

Book Review

Joseph R. Cerami & Jeffrey A. Engel, eds.
Rethinking Leadership and “Whole of Government” National Security Reform: Problems, Progress, and Prospects
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Reviewed by Howard A. Doughty

Sometimes you *can* tell a book by its cover. And sometimes you can even learn almost everything that you may want to know from the publisher’s imprint.

So, while it might do no harm for Wall Street financiers to peruse volumes published by the Monthly Review Press in New York or the Merlin Press in London, there is little doubt that they would find little in such books to be congenial to their dominant way of thinking. Similarly, no leftist zealot would be apt to find consolation in any of the various tomes from the Cato Institute or the Conservative Book Club. Both poles of the ideological spectrum provide pretty much what may be expected by discerning analysts and casually informed observers alike. In the case of *Rethinking Leadership and “Whole of Government” National Security Reform*, however, liberals (to say nothing of radicals of various stripes) would be mistaken to dismiss the book because of its associations. The US Army War College, the Strategic Studies Institute, the Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs, the George H. W. Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A & M University all figure prominently as supporting and enabling institutions; so, those on the left or even the dead centre of the political spectrum might prematurely jump to conclusions about its content. That would be a mistake. Sometimes, appearances deceive and premature expectations are shown to be false.

This was certainly my experience as I approached *Rethinking Leadership*. Joseph Cerami and Jeffrey Engel have brought together seven worthy authors whose work, in addition to their own contributions, would be informative and insightful to people approaching the topic of national security from a wider range of ideological perspectives than might seem likely at first sight.

The key is in the title. For decades, “new public management,” the adaptation of neoliberal ideology to public sector reform was all the rage. Thatcherism and Reaganism (Thatcherism plus the denial of the “theory” of evolution) dictated the adoption of private sector methods including the redefinition of citizens as clients and the use of market mechanisms to distribute public goods. Excellence in the public sector came to mean customer satisfaction, not the achievement of social justice, equity or other egalitarian goals. Especially important, of course, was the quantitative reduction of the public sector itself. Whether through wholesale privatization, public-private partnerships or the simple slashing of program funds, the prevailing wisdom was that government involvement in

the provision of goods and services was to be countenanced only when no other means were available. At base, this meant that anything other than domestic protection (police, fire and emergency measures) and foreign adventurism (armed forces, intelligence organizations) were legitimately to be placed under state authority. And, even here, exceptions did not prove but rather undermined the rule. From minimum wage security personnel holding the fort in upscale gate-guarded communities to the “contracting out” of military tasks to companies such as Blackwater, the legitimacy of private police and prison administration and vast numbers of mercenary soldiers in various wars, notably in the attack on Iraq, have increasingly been embraced.

The alleged benefits in terms of cost-cutting and efficiencies were, of course, unmet. Meanwhile, both the quality of service and the range of available public benefits declined. The return swing of the pendulum is now captured in the phrase “whole of government” reform. While technically referring mainly to an expansion of portfolio boundaries to achieved common policy goals and an attempt to link the “silos” to one another to enhance shared data collection and resource planning, whole of government approaches now permit and even encourage cooperation and coordination. As Christensen and Lægread (2007) point out, this does not necessarily mean an abandonment of the “business model,” but it does at least hint at a new direction. If nothing else, the emphasis came to be placed on the possibilities of integration rather than disaggregation and, perhaps most importantly, a willingness to have policy deliberations informed, as Bogdanor (2005) told us, by a range of social sciences and not just a narrow view of economics.

In his introductory remarks, Strategic Studies Institute Director, Douglas C. Lovelace Jr., frankly acknowledges that “the world is changing in fundamental ways, and our traditional models for understanding America’s role do not appear to be working very well.” This commitment to reform is palpable throughout. Moreover, since the authors are addressing issues of putative importance above questions of accountancy over accountability (which is to say that they have few, if any, vested economic interests in the matters at hand), their hands are more or less free to take issues of principle and practice more seriously than questions of immediate profit. Editor Cerami adds a second crucial element when he writes that the contributors were urged “to think more broadly about leadership and government reform, [and] were challenged to think about the whole of government rather than leadership at the top, or solely on the role of presidential leadership. The aim was to think more about government reform and leadership from the top, middle and entry levels. In other than national security and explicitly military contexts, such nods to democracy would not seem particularly noteworthy; however, in the often arcane and always anxious world of geopolitical inquiry and strategic planning deviation from assumptions of hierarchy are rare. Only in rigid theocracies, prisons and psychiatric facilities is the chain of command and the suspicion of change from below likely to be more pronounced.

