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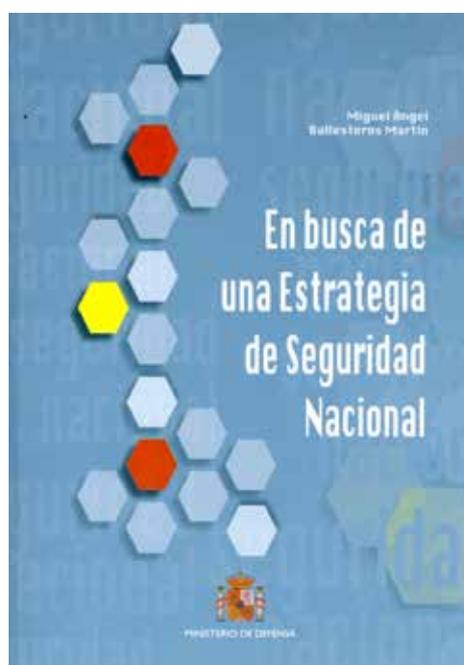
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BOOK REVIEW

EN BUSCA DE UNA ESTRATEGIA DE SEGURIDAD NACIONAL

Author: Miguel Ángel Ballesteros, Publisher: Madrid, Ministerio de Defensa, 2016. ISBN: 978-84-9091-176-1 (323 pages).



National Security Strategies (NSS) and the institutions associated with them - in the case of Spain, the System, the Council and the Department of National Security - are recent realities in our country. Although they are still in the development stage they nevertheless represent a historic step forward.

The adjective historic cannot be overemphasised. It is fundamental to the understanding of a process involving the two approved NSSs so far. The first of these was titled *Estrategia Española de Seguridad. Una responsabilidad de todos - Spanish Security Strategy. A Responsibility for all-* (June 2011, under the Socialist government) and the second: *Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional. Un Proyecto compartido - National Security Strategy. A shared project -* (May 2013, under the Popular Party government). Spain, one of the main players - if not the leading actor - in Western society in the sixteenth century, suffered a gradual decline in the seventeenth, recovered to a certain extent in the eighteenth, and went into free fall throughout the nineteenth and part of the twentieth century. The consolidation of democracy has been accompanied by an increase in Spain's external role consistent with its relative share of power on the international stage - we are a medium power - and conditioned by a historical heritage that still weighs on our political elite and our society. However, viewed from an overall perspective, the trajectory of the last decades is extremely positive.

It is also important that programme and institutional development should attract academic interest. It is further proof of the consolidation of security and defence studies in Spanish Universities. And it allows for the creation of synergies between the fields of national defence, security and external affairs, and the field of university research and teaching.

En busca de una Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional offers an example of that win-win relationship. Its author, General Miguel Ángel Ballesteros, director of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, has a long professional background in the Armed Forces and Defence and also as an academic, which allows him to combine the knowledge acquired by his practical experience with the rigour of scientific methodology. The book based on his doctoral thesis, which received the Extraordinary Doctorate Award, makes a very relevant contribution to the area of security studies and is of interest to those in political and technical spheres who design and implement national security strategies.

The first four chapters of the book focus on defining and clarifying the basic NSS-related concepts: security, defence, strategy, globalisation, risks, threats and dangers. It sets the theoretical and conceptual bases for the rest of the work and - perhaps unintentionally - provides a useful glossary for all Degree or Postgraduate course subjects concerning International Relations and Strategic Studies.

In the fifth chapter the author reviews the main theoretical methods for the development of defence and security strategies and provides us with a clear picture of the progress achieved so far. It also marks the end of the book's theoretical framework. From here on the reader enters the empirical part of the book. Chapters six and seven analyse in detail the structure of the national security systems and the

strategic development processes in several other Western countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Holland and Italy, together with an illustrative Ibero-American case study devoted to Chile (something to be welcomed). The comparative study is rich in content, wide-ranging in perspective and allows for lessons to be learned. It provides a frame of reference for the study of Spain's particular case. This particular aspect, addressed in greatest detail in both chapters, makes it indispensable reading for those involved in setting up or implementing the next NSSs in Spain or those carrying out scientific research in relation to them.

