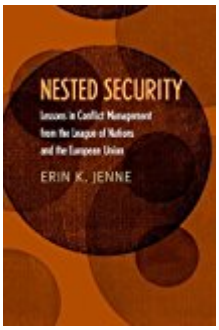
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Erin K. Jenne. *Nested Security: Lessons in Conflict Management from the League of Nations and the European Union.* thaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. 264 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8014-5390-8.

Reviewed by Jennifer De Maio

Published on H-Diplo (September, 2016)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

In *Nested Security: Lessons in Conflict Management from the League of Nations and the European Union*, Erin Jenne makes an important contribution to the literature on conflict management. Jenne argues that in order for mediation of civil disputes to succeed, it is necessary to first address the wider conflict environment. While traditional approaches to conflict management focus on building domestic institutions in order to promote peace, Jenne posits that conflict management efforts must instead work from the outside in. That is, regional stability must be considered before attempts are made to mitigate internal wars. She contends that third parties, and in particular powerful third parties, are more likely to manage civil wars effectively if they "nest the domestic disputes in a stable regional environment" (p. 9). Scholars and policymakers know that the involvement of major powers is critical to conflict management success. Jenne argues that their involvement alone is not what is critical, however. These actors must build security from the outside in; they must stabilize the region before reconfiguring domestic institutions to promote peace. If the region is not stable and if the wider systemic or hegemonic environment is not secure, then efforts to manage civil wars will fail. Much of the mediation literature, according to Jenne, understates how critical it is to nest domestic conflicts in a broader regional and systemic context. Her book attempts to fill the gap in the literature.

To demonstrate the explanatory power of her hypotheses, Jenne undertakes an impressive, in-depth historical analysis of four cases of mediated low-intensity war in interwar and post-Cold War Central and Eastern Europe. She divides her cases by mediator strategy--preventive diplomacy and induced devolution. The choice of cases allows Jenne to examine two different security regimes in Europe--the League of Nations security regime and the European Union/Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (EU/OSCE) security regime. The systems are appropriate for comparison, she argues, because they both had well-developed mechanisms for early warning and preventive diplomacy and could thus withstand tensions

in the absence of coercive power. The systems are also appropriate for comparison because there is variation in the outcomes of interventions to manage internal wars. With her comparative historical analysis, Jenne tests how well her nested security model holds across different mediations undertaken in a variety of settings with various participants, mediation strategies, and geopolitical environments. She looks at cases with similar contextual conditions and compares successful mediations (which she defines as cases where tensions decrease once mediation has begun) with failed mediations (cases where tensions increase once mediation has begun) to identify variables that determine conflict escalation versus de-escalation. She also uses process-tracing over time to consider which of these variables might be determining success/failure in a single mediation.

Jenne supplements her qualitative case studies to test the transportability of her model outside Europe by using the Managed Intrastate Low-Intensity Conflict (MILC) dataset from 1993 to 2004. She considers low-intensity conflicts undergoing third-party mediation and finds that the quantitative analysis generally supports her nested security argument. Mediated conflicts are unlikely to end if the outside environment is not stable. But, a stable environment alone does not produce peace. External stability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for peace at the domestic level. These findings suggest that there are other variables that must be present in order for conflict management to succeed. Mediator type matters as does the ability of the security regime to manage spoilers and alter calculations of would-be combatants with an effective mix of carrots and sticks.

In addition, Jenne draws inferences from her case studies by considering what each European regime did well and what each did less well; she then offers lessons for successful cooperative conflict management based on this analysis. She points to two main principles as critical for success: 1) integrating domestic, regional, and international dimensions; and 2) co-opting spoilers and provocateurs. Both of these principles are well supported by the existing literature on peacebuilding and on how to deal with spoilers. What would be interesting to know is how these factors contribute to long-term peacebuilding. Perhaps her analysis could be extended to look at the success of conflict management efforts two, five, and ten years after the cessation of hostilities. This type of analysis would improve our understanding of the importance of working with international, regional, and subregional partners to ensure peace and could help develop strategies for altering the preferences of spoilers in order to bring them into the peace process.

Jenne claims that her argument about nested security can be extended to other regions beyond Europe. She points to regimes in Africa and Asia that have been established to provide collective security and early warnings of impending crises. While these regimes are in place, an important question to consider is, how effective are they? Have they been able to prevent and/or de-escalate civil wars? It is certainly critical to consider the outside environment in regions like Africa where conflicts spill across borders and contribute to broader continental wars. Unstable external environments also increase the likelihood of domestic conflicts, so it seems that an analysis of the value of nested security would be particularly relevant in Africa. But the requirements for establishing effective security regimes that Jenne outlines are not (yet) sufficiently present in Africa. There is a decision-making body in place but it still struggles to deal with spoilers and veto players. Also lacking is cooperation between monitors and enforcers to provide effective conflict management at all stages of the conflict life cycle--from preventive diplomacy to postwar peacebuilding efforts. Where there is early warning at the regional and subregional levels in Africa, this information is not always translated into effective action. The feedback loop between early warning and action

needs to be addressed. Similarly, each stage of the conflict life cycle is wrought with challenges for regional and subregional mediators, who often lack the capacity to undertake a conflict management process without the support of international partners. This suggests that the outside is critical to the success of peace inside, but it is not a stable regional environment alone that will end war. There are a multitude of other factors that contribute to the likelihood of conflict management success in regions like Africa. Jenne is right that we must look at what is happening in the region more broadly and that we cannot expect to build peace on the inside when there is chaos on the outside. But as she herself acknowledges, external stability alone does not create peace. It is an important piece of the conflict management puzzle and she does well to remind scholars and policymakers alike that we cannot get so caught up in the trees that we miss the forest.