BOOK REVIEW


Walter Kemp

In Peace and Security in the Postmodern World, Dennis Sandole sets out to explore the ‘goodness-of-fit’ between academics and diplomats who are trying to build a more peaceful Europe. He unwittingly succeeds. What this book reveals is that Sandole, like diplomats accredited to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has spent more than a decade trying to build a security architecture for Europe that has limited relevance for real threats and challenges to the continent.

The basic premise is noble. In the early 1990s, Sandole drew up a blueprint for a new European peace and security system to prevent ‘future Yugoslavias’. It is based on three pillars corresponding to the OSCE’s traditional three security baskets: NATO/NACC to cover hard security; the EU/EFTA for the economic and environmental dimension; and the Council of Europe for the human dimension. OSCE principles provide common foundations, and its broad membership, consensus-based approach and forum for dialogue provide the common roof.

The scaffolding was erected in the 1990 Charter for a New Europe. Sandole visited Vienna in 1993, 1997, 1999 and 2004 to see how far the architecture was evolving towards his ideal model. He attempted to monitor progress by asking representatives of OSCE participating States a series of questions designed to reveal their national security objectives and how they could be fulfilled multilaterally.

In theory, this is the kind of thing that the OSCE should do itself — providing periodic evaluation and assessing the lessons learned. Unfortunately, it has seldom done so and therefore lacks institutional memory. It should therefore be thankful that an American academic would give it so much attention for more than a decade.

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Sadly, for all his effort, Sandole asks the wrong questions from the wrong people. Considering his study is about the OSCE, he asks a lot of questions about NATO. And as he admits towards the end of the book that perhaps ambassadors receiving instructions in Vienna are not the best placed people to talk about the conceptual and operational strengths and weaknesses of the Organization. He would have been better off looking at how the OSCE works in practice on the ground, and asking policy makers in capitals — responsible for European security issues — how they viewed the organization’s relevance in a broader context.

The result is that the information gathered does not give us much insight into the real added value of the OSCE in dealing with the types of issues that Sandole believes, quite rightly, it is best placed to deal with namely conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. Indeed, the cases where the ideal security model actually worked in practice — in Albania, Bosnia, and Macedonia — are not analyzed.

Nor do we get an idea of the relevance of the OSCE in relation to developments in the Russian Federation and its ‘near abroad’, EU enlargement and its ‘new neighbourhood’, Transatlantic relations, and NATO enlargement. Instead, information is filtered through a narrow prism focused almost exclusively on developments in Bosnia and Kosovo as if the Organization’s whole raison d’etre were to prevent and contain ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia. In that respect, the chapter on negotiators’ perceptions of the lessons learned from the Balkan wars of the 1990s are the most useful.

After 9/11, Sandole changes tack and tries to link the sources of genocidal violence and terrorism in the OSCE area. In his 2004 survey he asks participating States: is there a linkage between, on the one hand, the violent ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union and, on the other, September 11-type terrorism. The answer is a resounding ‘no’.

Sandole’s case is not helped by a rather strong reliance on quotations which are often marked with italics to point out important passages, concluding the sentence with closed brackets that note that emphasis was added. This becomes rather annoying and suggests that the reader is not smart enough to capture the main points within the excessively long quotes [emphasis added]. There is also a tendency to use, even invent, pretentious political science terms like ‘aggressive manifest conflict process’ which translates into English as ‘violence’.

All of that having been said, Sandole has developed a valuable set of data which gives a unique insight into the evolution of the OSCE. His work parallels a series of attempts by OSCE states to build the very security model that he espouses: the so-called ‘security model’ debate in the mid-1990s that led to the Platform for Cooperative Security; the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century (adopted in 2003); and the latest reform process of 2004-2006, euphemistically referred to as strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE.

It would be interesting to see what answers OSCE representatives would