



LITERATURE REVIEW

John Allen Williams, Stephen J. Cimbala, Sam C. Sarkesian, *US National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics, Sixth Edition* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2022), 390 pp.

The formulation of U.S. national security policy involves competing interests, divergent organizational equities, and unanticipated bureaucratic and political challenges, as various government and private sector communities jockey for influence. The policy process itself is cumbersome, confusing, and often lethargic. Understanding how official U.S. government policy is created, modified, or overturned requires an understanding of multiple actors, institutions, and processes. This can be a frustrating endeavor for those unacquainted with the details of what is often described as “sausage making.”

This is where John Allen Williams, Stephen J. Cimbala, and Sam C. Sarkesian add transparency to a process that often seems opaque to the average citizen. The sixth edition of their book, *US National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics*, is a detailed and comprehensive primer on the national security process, looking at the actors and issues that establish the parameters of official decision making.

The book is well organized, containing chapters on the roles of both the executive and legislative branches of government in the creation and execution of national security policy. From the president and the National Security Council to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the intelligence community, the authors explain the critical elements of policy making, the various phases of the policy process, and the factors that influence various policy outcomes, including the important role of Congress and the various checks and balances that constrain a president’s freedom of action. Using examples drawn from history as well as contemporary developments, they illuminate the seemingly mystifying and incomprehensible world of American national security policy in a way that is detailed and thorough, yet easily understandable.

The book begins with a basic explanation of national security, national interests, and U.S. values. It defines national security policy as “primarily concerned with formulating and implementing national strategy involving the threat or use of force to create a favorable environment for US national interests.” [p. 3] (The authors later call for rethinking the concept of national security “based on core (first-order priorities).” [pp. 322, 324] It also explains the distinction between “vital” interests, “critical” interests, “serious” interests, and “peripheral” interests. [pp. 7-8]. It then discusses the role of international actors, focusing on allies (e.g., NATO) and adversaries (e.g., Russia, China), and the impact they have on U.S. decision making. There are also chapters reviewing the spectrum of conflict, looking at how the United States has dealt with unconventional conflicts such as counterterrorism, as well as discussions of nuclear weapons, arms control, and proliferation issues. The authors also explain the national security impact of various external and bureaucratic interest groups’ role in the domestic political process, as well as the status of, prospects for, and controversies surrounding civil-military relations.



Throughout the volume, the authors attempt to assess the evolution of U.S. policy dispassionately and objectively, drawing on seminal scholarly works to bolster their arguments. In most cases they succeed. Occasionally, however, a perceptible, if unintentional, bias seeps into their narrative. For example, they assert that the difference between “insurgents” and “terrorists” is simply “a matter of semantics.” [p. 70] Given the current outbreak of Middle East violence ignited by Hamas’ October 7, 2023 terrorist attack, Israelis may beg to differ. Though asserting that the lack of a clear, universally accepted definition of terrorism leads to “the view that one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter,” the authors acknowledge that “such a perspective ignores the characteristics of terrorist acts and the impact on their victims. Furthermore, this view is based on convoluted moral principles that elevate assassination and murder to humanistic ventures.” [p. 77]

Perhaps a more illustrative example of subjectivity is when the authors discuss nuclear weapons and arms control. To wit, they contend that:

...the arms control regime that obtained as between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and afterward between the United States and Russia, fell victim to a worsening in political relations between Moscow and Washington, challenges from a rising China, changes in technology and states’ aspirations for nuclear modernization, and a lack of political resolve to maintain or improve existing arms control agreements that not only improved transparency and supported deterrence stability, but also served as symbolic reaffirmations of leaders’ awareness that, as former US and Soviet leaders Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev jointly affirmed: a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. [p. 95]

Unfortunately, the above explanation of the contributory reasons for the demise of traditional arms control does not mention Soviet (and later, Russian) cheating on agreements, which undermined the transparency and predictability that the arms control process was supposed to provide. In addition, the notion that arms control agreements “supported deterrence stability” is belied by the actual results of the agreements themselves, which led the Soviet Union and Russia to exploit them for unilateral advantage while the United States was self-restrained—hardly a stabilizing development. Moreover, the Reagan-Gorbachev statement on the inability to win a nuclear war and the commitment to avoid one—reiterated most recently by President Biden—reflects a Western worldview that apparently was not shared by the Soviet Union (and given the multitude of recent outrageous Russian nuclear threats, may similarly be rejected by Russian officialdom).

