

U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

POLICYMAKERS, PROCESSES, AND POLITICS

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

SAM C. SARKESIAN

U.S.

NATIONAL SECURITY

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Processes, and Politics

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Sam C. Sarkesian



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Preface

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, dramatic changes have taken place in world politics and the security landscape. The super-power era has ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany. The fear of major wars has diminished considerably. Attention has turned to domestic needs, and for many, economics has replaced the military as the prime mover in national security.

Nonetheless, the world remains a dangerous place. The end of East-West confrontations has given rise to a variety of ethnic, religious, and nationalist conflicts. The struggle of Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan, which is supported by some of its Muslim neighbors, continues unabated, a reflection of the Armenian genocide of 1915 by the Turkish government. And in 1994, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the resulting conflicts among Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians have challenged the ability and effectiveness of the United Nations and Western powers. The drug wars, the continuing conflicts in parts of Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and the U.S.–North Korea confrontation over nuclear weapons development add to the confusing and unstable international security landscape. Complicating all of this is Russia's attempt to assert itself as a major player in international security affairs, while the world remains troubled about that nation's internal politics. The international problems seem endless.

The changes from the Cold War and the uncertainties these have created have led to scholarly and policymaking disarray—there is a search for analytical and conceptual clarity in coming to grips with the post-Cold War period. At the same time, national strategy seems to lack vision, and military posture and contingency response lack operational guidelines. All these issues have focused on the relevance of the National Security Establishment and the national security system that were established at the outset of the Cold War: Are they relevant in the post-Cold War era? All these matters are complicated by questions regarding the strength and judgment of the national leadership.

The major focus of this book remains, as spelled out in the first edition, the National Security Establishment—the offices and institutions responsible for U.S. national security—and the policy process. Again, studying these will not provide all the answers, but it will provide knowledge essential to seeking answers.

New leaders are emerging in many parts of the globe, as are different types of ideologies and political systems—all this in the context of differing

strategic cultures. Thus, it would be best to wait until the “fog” clears before studying national security, but the U.S. political-military system does not have the luxury of waiting for a clearer picture. Also, such matters will not wait until the United States gets its National Security Establishment properly positioned. To understand what all of this may mean, one should begin with a study of the character and nature of the U.S. National Security Establishment, what policy procedures are in place, the structure and capabilities of the various national security instruments, and the quality of U.S. national security leadership. It is from such a study that we can determine with some degree of accuracy the effectiveness of the U.S. national security effort in any given area or in response to any specific threat or challenge. Equally important, such a study will provide reference points from which to examine U.S. national security in the remainder of this decade and into the next century. In this respect, various themes, concepts, and references are carried over from one chapter to the next. This is intended to demonstrate not only their importance, but also that they are multidimensional and have an impact on issues analyzed in different chapters.

As was the case with the first edition, various aspects of U.S. national security have been part of my teaching and research. Also, I have discussed parts of the revised edition with colleagues, and I have included other sections in formal presentations at various professional conferences. Throughout these efforts, I have tried to avoid ideological biases. Yet, some will undoubtedly attempt to place an ideological label on these efforts because they disagree with my assessments. No apologies are offered. The analysis and conclusions of this new edition are my own, as are any mistakes or misinterpretations.

Sam C. Sarkesian

Preface to the First Edition

It has often been said that “security is a state of mind” and that national security is the way people feel about themselves and the confidence they have in their leaders and the political system. But things like state of mind, confidence, and the nature of the political system are not easy matters to examine—or even to identify with precision. Indeed, simply defining the *concept* of national security evokes disagreement among scholars, policy-makers, and the public in general—most of us tend to see only “bits and pieces” of national security.

How can we understand national security issues and provide informed assessments? There is no easy answer. But there is surely a place to begin: at the focal point of the national security process and the offices and institutions responsible for U.S. national security. Studying these will not provide all the answers, but it will provide knowledge essential to seeking the answers, which is the basic motivation for this book.

The book is an outgrowth of my teaching, research, and experience involving a variety of national security issues. This background has convinced me that the concept of national security has become so distorted and politicized that it is increasingly difficult to develop a sense of balance and analytic objectivity. Indeed, many college students—as well as some policymakers, military professionals, academicians, and particularly elected officials—seem to lack a sense of history or understanding of the concept of U.S. national interests. They tend to equate the ideals of American democracy with the realities of the existing international security environment. They analyze U.S. national security posture in terms that assume and demand immaculate behavior and an immaculate system, while often glossing over the realities of the world. Combined with a focus on the issue of the moment only, such perspectives do little to develop a serious understanding of national security issues.

