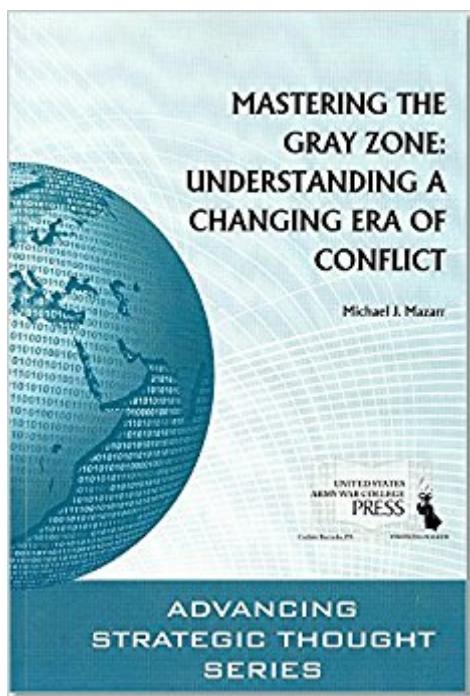


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Mastering The Gray Zone: Understanding A Changing Era Of Conflict



Synopsis

Discussions of an emerging practice of "gray zone" conflict have become increasingly common throughout the U.S. Army and the wider national security community, but the concept remains ill-defined and poorly understood. This monograph aims to contribute to the emerging dialogue about competition and rivalry in the gray zone by defining the term, comparing and contrasting it with related theories, and offering tentative hypotheses about this increasingly important form of state competition. The idea of operating gradually and somewhat covertly to remain below key thresholds of response is hardly new. Many approaches being used today "such as support for proxy forces and insurgent militias" have been employed for millennia. The monograph argues that the emergence of this more coherent and intentional form of gray zone conflict is best understood as the confluence of three factors. Understood in this context, gray zone strategies can be defined as a form of conflict that pursues political objectives through integrated campaigns; employs mostly nonmilitary or nonkinetic tools; strives to remain under key escalatory or red line thresholds to avoid outright conventional conflict; and moves gradually toward its objectives rather than seeking conclusive results in a relatively limited period of time. Having examined the scope and character of gray zone conflict, the monograph offers seven hypotheses about this emerging form of rivalry. Finally, the monograph gives recommendations for the United States and its friends and allies to deal with this challenge.

Book Information

Paperback: 153 pages

Publisher: Department of the Army (March 17, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 158487712X

ISBN-13: 978-1584877127

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #967,573 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #169 in Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Biological & Chemical #170 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Military Policy #492 in Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Nuclear

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR MICHAEL J. MAZARR is a Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation. Prior to coming to RAND, he spent 12 years as Professor of National Security Strategy, course director, and Associate Dean at the U.S. National War College in Washington, DC. From late-2008 to early-2010, he served as Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. From October 2000 to November 2001, he was president and chief executive officer of the Henry L. Stimson Center. Before coming to Stimson, he was senior vice president for strategic planning and development at the Electronic Industries Alliance in Arlington, VA. He has been a U.S. Naval Reserve intelligence officer, a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a founding member of both the Council on Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific and the Committee on Nuclear Policy. He taught as an adjunct professor in the Georgetown University Security Studies Program from 1989 to 2012 and again beginning in 2015. From 1993 to 1995, Dr. Mazarr was legislative assistant for foreign affairs and chief writer in the office of Representative Dave McCurdy (D-OK), where he was responsible for foreign affairs issues and legislation and the drafting of major political speeches. Before working in Congress, Mazarr was a senior fellow in international security studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC, and oversaw major Center studies in a number of substantive areas. From 1995 to 1999, Dr. Mazarr served as editor of The Washington Quarterly, director of the New Millennium Project, and dean of the Young Leaders Program at CSIS. He has authored ten books, including North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation (1995) and Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity (2007). He has edited seven anthologies; published essays in The Economist, Policy Review, Survival, The New Republic, The National Interest, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, The Washington Quarterly, International Security, and elsewhere; and authored editorials in The Washington Post, The New York Times, and other newspapers. Dr. Mazarr holds A.B. and M.A. degrees in government and national security studies from Georgetown University, and a Ph.D. in policy analysis from the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs. Â

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