In addition, the authors appear to praise the Biden Administration’s early extension of the New START Treaty [p. 98], noting that the arms control dialogue helped reduce political tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union through a process that promoted nuclear weapons restraint on both sides [p. 105]. Such a characterization is inconsistent with

historical realities, perhaps best expressed by former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, who stated: “when we build, they build; when we cut, they (the Soviets) build.”¹

Interestingly, the authors’ view that “Improvements in Russia’s conventional military forces after 2007 have reduced Russia’s dependency on nuclear coercion” [p. 110] seems oddly inconsistent with what has been a clear *expansion* of Russia’s reliance on nuclear weapons for coercive purposes, especially in light of Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Indeed, this has been recognized by multiple parties across the political spectrum, including the bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission, which stated that “Russia’s increasing reliance on nuclear weapons and potentially expanded nuclear arsenal are an unprecedented and growing threat to U.S. national security and potentially the U.S. homeland.”² Moreover, the authors appear to confuse correlation with causality by suggesting Russia’s illegal 2014 annexation of Crimea and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 were responses to American support for the overthrow of the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich regime in Kyiv. [p. 341]

Also questionable is the authors’ suggestion that because of President Trump’s “abrogation” of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA—the so-called Iran nuclear deal—“a military confrontation (with Iran) cannot be ruled out.” [p. 120] In this regard, the authors seem to imply that Trump’s action was a mistake that could have potentially disastrous consequences. In addition, President Trump’s policies regarding the southern U.S. border are described as “draconian” and “harsh.” [pp. 260, 295]

These subjectively nuanced statements are relatively minor given the nearly 400 pages of detailed and well-informed tutorial on the workings of the policy making apparatus of the U.S. government. Despite ongoing concerns about the resilience of the American democratic experiment, the authors are bullish on American democracy, arguing that “Despite all the disadvantages open systems face in their dealings with authoritarian systems, rogue regimes, and international terrorists, in the long run democracy has the advantage.” [p. 134]

In their assessment of the struggle for policy primacy between the executive and legislative branches, the authors note disagreements over the use of covert operations and attempts by Congress to assert its authority over war powers. But they argue “The president

¹ Testimony of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown before the Senate Budget Committee, February 21, 1979, in “The Administration’s Defense Budget,” *First Concurrent Resolution on the Budget—Fiscal Year 1980, Hearings Before the Committee on the Budget, United States Senate, Ninety-Sixth Congress, First Session, Volume II*, p. 111, available at https://books.google.com/books?id=i0hLAQAIAAJ&pg=PA140&lpg=PA140&dq=%25252525E2%2525252580%252525259CSoviet+spending+has+shown+no+response+to+U.S.+restraint%25252525E2%2525252580%2525252594when+w e+build+they+build;+when+we+cut+they+build,%25252525E2%2525252580%252525259D&source=bl&ots=JqsyNhE5 QS&sig=ACfU3U0JZRL8YINyxK6YxNOQIOOg1ksbdQ&hl=en&ppis=_e&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi_2cvd3qvmAhUiqlkKHdQ3C-8Q6AEwAHoECAkQAg#v=onepage&q=%25252525E2%2525252580%252525259CSoviet%2525252520spending%2525252520has%2525252520shown%2525252520no%2525252520response%2525252520to%2525252520U.S.%2525252520restraint%25252525E2%2525252580%2525252594when%2525252520we%2525252520build%2525252520the y%2525252520build%252525253B%2525252520when%2525252520we%2525252520cut%2525252520they%2525252520build%252525252C%25252525E2%2525252580%252525259D&f=false

² *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, October 2023, pp. 7, 90, available at <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/A/Am/Americas%20Strategic%20Posture/Strategic-Posture-Commission-Report.pdf>.

has the key role, the constitutional authority, and much latitude in foreign and national security policy” [p. 264] and that “Ultimately it is the president who is held responsible for national security policy, regardless of the actions of Congress.” [p. 262] Importantly, the authors also discuss the role of the media and a free press in a democracy, noting the rise of “adversarial journalism” and the impact “journalistic excesses” and perceived biases can have on policy implementation. [p. 279]

The book concludes with a call for visionary approaches to national security and an understanding of geostrategic theory that includes a recognition of other strategic cultures, ideologies, and philosophical systems, as well as the impact of modern technological advances. It argues that “the focus of US policy and strategy, in geostrategic terms, should be to stabilize balances or create equilibrium among competing ideologies and systems in order to establish a basis for resolving conflicts through alliances.” [p. 340] It notes that “Alliances can serve as roadblocks (to the expansionist goals of totalitarian or authoritarian systems) as well as containment, deterrent, and defensive forces.” [pp. 341-342] While the authors acknowledge the need to revise and reform the structural aspects of national security policy making, they conclude that it falls upon the president to provide the necessary vision and direction to adapt U.S. national security policy to the contemporary and emerging challenges of the 21st century.

