

**North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework. By
Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., Abelardo Rodriguez Sumano, and Todd S.
Hataley, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2013.**

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Abstract

North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework. By Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., Abelardo Rodriguez Sumano, and Todd S. Hataley, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1-58826-854-9.

***North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework.* By Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., Abelardo Rodriquez Sumano, and Todd S. Hataley, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1-58826-854-9.**

The contours of the international system are undergoing significant shifts, both in terms of structure and process. The end of the Cold War brought with it fundamental alterations in both of these systemic elements. Since then, the significant growth of new powers and increased securitization of different types of threats have served to accelerate these changes. In response, there has been a substantial return of scholarly attention to the region as the primary systemic context within which security interests are located. Within this *new regionalism*, the concept of the Regional Security Complex (particularly as defined within Barry Buzan and Ole Waever's *Regions and Powers*) has provided an important analytical foundation. Such is the case with *North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework*, by Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., Abelardo Rodriquez Sumano, and Todd S. Hataley.

What is particularly distinctive and significant about this book is that it focuses on a relatively under-analyzed Regional Security Complex (RSC). Perhaps it is not surprising that the North American region has received less attention than others. First, it is far less contested over than others. If there is any region where the term “hegemony” is applicable, it is North America. This is particularly true if one defines the RSC (as the authors do) as including only Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Second, the extra-regional orientation of the United States has led many scholars of American foreign policy to focus elsewhere. With the exceptions of US attention to Homeland Security and the destabilizing forces associated with the flow of narcotics and people along the US-Mexican border, the US does not seem to prioritize its own region. Finally, with the exception of NAFTA, it is not all that common to think about the North American region as an independent and interesting sub-system. As the authors demonstrate, this perspective seems to be consistent with each of its member states.

Thus, the initial point that one should take away from this book is that the North American region is indeed worthy of analysis as an RSC. The application of the RSC framework to the region and the analysis of its distinctive features then is a significant contribution in its own rite. Second, the dynamics of the North American RSC are not as clear-cut as a simple assertion of “hegemony” might imply. If hegemony indicates the ability of one actor to make and enforce order within its system, Kilroy, Sumano, and Hataley give the reader a reason to reconsider whether the term should be applied. What emerges from the historical and contemporary analyses of the security relationships between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, is that each actor has pursued an orientation toward the region that is quite distinctive from the others. Indeed, the authors state,

“The thesis we offer is that, while security relationships between the three countries have appeared to suggest the existence of a North American security complex, there remain significant obstacles, derived from different threat perceptions based on identities, institutions, and interests that will impede further integration and cooperation” (p. 4).

The analysis of the United States indicates a state that has gone back-and-forth over time in its orientation toward the region. At times, it has sought to consolidate the Western Hemisphere's (in broader terms than NAFTA) security management. At others, it has looked beyond its own neighborhood toward a more globally oriented posture. Canada, for its part, has been more focused on the international system as a whole. The authors point out that this has been true since the end of World War II, when Ottawa made the conscious choice to prioritize the development of an effective United Nations over the Organization of American States. Such an orientation has continued to today, though the authors do not understate the importance of Canada's continued contribution to NORAD. Mexico has remained extremely cautious about entering into any sort of security arrangement that would require it to join in a U.S.-driven operation or worse, to allow U.S. forces back into its sovereign territory. This is an understandable position, given its own history. Each of these characterizations are reflected consistently over time, even after the NAFTA agreement was signed.

Third, the inclusion of the I-I-I (Identities, Institutions, and Interests) framework "as a key analytical intersection with regional security complex theory" (p. 4) adds a component that is clearly salient to the North American case (and likely most other RSCs). While Mexico stands out as the most distinctive in terms of identity and institutions, each state varies significantly in its interests. There is thus a value to the incorporation of the I-I-I framework. Indeed, it is more through the employment of the I-I-I framework than RSCT that the authors add depth to the analysis of the North American case. As the thesis indicates, the sources of a lack of success in developing a coherent identification as a regional unit or even an extensive and effective cooperative security arrangement lie in the members' differing identities, institutions, and interests.

One could argue in fact, that the authors would have been better served by focusing on the I-I-I framework instead of the RSCT (which considers a number of regional attributes, which are not really the focus of this book). The presence (or lack thereof) of an RSC after all, does not depend on cooperation. RSCs are formed when there is such deep interdependence in the processes of securitization and desecuritization that one cannot appropriately understand or resolve security issues without considering the complex holistically. The lack of a highly cooperative arrangement among RSC members is a separate issue than whether or not an RSC exists. Thus, North America (even if one includes Central America and the Caribbean) can easily be argued to be an RSC before considering its characteristics.

The interesting empirical questions then, address the nature of the RSC, its causes, and its effectiveness in addressing regional security problems. It seems that the authors are really more concerned with the regional security order than whether or not there is an RSC. Indeed, the authors characterize the RSC as lacking coherence and high-level cooperation, and attribute this largely to the varied identities, institutions, and interests of the member states. This is an interesting and important argument, and one that they effectively make. One wonders though, whether this sort of order is still sufficient for addressing serious security problems. While the ideal type of security community may reflect normative preferences of the day, it is not clear that it is always the most effective mechanism for managing security. In the case of North America, perhaps the capabilities of the US are so extensive and its willingness to act in cases of serious security threats so clear, that such a security community is unnecessary.

North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework casts the attention of regional security scholars to arguably the most under-explored RSC, as such. Its attention to the development of the security relationships between Canada, the US, and Mexico over time and in the current era is interesting and important. The collaboration of three scholars with real attention to providing clear analyses of each of the three states' perspectives is also quite valuable. The book provides a focus and depth with respect to the North American RSC that will be a useful tool for anyone interested in the region. More importantly, it demonstrates the value of examining the North American RSC as well as applying the I-I-I framework to RSC analysis more broadly.

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