4-19-2024

Book Review: Resourcing the National Security Enterprise: Connecting the Ways and Means of US National Security

Christopher Sandrolini
Susan Bryant is the executive director of Strategic Education International, a visiting research fellow at National Defense University, and the author of several publications, including *Military Strategy in the 21st Century* (Cambria Press, 2018). Mark Troutman is the CEO of Strategic Education International. He teaches business and national security economics at Georgetown University, among other academic institutions, and is a former dean of the Eisenhower School at the National Defense University. In *Resourcing the National Security Enterprise: Connecting the Ends and Means of US National Security*, they present a collection of essays by authors experienced in US academic, military, and national security communities. This practical guide for novice practitioners in the American national security enterprise identifies key problems in the field and provides recommendations on how to fix them.

As retired Army colonels, Bryant and Troutman believe military officers new to Washington's bureaucracy “inevitably become enmeshed, flabbergasted, and stymied” by obstacles of which they were previously unaware—the invisible, but real, web of processes and authorities that constitute the rules of the game (2). Mastering these rules is essential to turn strategies and policies into funded, viable programs. The editors clearly show that national security resourcing is neither orderly nor integrated, and the budget is more an “outcome” of a vast process than a specific, desired result of its participants. They address the US government’s methods of providing resources to agencies involved in national security—especially the Department of Defense and the Department of State, the US Agency for International Development, and the Department of Homeland Security—as well as support for UN peacekeeping. The contributors focus on the defense budget process, strategic choices associated with the defense force structure, military readiness, the roles of Congress and the National Security Council, and the link between defense planning and programming.
Bryant and Troutman place the defense budget within the context of overall federal spending, observing that congressional involvement increases the difficulty of canceling programs or contracts once launched, leading to upward pressure on the defense budget over time. The four-chapter section dealing with the Department of Defense covers the annual Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process that has four sequential phases, each managed by different groups of people with different skills, bureaucratic interests, and timelines. The PPBE phases overlap with the phases of other fiscal years and require four years to complete; while one year’s budget is in the planning phase, another is in the programming phase, and so on. This complexity increases the difficulty of managing the overall process.

The book explains how the Department of Defense balances the “four pillars” of force structure, force posture, readiness, and modernization in developing strategy; examines the concept of readiness in detail; addresses the sequencing and timing of the budget process; and notes misalignment between the strategy formulation and programming phases. The “four pillars” framework rests on the idea that the defense enterprise includes hundreds of “intermediate goods,” or actions related to the four pillars, whose ultimate purpose is to accomplish a mission. There are inherent trade-offs between the pillars, but they are difficult to integrate because defense experts work within program stovepipes; it can even be difficult to measure the pillars themselves. For example, existing readiness metrics (such as the status of resources and training system) are most useful for monitoring downstream readiness factors like the status of deployable ships. This focus on downstream elements means that they are lagging indicators, identifying problems that have been developing for months or years. The earlier identification of these problems remains a challenge.

The book concludes with four excellent recommendations drawn from arguments made by individual contributors, though they are clearly intended for a higher-level audience and are not developed in detail. These recommendations call for creation of a Congressional Select Committee on National Security Affairs; regular National Security Council assessment of strategic resourcing; a broader whole-of-nation conception of national security; and serious effort to address chronic deficit spending.

Military officers unfamiliar with Washington’s ways will find *Resourcing the National Security Enterprise*—endorsed by retired Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster—a well-organized and lucid practical introduction to working within the confines of a bureaucracy.