US National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics is an impressive volume and should be required reading for students of American politics and government. Its explanations are clear, the currency of its examples add context and value, and the book’s sources are extensive and well documented. Anyone interested in the workings of the U.S. government can benefit from this book, and (to the extent they still exist in physical form) it deserves a place of prominence on the bookshelves of college and university libraries.

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Thomas Kent *How Russia Loses: Hubris and Miscalculation in Putin’s Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2023), 379 pp. (available at <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/How-Russia-Loses-Web-Version.pdf>).

In his latest book, *How Russia Loses: Hubris and Miscalculation in Putin’s Kremlin*, Thomas Kent analyzes a lesser-known aspect of Russia’s influence operations, namely those that were unsuccessful. While this topic receives less attention within the general discourse, its study ought to be a quintessential part of a comprehensive strategy to defeat the Russian Federation’s belligerent strategy against the West. Kent draws on his decades of experience in the communications field and deep knowledge of Russia. Expert interviews provide additional nuance and depth to a complicated subject. Together, these elements make for a

riveting read and offer a fresh perspective on a topic in which one usually does not indulge in optimism.

Amid the ever-deteriorating national security environment and the West's increasing domestic polarization, fostered in part by Moscow's aggressive exploitation of modern technologies and social media, it is easy to forget that failures are as known to Russia's propaganda machine as successes. Moreover, Moscow's failures share common attributes that, with a little bit of ingenuity, the West may be able to exploit to become more effective in countering Russia's actions.

Kent examines six case studies in which Russia's aggressive leaders squandered away what should have been their advantage. They are: Russia's activities in Ukraine and later its full-scale invasion that turned an overall friendly state to Russia's enemy for generations; the case of mismanaging relations with the Republic of South Africa; Moscow's blundered launch of the Sputnik V vaccine; missteps that led to delays in building the now defunct Nord Stream 2 pipeline; the inability to effectively compete with the West and sway Macedonia from its pro-Western course; and, a short-sightedness in underestimating Ecuador's pro-Western course. Each of these failures cost Russia political and diplomatic prestige plus billions of dollars in mismanaged resources.

These cases shared one or more traits that contributed to or caused Russia's failure to achieve its objectives. For example, Russia tends to focus on building relations with a thin layer of top political and business figures, which also means that its political fortunes can easily change whenever these figures leave the picture. Such were the cases of Russia investing in relationships with Nikola Gruevski in Macedonia, Jacob Zuma in South Africa, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Russia's focus on advancing its self-interest and lack of prioritization of public diplomacy and aid leads it to view relationships with other countries narrowly and undermine the potential for building a lasting beneficial partnership. Russia also often overestimates its own strength and underestimates the strength of democratic institutions, civil society activists, and Western nations. Russia tends to be surprised and unable to effectively respond when these institutions show their decisiveness, as they did in thwarting Russia's campaign to stop Macedonia joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Russia's contempt of international organizations, independent regulators, and legal processes leads it to underestimate obstacles to reaching its goals, particularly those that are controversial, as was the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Russia's conflicting goals, driven by Vladimir Putin's desire to concentrate power, and his commitment to autocratic nationalism, is not universally appealing and diminishes Russia's foreign policy's cultural appeal. Each of these weaknesses offers an avenue for countering Russia's influence and frustrating its foreign policy goals.

If there one disconcerting aspect to the book, it has nothing to do with the author's masterful handling of the subject, but rather with the grim realization that more often than not, Russia's ineptitude, rather than the West's counter-efforts, is more responsible for its

foreign policy failures. Kent's recommendations are a good start to impose discipline on the currently disjointed enterprise of countering Russia's malicious influence.

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Ankit Panda, *Indo-Pacific Missile Arsenals: Avoiding Spirals and Mitigating Escalation Risks* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023), 136 pages.

To what extent is the proliferation of missiles in the Indo-Pacific the cause or effect of worsening political relations? Many analysts within the realist theory of international relations would agree with the scholar Colin Gray, who stated, "States do not fight because they are heavily armed; rather they are heavily armed because they judge war to be a serious possibility."³ While weapons can be signals or manifestations of a state's intentions, the root causes of political tension and war are to be found less in the weapons themselves and more in the degree of aggression and revisionism of a state's leadership.

