



Conflict Management and Peacebuilding: Pillars of a New American Grand Strategy

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Strategic Studies Institute & U.S. Army War College, October 2013, 420 pages

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Conflict Management and Peacebuilding: Pillars of a New American Grand Strategy provides an important contribution to understanding the civil-military complexities in responding to, stabilizing, and building sustainable peace and prosperity in conflict and post-conflict environments. The central issues addressed in this volume include the strengths and limits of American military force and diplomatic prowess; the intrinsic melding of soft and hard power (“smart power”); the importance of multinational collaboration; the need for a more comprehensive “whole of government” approach; and the cultural differences within and between American, allied, and host-country state and non-state actors.

Conflict Management is a lengthy read, comprising 14 chapters and 410 pages. The volume could hardly be shorter, however, as it is a compilation of essays from an excellent symposium of a similar title held on February 24, 2012, at Kennesaw State University and the Strategic Studies Institute. In the opening chapter, the editors provide a useful summary of each of the subsequent chapters, but for serious practitioners and theorists alike this summary belies the richness of each of the chapters that follow. The editors advise that the symposium and book reveal a “broad range of viewpoints, a number of overarching themes and tentative agreements”, but it is left to the reader to distill these. A concluding chapter that attempted to do this would have been a useful addition to the volume, and helpful for strategic thinkers and planners in determining what the editors call “the future of U.S. grand strategy in an age of austerity”.

Most of the volume addresses U.S. perspectives on contemporary peacebuilding and conflict management, but there are also useful European and African perspectives, including on the effectiveness of U.S. approaches in these areas. Given the rise of China and the Obama administration’s declaratory intention to pivot more to the Asia-Pacific, the volume, surprisingly, gives little attention to this dynamic in shaping future U.S. grand strategy. An excellent chapter by Liselotte Odgaard partially addresses this by providing a comparison between America’s “integrationist” approach and China’s practice of “coexistence”. Managing this dilemma may well prove to be central to global security in the 21st century, particularly given Odgaard’s assertion that “the United States is a great power in decline, with estimates of U.S. GDP at only two-thirds of China’s GDP in 2050”.

Moving away from more conventional state-centric power politics, several chapters highlight the growing importance of “human security” in shaping America’s new grand strategy. These authors advocate for the U.S. to address human security more coherently in both policy and practice. This theme emerges in different ways by different authors, including the two chapters providing African

perspectives, the first by Kwesi Aning and Festus Aubyn, and the second by Abel Esterhuyse. This theme is also included in the chapter on civil-military coordination by Christopher Holshek, the chapter on peacebuilding and development from an NGO perspective by Fouzieh Melanie Alamir, and in Michael Ashkenazi's chapter that calls for a bottom-up approach to address the chronic problems of "individuals and small groups".

In his informative chapter on "smart power", Robert Kennedy contends that "... the greatest challenge for the United States will arise from a continued relative shift in power from the world's predominant political, economic, diplomatic, and military superpower to *primus inter pares* in world affairs". The chapter by Michael Lekson and Nathaniel Wilson supports this view, suggesting that states will remain the main actors in shaping major international security activities and outcomes. Unlike other authors who tend to conflate peacebuilding and conflict management, however, Lekson and Wilson draw a clear distinction and contend that the scarcity of U.S. resources will demand greater priority on conflict management and less on peacebuilding as a pillar of U.S. grand strategy, although they acknowledge that peacebuilding will remain prevalent in international security. Noting the limitations of successive U.S. national security policies, they assert that: "A grand strategy needs to be developed to deal with the future, and not to provide tactical prescriptions for the present".

The decline and limits of U.S. power in relative terms and the return to a more multipolar world is a theme repeated in a number of other chapters. Frederick Smullen contends in his chapter that threats are more global, unpredictable, and persistent than in previous eras and calls for greater U.S. leadership through more rigorous strategic planning to stabilize the current world order—in his words, "America needs to stand out as a beacon of what is right in and for the world." Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, the former German Defense and Economics Minister, calls for a new and long-term visionary strategy to strengthen the transatlantic relationship "by promoting a global democratic political culture based on respect for cultural differences".

One of the book's strengths is its focus on practical strategies that could be adopted by the United States to enhance peacebuilding and conflict management. In addition to Guttenberg's call to strengthen transatlantic culture, a number of authors emphasize the need for improved "cultural understanding" of host populations, noting the limitations of imposing American values, particularly when military and civilian deployments provide limited time and opportunity in-country to gain the trust of local populations, underpinned by an appreciation of historical and cultural factors. The fore-mentioned chapters by Alamir, Ashkenazi, Aning and Aubyn, and Esterhuyse all emphasize the importance of greater cultural understanding by the United States. Focusing on the U.S. military contribution to peacebuilding, William Flavin reminds us that successful peacebuilding must reflect true national ownership and address local priorities. Simply put, peacebuilding cannot be imposed effectively by outsiders, and particularly by occupying foreign military forces. In his chapter, Charles Dunlap espouses the importance of "free enterprise and liberal democracy" in building national resilience and international security. To help achieve this, Dunlap advocates that the U.S. should adopt an "off shore" approach based on a light military footprint, claiming that "The efforts to reorient entire societies in Iraq and Afghanistan via a strategy that was manpower-intensive and ground centric has proven to be flawed." Clearly, not everyone would agree with Dunlap's analysis or interpret his off shore option as a viable grand strategy, although his approach would seem to have merit in specific circumstances.

Dwight Raymond's unique chapter on Mass Atrocity Prevention and Response Options

(MAPRO) may have particular relevance for the charting of a new grand strategy for the United States (and other countries). The responsibility to protect civilians is now a core issue for the United Nations and its member states. MAPRO provides useful guidance on how to prevent and respond to these circumstances, both strengthening America's commitment to human rights and international law and requiring the development of new doctrine and training for civilian and military actors. The early introduction of these concepts in new and transforming states could assist in enhancing the prospects for a local peace as well as developing international norms. The international community's current inability to deal with the tragedy in Syria suggests that an alternative MAPRO approach warrants greater attention, although Raymond does not specifically advocate this course of action.

Conflict Management and Peacebuilding: Pillars of a New American Grand Strategy is an important read for scholars and practitioners concerned with the development of America's national security policies. The chapters are rich in facts and ideas, and individual readers will highlight different priorities. In an age of austerity and increasing strategic uncertainty, however, the book does not provide a blueprint or a list of priorities for America's future grand strategy. There is plenty of evidence that the United States should develop a grand strategy that is more joined-up, comprehensive, whole-of-government, and multilateral. A stronger emphasis on enhancing civil-military coordination seems necessary and sensible. Despite this overwhelming evidence, however, it is yet to be seen in the age of austerity if major U.S. security organs will embrace this collective opportunity or retreat to the comfort of their traditional fiefdoms, claiming "core business" as their essential *raison d'être*. **IAJ**