This is not to say that *Rethinking Leadership and “Whole of Government” National Security Reform* is a reckless exercise in proto-revolutionary thought. Quite the contrary, its contributors offer thoughtful and measured suggestions of direct relevance, quite

within the traditions of their craft. And yet, the mere fact that they acknowledge serious problems within the domain of national security leads them to be more than usually adventuresome in their selection of sources of inspiration and practical application. They perceive problems and they wish to set out actionable solutions. Accordingly, not so much what they say but the way that they set about the task of saying it provides a model for institutional reformers in any number of fields from education to ecology and from immigration to health insurance.

Every one of the papers that make up this collection merits comment, and such comment would be generally favourable. Of more importance to the general reader than the discussion of specific issues is the overall theme of ethical development. It is the focus of Joel H. Rosenthal's chapter on "Leadership as Practical Ethics," but it also informs a number of other offerings, not least a reflective piece by Todd Pittinsky on "winning hearts and minds"—a slogan that has taken on a rather dubious connotation, especially when applied to theatres of actual combat and exercises in what is called "nation building."

The principal virtue of the book is its shift in emphasis not merely to an approach to national security that includes accessing the expertise and orientation of more than a narrow range of detection and operations, but also to an openness to information and approaches that are, as the phrase "whole of government" implies, "holistic." This is not to say that the government of the United States has traditionally ignored the importance of communications, say, as organizations from Radio Free Europe to Voice of America attest. It is also not to casually dismiss foreign aid undertakings from the Marshall Plan to the idealism of the Peace Corps and, of course, initiatives from President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress to the Agency for International Development.

Unfortunately, however, many of the activities of ostensibly social and economic assistance were (sometimes accurately) described as "cover" for covert operations of various sorts. So, "progressives" in distant lands could be forgiven for their scepticism about the authenticity of American commitments to their well-being in light of the infiltration of intelligence agents of one sort or another in programs said to be motivated by something more ennobling than crass and often misplaced political interest.

Cerami and Engel do not, of course, construct anything approaching a sustained critique of past practice in the domain of national security. They do not have to. To the outsider, the failures of US intelligence at home and abroad are rather transparent. What they do accomplish is partly a tacit recognition of some of the sources of those failures and the articulation of a plan for change.

Toward the end, Jeffrey Engel encapsulates the necessarily modest ambition of the book in the chapter entitled "Change is hard ... but even small steps matter." New directions, new methods and new values (or at least a real commitment to old values) are important. These include the necessity of understanding the cultures, politics and economic problems of people the world over, the gathering, treatment and dissemination of

information and the essential obligation to see the world as more than a chess (or, more accurately, a video) game.

Involved would necessarily be a willingness to engage the world with some measure of good faith, openness and a willingness to listen to the complaints and attempt to see from the perspectives of others: in short, to approach the world more pragmatically and less ideologically. Implied is the need to comprehend the nuances of exotic cultures and the limitations of our own, and especially to respect what is truly valuable in “Western freedoms.” As some wag once said: “The reason they hate you is that you don’t even understand why they hate you.”

If the restrained but important place of internal organizational reform offered here is taken at all seriously, then it will not be impossible to anticipate good effects. Significant shifts in policy from domestic abuse of civil rights to foreign applications of “extraordinary” measures do not augur well for the future, but *Rethinking Leadership and “Whole of Government” National Security Reform* suggests that “change we can believe in” is not the fantasy it sometimes appears to be but a practical alternative to existing policies and practices—it just takes the wit and the political will to try to achieve it.

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