Other scholars, such as Ankit Panda, do not appear willing to cede the point and are focusing their analyses on the broad danger of unintentional escalation—encompassing inadvertent escalation and accidents. In an argument reminiscent of Thomas Schelling's "threat that leaves something to chance," Panda maintains that as the missile arsenals of states like North Korea, Taiwan, Japan, China, and the United States grow, so too do the pathways for unintentional escalation—even if all sides do not wish to engage in conflict. Panda's purpose in his new monograph *Indo-Pacific Missile Arsenals*, is to identify how "proliferation could intensify already complex security dilemmas and heighten nuclear escalation risks in crises." (p. 1)

The report begins with a useful taxonomy of missile types present or under development in the region, with particular emphasis on missiles below intercontinental range. The dizzying array of missile types and sub-types is indicative of the wide variety of missions each state envisions for its missile arsenal. Panda provides a fairly comprehensive summary of each state's missile types and the primary drivers behind their development and procurement. Panda restricts the scope of his analysis to the major players in the region with missiles, the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, and those with ambitions to become major missile procurers, namely Australia.

While Panda saves most of his commentary on the strategic implications of these missile-related developments for the final third of the report, there are a number of comments in each country profile that foreshadows his conclusions and recommendations. For instance, he states that North Korea and South Korea "... have strong incentives to shoot first under

³ Colin S. Gray, *Weapons Don't Make War: Policy, Strategy, and Military Technology* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), p. 55.

certain circumstances and increasingly credible missile capabilities to make good on their plans in a crisis.” (p. 23) Or, “A positive feature of the planned deployments of new ground-launched U.S. Army missiles is that they are all unlikely, initially, to have the capability to range deep within China, where they might otherwise hold nuclear weapons facilities, launchers, and other related infrastructure at risk.” (p. 57)

The common thread through these and other comments are that the weapons themselves, or more precisely, their proliferation, is the cause of growing political tensions and the potential cause of inadvertent escalation during a crisis or wartime. Realists in the mold of Colin Gray will likely wince at this assertion since it is not at all clear the potential increase in the risk of inadvertent escalation (far from a certainty itself) outweighs the potential increase in maintaining deterrence against revisionist states like China and North Korea. Panda does not attempt a net assessment of the risks and benefits of increasingly numerous and capable allied missile arsenals in the Indo-Pacific. Instead, he maintains that a mix of confidence building measures could mitigate at least some portion of the inadvertent escalation risks.

In his words, “The growing pursuit of conventional counterforce strategies presents serious escalation risks [incentive for preemption] that continue to be largely discounted by planners and policymakers.” (p. 63) And, “Regional policymakers should understand that because large-scale conventional war is the most likely immediate antecedent to nuclear war and because missiles are likely to play an especially prominent role in any large-scale conventional war in Asia, measures of negotiated and unilateral restraint around missile capabilities can substantially contribute to reducing nuclear risks.” (pp. 79-80)

Panda states that the risk reduction measures he recommends need not weaken deterrence, and indeed, the bulk of his recommendations concern increased dialogue between partners (the United States and allies) and adversaries (the United States and China) about the risk of inadvertent escalation. For Panda, these dialogues would ideally lead to political commitments like missile launch notification regimes and eventually a verifiable arms control agreement that limits at least some missile types. To his credit, Panda is not sanguine about the chances for arms control in the foreseeable future, but as before, he takes it as a given that some arms control is better than no arms control when this may not be the case.

The growing proliferation of missiles in the Indo-Pacific, and subsequent calls for restraint through arms control, bears some resemblance to the international conditions shaping the region 100 years ago. Japanese aggression combined with the U.S. and its allies’ desire to avoid arms races produced the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty that constrained the number of capital ships—the primary means for projecting military power then. The technical solution (arms control) to the technical problem (increasing numbers of capital ships) did nothing to diminish irrepressible Japanese revisionism, the root cause of conflict in World War II in the Pacific. Those capital ships that were said to be the cause of political tensions were in fact most needed for deterrence—a fact the allies discovered too late.

The parallels with missiles today in the Indo-Pacific are not perfect, but similar enough that they should cause the reader to pause before endorsing Panda’s ideal goal of binding

arms control treaties on missiles in the region. That said, Panda's informational summaries on missile types in each country are valuable contributions to the literature and provide the reader with a good overview of a particular subset of increasingly important military capabilities. The recommendations on increased dialogue between adversaries on inadvertent escalation are sensible, but the fact that even that seems out of reach should indicate that states like China and North Korea may not hold the same Western values about avoiding strategic instability in all cases.

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