

Book Review

Sustainable Security: Rethinking American National Security Strategy

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Sustainable Security: Rethinking American National Security Strategy

Jeremi Suri and Benjamin Valentino

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In his classic book *Risk Society towards a new Modernity* the German Sociologist Ulrich Beck realized that the dilemma of security contained an underlying contradiction very difficult to grasp. While our efforts are posed to achieve a zero-risk community, new unseen risks emerge (Beck 1992). In view of this, some of the guiding questions that frame this review are what does a security analyst serve for?; what is its role in post 9/11 context?

The same pungent points led Jeremi Suri and Benjamin Valentino to present an interesting edited book which contains thirteen chapters elegantly written by well-versed scholars who have dedicated their lives to the study of American Security fields. The present research which took room between 2011 and 2014 was originally hosted by Tobin's project national security initiative. Equally important, the book is organized in two different sections. The first signals to the historicity of international relations and the different strategies adopted by US government in the past, while the second is characterized by a profound discussion on real study cases which interrogate security commitments in other continents. Both sections are complementary indicative to the need of reassessing the interests of national security in America as well as the in-depth analysis of the difficult socio-economic background where the West will move in the years to come. Not surprisingly, the title of the book is *Sustainable Security*. On an introductory note, the editors acknowledge on the current problems precipitated by the stock-and-market crisis happened in 2008 and its effects of national security budget. At the same time, the inflation of risks inflated by mass-media paved the way for the rise of populist discourses which obscure more than they clarify. It is the time to think a sustainable security which includes not only a clear agenda to prevent global dangers as climate change, or terrorism, but also others important risks as cyber-terrorism as well as the political and economic liabilities to intervene in other nations in the quest of risk-zero society. As Suri and Valentino observed, there should be at least some degree of reciprocity among nations that elude the United States to devote considerable financial resources to keep its privileged position as watchdog nation. In consequence, autonomous countries should play an active role in fostering more democratic institutions whereas a more sustainable agreement with other countries is built.

As this backdrop, the first chapter explores the financial deregulation as the key factor that caused not only the economic crisis but also the problems of the US to struggle against terrorism. The same line is followed by second chapter which is authored by Drezner & Hite-Rubin. The authors widely

discuss to what extent the military costs of the US is self-defeating for international investment. Paradoxically, while under-developed nations are dependent from the US respecting to the security policies, they gain better positions to gain further investments. In the third chapter, C Williams argues convincingly that cuts-off in the programs of security, far from what public opinion precludes, will strengthen the national security strategy. Chapters four, five, and six analyze the zenith and decline of United Kingdom of Great Britain in the eighteenth century, China in the nineteenth century, and finally United States today as main powers that promoted a culture of hyper-surveillance. The fact is that domestic taxation and foreign borrowing systems are vital towards a sustainable program for security. Joshua Busby ends the section discussing in depth the ebbs and flows of governments to struggle against climate change. From chapters eight to thirteen, readers will find interesting arguments which focus on the current geopolitical position of America in a hyper-globalized world. For example, Benjamin Valentino (one of the editors) says overtly that popular parlance is reluctant to a potential isolationism supporting the costs of overseas alliance with other governments. However, over the recent years an emergent trend self-oriented to promote the American retreat across the world is the main aspect of concerns in specialists and policy makers. What is more than interesting to discuss is that in post-crisis context, there is a clear dissociation between the stance of lay people and experts respecting to international affairs. In the rest of the book, authors such as William Wohlforth, Daniel Byman, Bjerg Moller, Jennifer Lind among others debate specific study-cases that describe the limitations of America's commitment in Middle East, Europe and other continents. The involving chapters and exposed arguments cohere in revisiting the belief that national security rests on the efficacy of the government to deploy military forces with direct occupation worldwide. To put this slightly in other terms, the current occupation in Middle East not only seems to be excessive but also unnecessary simply because the efficacy of the US to prevent looming threats in the region is limited. Most certainly, editors and authors toy with the idea that the turn of the century has brought many unexpected risks and problems for a more deteriorated Cold-War system which merits to be revisited in the next decades.

Particularly, this reviewer finds *Sustainable Security* as a pathbreaking book which illustrates the problems of the US to shape a dialogue with other nations to forge a more sustainable instrument towards multiculturalism. As Korstanje (2015, 2016, 2017) puts it in earlier works, one of the main problems of the US and the West to understand the alterity comes from the sense of exceptionalism, which was instilled by puritans and Protestantism. In a nutshell, Puritans fleshed out a cosmology where the world was considered as dangerous place. The image of predestination not only offered to Puritans a closed view of the future, but also created a state of anxieties which was regulated by "the fear of strangers". This doctrine, adjoined to other ideological discourses as "the freedom from want", crystalized in the idea that America was the most democratic country in the globe which made headways on the civilizatory process. The proponents of imperialism envisioned while the capitalist project was a success example in America, it should be very well expanded to other cultures. That way, America debated between two contrasting but complementary fears, the needs of intervention to regulate potential hostile agents and an ethnocentric view to understand the otherness. Last but not least, Suri and Valentino's book reminds not only the importance to leave the pro imperialist theories behind, but also in bolstering a fluid and responsible dialogue with other countries to enrich multicultural endeavors to fight against the "scourge of terrorism" and other global risks.

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