Seen this way, national security becomes a zero-sum game in which issues are black or white. One is either moral or immoral. National security policy is good or bad. Political actors in the external world are good or evil. Unfortunately, the international security environment does not lend itself to such simplistic notions.

Mind-sets in the United States tend to place national security issues in quick-fix, short-term, doable frameworks. That is, we tend to see an issue only after it becomes a national security problem and to respond to that particular problem in a traditional fashion: identify it, find the best solutions,

apply them, and “fix it,” all according to conventional notions and expectations. Thus, we tend to seek solutions to the problems of the Middle East, Central America, and nuclear war, for example, with momentary information and superficial understanding, neglecting a systematic basis for identifying and applying U.S. national interests, policy, and strategy.

The purpose of this book is specifically to correct the problems that evolve from such superficial decisions: to provide a systematic way of studying U.S. national security by approaching the subject from a long-term perspective, linking it to historical continuities and discontinuities, and basing this analysis on the nature and character of the U.S. political system. From this perspective, national security is first determined by the leadership quality and mind-set of the incumbent of the Oval Office—the fundamental premise of this book is that the President is the center of the national security policy process.

Some attention is given to the details of prevailing national security issues, but the intent here is not to offer solutions to these issues. The focus on some general substantive issues provides a realistic context within which the President, the National Security Establishment, and the policy process function; and some attention to major substantive issues (such as the nature and character of the Soviet system) assists in understanding the difficulty of developing within the U.S. National Security Establishment a coherent policy and strategy direction and a supporting network of political actors. But one will not find here what the United States should do in the Middle East, for example, or in Southeast Asia or Central America.

This book is not offered solely as a textbook on U.S. national security. It is also a study and analysis of the problems of trying to formulate and implement coherent national security policy and strategy in a democracy. This additional dimension will assist serious students and policymakers to focus on fundamental issues and, more important, to rethink the basis for U.S. national interests and long-term national security policy and strategy.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I is a study of the meaning and concept of national security, U.S. political characteristics, and the international security environment. This part establishes boundaries and reference points for the remainder of the book.

Part II examines the National Security Establishment, beginning with the President and the nature of the presidency and continuing with special focus on national security policy; this includes a study of the policymaking structures, such as the National Security Council. The military and intelligence establishments are also analyzed.

Part III begins with a study of the national security policy process, comparing foreign with domestic policy. The remainder of the chapters in this part use this policy process framework to examine the system—that is, the important political actors involved in national security policy, their

roles and power, and how they relate to the President and the process.

Part IV is a series of conclusions that provides a systematic view of the U.S. national security system and its critical components. The fundamental focus remains: a common sense way to study and understand the essentials of U.S. national security.

I wish to thank Stephen J. Cimbala of Pennsylvania State University, who read and commented on the manuscript. His knowledge of the subject matter and his incisive critique were invaluable. Students in my classes at Loyola University of Chicago also contributed by their questions and comments about many of the subjects in this book. Laurette Liesen of Loyola assisted more directly by reading and commenting on the manuscript.

However, this book represents my own views and interpretations of how U.S. national security should be studied and analyzed. Consequently, it is surely vulnerable to criticism, and I make no apologies for this. I have tried to achieve balance by taking account of views of noted scholars and experts on U.S. national security. But in the final analysis, this is my own work, and I am responsible for any errors, misinterpretations, and idiosyncrasies.

S.C.S.

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Part I

Introduction

National Interests and National Security

“What is it in our interest to prevent? What should we seek to accomplish?”¹ So wrote Henry Kissinger over two decades ago before becoming assistant to President Nixon for national security affairs. The same questions continue to challenge policymakers, scholars, and elected officials today. The answers were elusive at the start of the Cold War and remain so today.

Why is this so? Don’t we know what is in our national interest? At first glance the answer seems relatively simple. The purpose of U.S. national interest is to promote the country’s values; to promote these values means to protect them by establishing and implementing effective national security policy.

Upon close examination, however, these answers are inadequate, and they raise a number of further questions. What are the country’s values? How are they reflected in national interests? What is the relationship between national security and national interests? What is national security? How should U.S. national security policy be implemented? For the past four decades these questions have been addressed by many U.S. politicians and scholars. *If* there is anything that they agree on, it is that there is no agreement.