Policy recommendations, which in Anglo-Saxon articles usually occupy only a couple of pages, are given an entire chapter in this book. This is the most original part of the work and is endorsed by the enormous theoretical-conceptual and empirical efforts preceding it. Here the author distils the essence of the concepts, techniques and processes used in the elaboration of strategies to propose a new approach in the design of these strategies. It is in this chapter that the synergies between the practical, professional and academic spheres discussed above can be fully appreciated.

Among the many issues that merit particular attention in this book, there are four that I consider of special interest.

Firstly, the author's emphasis on the integral approach to security. Indeed, the term *Comprehensive Approach* has become one of the pillars of the Atlantic Alliance in dealing with crises and conflicts. In the case of Spain's NSS, while the methodology employed is not exactly the same, the underlying philosophy is. This 'full-spectrum' approach to National Security is a necessity derived from the multidimensional nature of the concept – an aspect discussed in depth in chapter 3 of the book - and the complexity of the problems that affect it, a complexity that is exacerbated in a global world (studied in detail in Chapter 2).

Secondly, it is worth highlighting the importance that the author places on methodological rigour in the design of national security strategies. This connects well with what Colin S. Gray calls assumptions, as the fourth element affecting the other three in the strategy triangle ends-ways-means. These are preconceived ideas, values and principles that condition (and sometimes disfigure) our analysis of reality in relation to each of these three elements: the political ends one seeks to achieve and to preserve from threats, the means and capabilities available, and the bridge that unites both - the modes - that are the essence of the strategy.

According to the author, the correct use of the methodology must guarantee that the knowledge that feeds the NSS design has the requisite scientific support. Ultimately, a national security strategy -like any other public policy- is a hypothesis of improvement. It is based on the belief that the measures to be taken will contribute to the proper management of problems that demand a response from the State. Uncertainty is inherent in them. Their effectiveness is not checked until they are carried out. In order to deal with this uncertainty, it is best to base their design on solid scientific bases and to continuously evaluate the effects generated by the application of the NSS.

A third aspect worthy of note is didactic nature. Despite having derived from a doctoral thesis, a non-specialised public will find this book easy to read. In addition to its obvious appeal for the scientific and 'strategic' community, there are three other types of readers to whom this book is of interest. In the first instance, the political elite. This is undoubtedly a book that will attract the attention of the members of the Parliamentary Committees for Defence, the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Economy and Competitiveness and International Cooperation for Development, as well as advisers specialised in the field within the various political parties. Another audience is that of senior executives and security officers of large Spanish companies, especially those with an international presence. And, finally, the social elite, especially those involved with NGOs and the media. Their contribution is essential for collective reflection on the identity, values, objectives and national interests that give meaning to the NSS, building a consensus in relation to the ways and means employed in these strategies as well as ultimately legitimising them. The book provides a good starting point towards reaching that common ground.

The fourth and last aspect to emphasize is that throughout its pages the book is opening doors to future research. It offers a magnificent overview, to which it adds its own proposals, from which new studies are easily derived. For example, on examining the Spanish case, several questions arise: why was the National Security Strategy of May 2013 not followed by a new National Defence Directive? (At the time of writing this review the last one was in 2012). According to the model, the Defence sector policy is at a lower level than the NSS. Other questions might be the following: what kind of follow-up has been carried out by Parliament on the implementation of the NSS? To what extent has the NSS been present in political debate and has it been used as a reference in the exercise of parliamentary control over sectoral policies linked to the Strategy? And finally, what is the relationship between that culture of security and defence promoted by the Spanish Ministry of Defence and a 'culture of national security' that, in addition to the first, emphasises the shared project of the national security system?

In short, *En busca de una Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional* is a timely work of reference on security issues in Spain and in the Spanish-speaking community. It is a mandatory reference book for everything related to national security systems and strategies, and a starting point for future works on the subject.

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