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Authority, Ascendancy, and Supremacy: China, Russia, and the United States' Pursuit of Relevancy and Power

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direction. As often as not, then, policy and strategy are directed by war; they do not direct it. Responding to that reality requires a dialogue between soldiers and politicians—not the subordination of one element to the other, but rather their “harmonization” (p. 78). For any kind of rationality to be imposed, politics must therefore listen to strategy, which must listen to war, both in its enduring nature and in its changing character. All this suggests a far more prominent role in the conversation for generals and admirals than current norms, often violated in practice, tend to permit.

As a student of the American founders and the American political tradition, this reviewer is not sure Strachan is right to challenge the Anglo-American taboos as much as he does. As a professor of strategy, however, I am certain Strachan has captured something vital for understanding the direction of any war. It arises from Clausewitz’s discussion of war as more than a true chameleon changing its colors from war to war. War does have a nature. It is embodied especially in Clausewitz’s trinity: the relation among reason, passion, and creativity that exists in any war. But that relation changes from war to war. Sometimes one element is more important than another, which gives an entirely different direction to a conflict than the one preceding or succeeding it. Sometimes the elements quarrel among themselves. Each attempts to give direction to war, and the changing historical direction of war is very much the result of the conversation among the parts and the interaction of their whole with others. No wonder, then, that Strachan does not give us the clear and final answers we crave. War will not allow them; neither will he. We therefore will have to figure the answers

out for ourselves. A fine way to start is by reading this subtle and erudite book.

KARL WALLING



Authority, Ascendancy, and Supremacy: China, Russia, and the United States’ Pursuit of Relevancy and Power, by Gregory O. Hall. New York: Routledge, 2015. 188 pages. \$145 (paperback \$42.95).

Gregory O. Hall, a professor of political science at Morehouse College, has taken an acknowledged fact of contemporary international relations—the dominance of the United States, Russia, and China within the international system—and developed a compelling academic model supporting this.

Hall argues that the Tripolar Conflict, Cooperation, and Competition (TC3) Framework model reflects the reality of the international system since at least the early 2000s. From Central Asia to the Middle East and Northeast Asia, Hall demonstrates that the United States, China, and Russia are locked in a complex web of interrelationships that increasingly determines the outcome of pressing regional, and even global, issues. As the traditional economic and military advantages of the United States decline relative to those of some rising powers, the international system will be even more defined by the interactions of these three dominant global powers.

Hall cogently traces the gradual transition of the global system following the “unipolar” moment that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. While the United States remains first among equals in numerous metrics of national power, the comparative diminution of its own influence and the rise of other power centers

have led to an international environment in which regional problems must be resolved in conjunction with the other critical global actors—namely, Russia and China. Hall contrasts previous examples of American unilateral action—from military intervention in the Balkans in the late 1990s to the 2003 invasion of Iraq—with more recent examples of U.S. foreign policy being constrained by Russian or Chinese concerns. Whether it is Russian support for the al-Assad regime in Syria, China's sustainment of the Kim dynasty in North Korea, or both Moscow and Beijing's attempts to constrain possible U.S. military action against Iran's nuclear program, Hall marshals the full panoply of regional issues to demonstrate the relevance of his framework.

For the national security community, Hall's work represents an important translation of international relations theory to the realm of practical policy making. His "strategic triangle" between the United States, Russia, and China is an accepted fact of international politics with which leaders around the world have grappled for at least the last decade. On almost any security issue of note, whether traditional or nontraditional, the acquiescence of at least two of the three major powers is essential for any action. Whether it is Russia and China constraining U.S. options in Middle East hot spots such as Syria or Iran, or the United States and China increasing their influence in traditionally Russian-dominated Central Asia, the triangular relationship plays out on nearly every conceivable regional security question. While the popular literature continues to debate a "post-American world" and other slogans, a "strategic triangle" has long been the reality for Russian, Chinese, and U.S. decision makers.

While Hall is particularly adept at translating the academic literature into a compelling narrative that fits the global political reality, he is less sure footed in properly contextualizing the limits of American power. Although it is clear that global power is more diffuse than in the years directly following the Soviet Union's collapse, and American power is certainly more constrained on a variety of regional issues, Washington still maintains an unparalleled ability to act militarily when and where it chooses even in the face of strong objections from Moscow and Beijing. The 2011 intervention in Libya demonstrates that, while Russian and Chinese concerns were certainly considered in ways unheard of during the 1990s and early 2000s, Washington still ultimately exercises a tremendous degree of discretion in the use of force and remains able to apply its overwhelming military advantage in a variety of contingencies despite deep misgivings in Moscow and Beijing.

As Professor Hall rightly notes, the continued economic and military advances of less developed nations such as Turkey, Brazil, Iran, and South Africa will inject new forces and issues into the international agenda. Nontraditional security issues such as water scarcity and environmental degradation, while certainly not replacing the traditional primacy of inter-state competition and conflict, will likely act as a supplement to those dynamics. As the global system seeks to adjust to these actors and issues, the predominance of the United States, China, and Russia in the international system and the reality of cooperation and competition between these powers will continue to define the twenty-first-century international order.

ALEXANDER B. GRAY