Each generation of Americans seeks to interpret the issues of national values, national interest, and national security in terms of its own perspectives and mind-sets. Although there is agreement regarding the core elements, such as protection of the homeland, interpretations differ about the meaning of national security, the nature of external threats, and the best course for conduct of security policy. Combined with significant changes in the world environment, the dynamics of the questions posed by Kissinger remain as fluid and elusive today as they were in 1969.

It is to be expected that in an open system such as that of the United States, in which there are multiple power centers and shifting focal points, there will be a variety of interpretations and clusters of power advocating one or the other national security posture. Recognizing that these matters are rarely resolved by one-time solutions and that they are, at best, ambiguous in character, this chapter explores the concepts of national security, national values, and national interest. In the process, a framework for studying and analyzing national security is designed.

First, we study the concept and meaning of national security. Second, an examination is made of the concept of national interest, its relationship to American values, and how these values and interests “play” in the international environment. Third, we focus on national security to determine its general meaning and develop a systematic way to study it.

As the necessary starting point for this exploration, it must be understood that regardless of the variety of interpretations and views of these matters, the United States is in the world to stay. Whether they like it or not, U.S. citizens cannot withdraw from external responsibilities, nor can they retreat to the isolation of the early twentieth century. Regardless of the policies of any administration, the United States has links to most parts of the world—politically, economically, culturally, and psychologically. What the United States does or does not do has an impact on international politics.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The new international security landscape has clouded the concept and meaning of national security. Moreover, the interpretation of the country’s values and national interests into meaningful national security policy has become a difficult process. This problem is well summed up by one expert:

No formal definition of national security as a field has been generally accepted; none may be possible. In general, it is the study of the security *problems* faced by nations, of the *policies and programs* by which these problems are addressed, and also of the governmental *processes* through which the policies and programs are decided upon and carried out.²

Recognizing the problems of defining and conceptualizing national security, a preliminary statement is offered:

National security is the confidence held by the great majority of the nation’s people that the nation has the military capability and effective policy to prevent its adversaries from effectively using force in preventing the nation’s pursuit of its national interests.

Two dimensions are part of this definition: physical and psychological. In the first instance, there is an objective measure based on the physical strength and military capacity of the nation to successfully challenge adversaries, including going to war if necessary. This also includes a more prominent role for economic strength and the ability to use it as a political-military lever against or in support of other states. The psychological dimension is subjective, reflecting the opinion and attitudes of the majority

of U.S. citizens regarding the nation's ability to remain secure relative to the external world.

National security must be seen in the context of foreign policy. Foreign policy is the policy of a nation that encompasses all official relations with other countries. The purpose of foreign policy is multidimensional. In the United States, the purpose of foreign policy is to pursue U.S. national interests, prevent conditions detrimental to the United States, and maintain relations with other countries in order to create conditions favorable to U.S. national interests. The instruments of foreign policy are primarily diplomatic, and secondarily economic and psychological.

National Security, Foreign, and Domestic Policies

National security differs from foreign policy in at least two respects: (1) National security purposes are more narrow and focused on security and safety of the nation. (2) National security is primarily concerned with actual and potential adversaries and their use of force; this means there is a military emphasis that is not usually the case in matters of foreign policy. However, national security policy overlaps with foreign policy—indeed, sometimes they are almost indistinguishable.

American values cannot be imposed on other states except in situations that are clear survival issues. Thus, much of foreign policy requires compromise, negotiations, the dynamics of give-and-take, and all of the techniques and subtleties associated with traditional diplomacy. This kind of work then becomes a matter for the Department of State, with long-range implications for national security policy. These relationships are shown in Figure 1.1.

The difficulties of clearly determining U.S. national interests and establishing national security priorities are compounded by the link between national security and domestic policy. (This link is fairly recent in U.S. history.) The domestic economic impact of certain national security policies (such as economic sanctions, an embargo on agriculture exports to adversaries or potential adversaries, diminished foreign oil sources, and the export of technologically advanced industrial products) links U.S. domestic interests and policies to the international security arena.

The point is that many national security issues cannot be isolated from domestic policy. In brief, in addition to the relationship and linkage between foreign and national security policy, there is also a domestic policy linkage that is an important factor in establishing priorities and interests. Indeed, for some scholars, this issue is viewed as “intermestic” politics and policies.³

Nonetheless, it is my view that national security rests primarily in the notion that there is a high propensity for the use of military force. Taking a page from Sun Tzu, if almost everything is a matter of national security,