Book Review of Global Security Cultures

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Global Security Cultures by Mary Kaldor, Polity Press, 2018, 234 pages.

Global Security Cultures is a book that helps us to understand why the ‘conflicts’ or ‘war’ between nations drags on, even when we know very clearly that the consequences of military means being used to attack terrorist, only worsens the situations. This book is written by the renowned scholar of war and human security, Mary Kaldor, Professor of Global Governance and Director of The Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit at the London School of Economics. Mary Kaldor, in this book brings in the concept of “security gap” that even though ‘millions of people lives in conditions of deep insecurity, and yet the security apparatus, that is largely consisting of military forces does not address the concern, rather it worsens the conditions’. In this book, Kaldor introduces the concepts like ‘global’ is used “as the ways of doing or patterns of behaviour rather than national or ethnic culture”, ‘security culture’ as “different interconnected combination of ideas, rules people, tools, tactics and infrastructure linked to different types of political authority” and ‘culture’ as she states, “helps to explain why certain practices become normalized or habituated even if they appear to be contrary to logic”. In this book, through these concepts, Kaldor is raising very pertinent questions like Why do politicians think that war is the answer to terrorism and with examples from war conducted at Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Mali, and Somalia had only worsen the situations and the conflicts in these places are never ending’. The central proposition of this book is that “the utility of military force has been transformed as consequences of technological change”.

Kaldor in this book had identified four major types of ‘security culture’ such as geopolitics, new wars, liberal peace and war on terror. One chapter each for these four types of ‘security culture’ is being dedicated in this book, the other chapters of this book are on security cultures and geographies, along with introduction and conclusion.

The chapter 2 on security cultures, poses some important questions like “Whose safety are we talking about—that of the individual, the nation, the state, the world?” It discusses about the seven types of security by the UNDP, the concept of ‘securitization’ developed by Copenhagen School, defining ‘security as a ‘speech act’’. Further, it discusses about the term ‘culture’ quoting from Colin Gray, Raymond Williams, Klein (on strategic culture),

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Johnston, Christopher Daase and Edward Lock. This chapter also discusses the components of security cultures as against the four types of security culture. They compared the narratives, indicators, rules, tools, tactics, finance and infrastructure of the four types of security cultures (i.e. Geo-politics, New War, Liberal Peace and War on terror). The chapter also further compared the dimensions of security cultures.

The chapter 3, on Geo-politics defines the concept of geo-politics as “about the political organization of space and how this is conceived, represented and used in political discussion”. Further, the chapter discusses about the discourse of Geo-politics, the evolution of Geo-politics as culture, the cultural adaptation of Geo-politics in the 21st century- which includes technology, war and economic considerations.

The chapter 4, is titled as ‘new wars. ‘new’ as a term is to “draw attention to the changed focus of global security (from a central, binary, geo-political struggle to contemporary forms of political violence)”. In this chapter, Kaldor discusses about the evolution and adaptation of new wars. The next chapter is on ‘Liberal Peace’. The liberal peace, “is described as a culture, a combination of interconnected ideas, organizations, people and practices that crosses borders and is continually being constructed and reconstructed”. Further, the chapter discussed, liberal peace as a concept and narrative, liberal peace as a security culture, contradictions and dilemmas of the liberal peace. Kaldor, concluded with the argument, that “the very contradictions of the liberal peace offer what is probably the only opening towards a more effective global security culture that could address the insecurity experienced by millions of those who have lived through new wars”.

The chapter on ‘War on Terror’ as Kaldor put it as “the war on terror is a massive failure, this phenomenon merely stimulates more spending on counter terror activities”. Further, the chapter, discussed, the evolution from ‘the cold war to the war on terror’, war on terror as a security culture and narrates on its implications. Followed by the chapter on Geographies that discussed the stories of four cultures, “by describing how they have played out in different new war contexts”. The context that were discussed were (a) Bosnia– Herzegovina war (1992–1995) (b) The American intervention in Afghanistan from 2001 and (c) Syria since, 2011.

Kaldor concludes this book with her main findings as that “all four security cultures have become increasingly bio-political rather than geo-political, that is to say, they are concerned with control over population rather than control over territory”. Further, she discusses about ‘adapting the liberal peace’, with dilemmas and contradictions in each of the four components of liberal peace (i.e. humanitariansm, peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building), which could ultimately ‘open up new pathways to safeguard and rescue civility in future’.

In this book, Kaldor introduces the concept of Global Security and explains the reasons why we get trapped in a specific pathway to security. She also explains the concept of global security culture, that involves various combinations of rules, ideals, narratives, tools, people, practices and infrastructure embedded in a set of political authority, that come together to address or engage in large scale violence’s. She also brings in the various other competing global security cultures as compared to the earlier one, that is based predominantly on military forces and nation states. She defines the four types of security
cultures such as geo-politics, new wars, the liberal peace and the war on terror and explain how in the contemporary security cultures, which could eventually open new pathways to safeguard and rescue civility in future.

This book would be useful for students and scholars of International Studies, Security Studies, Criminology, peace studies, Global Governance etc. This book details the contemporary security landscape.