

REVIEW: Defense Diplomacy: Strategic Engagement and Interstate Conflict.


KATZ, Daniel H. **Defence Diplomacy**: Strategic Engagement and Interstate Conflict. London, UK; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2020. ISBN - 978-0367135966.

Abstract: The book studies strategic engagement, one of the streams of Defense Diplomacy, undertaken by rival states in the international arena. The author analyzes the relationship between the United Kingdom and Germany before the First World War, between the US and the USSR during the Cold War and the current Sino-American tensions.

Keywords: Defense Diplomacy. Cold War. China. USA.

Resumen: El libro estudia el compromiso estratégico, una de las vertientes de la Diplomacia de Defensa, llevado a cabo por Estados rivales en la arena internacional. Para ello, profundiza en las relaciones entre Reino Unido y Alemania antes de la Primera Guerra Mundial, entre Estados Unidos y la URSS durante la Guerra Fría y en las actuales tensiones chino-estadounidenses.

Palabras Clave: Diplomacia de Defensa. Guerra Fría. China. Estados Unidos de América.

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The book “Defence Diplomacy: Strategic Engagement and Interstate Conflict” is written by Daniel H. Katz. This is the most recent study by the author, published in 2020 by the Routledge publishing house, according to Katz, aimed for “students of Defense, Diplomacy, Foreign Policy and International Relations”.

The book begins with the assumption that diplomatic and military affairs are intrinsically connected. Although the diplomatic field is led by foreign ministers and the military by defense counterparts, Katz repeatedly brings up the argument by the German theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1984) that politics and war are umbilically linked.

The second chapter begins with the author’s assertion that very little has been written, so far, about strategic engagement. This becomes, according to him, the “diplomatic defense interaction between potential adversaries”. In this field, the work “Defense And Diplomacy: The Soldier And The Conduct Of Foreign Relations” is seminal (Vagts; Fox, 2011). Katz says that several theses were written by US military personnel dealing with the system of defense attaches or bilateral relations in the field of defense. Only portions of military journals debate the role of military diplomacy and strategic engagement.

The chapter ends with the author discussing how strategic engagement is approached in three major paradigms of International Relations: defensive realism, neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism. In the case of the first, Katz indicates that strategic engagement may or may not contribute to conflict reduction, as defensive realists see it as one more way to gain an advantage over the opponent. Neoliberal institutionalists believe that strategic engagement is a regime that can promote mutual cooperation within the context of the “prisoner’s dilemma”. Finally in the case of the third paradigm, Katz believes that constructivists envision strategic engagement as a way to alter the preferences of rival states through the transmission of norms, turning enemies into friends through socialization and mutual learning.

From the third chapter onwards, the author begins the case studies on the relations between the United Kingdom and Germany prior to World War I. The author argues that diplomacy between the UK and Germany has exacerbated rather than lessened tensions between them. The Germans discouraged the practice of conversations through official diplomatic channels due to the influence of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, Minister of the German Navy, who feared the constraints that could be imposed by the British to the exponential growth of the power of the German armada. Katz also reports that the position of the United Kingdom regarding the expansionist movements of Germany was not clear, especially regarding France, which came to be interpreted, mistakenly, as a supposed British neutrality.

The political impact, according to Katz, also affected strategic engagement. He bases the argument on the failed Haldane Mission headed by Lord Richard Burdon Haldane, UK Secretary of State for War. Haldane was sent to Berlin in 1912 to avoid further escalation of tensions between British and Germans. This failure, as well as Churchill’s speeches affronting the Germans, demonstrated the lack of British political unity. In Germany this was even more evident, as Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was ignored in his pacifist advisements, in contrast to the attention paid by Kaiser Wilhelm II to the bellicose

speech of Tirpitz and General Alfred von Schlieffen, Chief of Staff of the German Army, who adopted a “cult of the offensive” mentality. Even an international naval exhibition, Kiel Week, to which the British King George V was invited in an ostensibly conciliatory gesture from Germany, ended up being misinterpreted by the British as a show of force, evidencing all the animosity that permeated the two nations.

The fourth chapter analyzes defense diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was a case of successful strategic engagement between the two great Cold War powers. The huge differences in regimes and ideologies made any attempt at reconciliation at the political level unlikely. The Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) and the Standing Advisory Commission (SCC) contributed to the deterrence of hostilities by bringing together common goals that bridged the differences between the Americans and the Soviets. These instruments were not put into effect in the form of treaties, but in the agreement between the two countries' military concerned with possible unintentional accidents at sea and with the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The military diplomatic channel, facilitated by the universal institutional culture of the Armed Forces, supported the approximation of the US and the USSR, showing the effectiveness of strategic engagement.

Chapter five focuses on the current relationship between the US and China. The author notes a series of obstacles to strategic engagement between these nations. The Chinese rise, in the economic and military fields, has become a concern and a threat to the interests of Americans and their allies in the Asia-Pacific region. Katz talks about the existing strategic mistrust, with the Chinese being accused by the Americans of not being transparent and of having, in the People's Liberation Army (PLA, in English), an armed wing serving the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (PCC) dictatorship. The Chinese, likewise, do not believe the Americans will renounce their hegemonic status to accommodate China's rise. The Chinese expansion into its Southern Sea and its use of the A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) concept are seen as its own version of the Monroe Doctrine. The American stance of support for Taiwan, seen as a priority objective for China, only aggravates the conflict. The scholar sees an urgent need to intensify strategic dialogue to keep Sino-American dialogue channels open.

In the penultimate chapter of the book, Katz compares and contrasts strategic engagement in the three case studies. Civil-military relations were a positive point in the US-USSR relationship during the Cold War, which was characterized by the success achieved with the INCSEA and the SCC. This was not the case between the United Kingdom and Germany, with governments, bureaucracies and military in disagreement, and between the United States and China, which have divergent interests and actions involving the use of the South China Sea and the status of Taiwan. The good quality of American-Soviet diplomatic-military relations contrasts with the deficiencies of the Haldane Mission, sent from London to Berlin, and the strategic mistrust generated by the domination of the Chinese PLA by the CCP Politburo.

In its conclusion, the book takes up the main objective of strategic engagement, the reduction of the propensity for conflict among potential adversaries. Katz mentions

Graham Allison's pessimistic view (2020) and John Mearsheimer's (2014) offensive realism regarding the inevitability of the Thucydides Trap and the security dilemma in current Sino-US relations, two economic, military and nuclear powers. For him, the examples of the Anglo-German conflict and the Cold War provide important lessons on how different factors can hinder or foster strategic engagement. Good communication and mutual trust measures, as noted in the case of INCSEA and the SCC, are valuable tools for defusing tensions and preserving constructive dialogue between China and the United States of America.

The renowned French realist theorist Raymond Aron (2018), in his classic "Peace and War between Nations", examines international relations bringing the idea of diplomacy and the military as two sides of the same coin. Both represent the State in its essence, with a leading role in the execution of a country's foreign policy, whether through negotiation, cooperation, conflict prevention and, if it reaches an extreme, war. Defense diplomacy is placed in this context, exercising part of these actions using military resources and personnel in a non-violent way, as a foreign policy tool (Cottey; Forster, 2004).

Daniel H. Katz's book represents an important contribution to the Military Sciences, as it approaches defense diplomacy from the perspective of one of its subfields, strategic engagement. This one, when dealing with the rapprochement between rival nations, brings embedded the very meaning and relevance of using military means as facilitators of a process of acquiring mutual trust.

Katz brings solid arguments against the inevitability of a conflict between the United States of America and China. To that end, he made an accurate analysis of the two cases where strategic engagement was applied with different results, extracting the causes of success and failure, in a logical and coherent manner, seeking to extract premises and lessons that can be applied by North Americans and Chinese, in order to foster stability and avoid the bellicose escalation of this interaction. The author achieves his goal of demonstrating the validity and viability of defense diplomacy as a channel of interstate relations that helps achieve mutual understanding.

The relevance of the work is another aspect that positively qualifies it. Because it was published in 2020, Katz managed not only to address past strategic engagements, but also to outline an overview of the challenges and obstacles faced by the United States and China, with their rise as an economic and military power posing a threat to the hegemonic status quo American. Katz concludes that defense diplomacy can help escape the Thucydides Trap.

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