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## A Dangerous World? Threat Perception and U.S. National Security, edited by Christopher Preble and John Mueller

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the multipolar nuclear world we now inhabit. The Department of Defense has an Air-Sea Battle Office, as does the U.S. Navy, and his discussion at the end of chapter 3 is aimed, presumably, at the folks inhabiting those organizations and their strategic masters.

Friedberg forecasts two potential ASB approaches: a “linear” approach that uses existing resources and technology and, in contrast, a “discontinuous” approach that relies heavily on new technologies and un-fielded weapons concepts (pp. 95–98). Friedberg seems to prefer the linear approach, given the ease with which it can be implemented (although that ease does not mean it will be inexpensive), but he does not rule out investigating new technologies. He is obviously wary of “betting the farm” on a “futures” approach.

In his final chapter, Friedberg describes two indirect approaches or “alternatives” to ASB: either a distant blockade or what he calls “maritime denial” (pp. 104, 116–17). He again applies an analytic framework to assess the efficacy of these less-offensive-oriented approaches. Distant blockade is merely economic warfare. It would aim at Chinese shipping, principally oil tankers at the key straits’ entrances leading through the SCS to Chinese ports. Maritime denial is simply ASB limited primarily to the global commons and PRC littoral inside the first island chain. One might characterize maritime denial as an active defense of the global commons, but again it is reactive, not something to implement without significant Chinese military provocation. The conclusion reviews the bidding on everything discussed. Here Friedberg comes across as a bit more bellicose than one might expect, implying that a mix

of all three approaches—ASB, distant blockade, and maritime denial—would probably be the best course of action. Friedberg comes closest to the nub of the issue when he writes: “The first dividing line in the debate over this issue is between the advocates of maritime denial, who seek to avoid strikes against targets on the Chinese mainland, and the proponents of ASB, who believe that war cannot be won without such attacks” (p. 137). However, he leaves the door open for the reader to make up his or her own mind on the issue.

While this might be perceived as strength, it is also something of a disappointment, because this reviewer wanted to know what Friedberg *really* recommends. Friedberg is clearly not of the opinion that ASB should be dismissed, and seems to support a course of action that implies the direct approach option while being ready, at a moment’s notice, to implement the other two approaches in response to a PRC “first strike” (p. 37).

Friedberg leverages all the latest writing on the topic, using the work of writers familiar to naval audiences such as Jan van Tol and Wayne Hughes. He has done his homework, and now it is time for all others to do theirs as the United States faces the A2/AD challenge.

JOHN T. KUEHN



Preble, Christopher, and John Mueller, eds. *A Dangerous World? Threat Perception and U.S. National Security*. Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2014. 224pp. \$12.95

Medical doctors are trained to recognize when patients’ complaints and self-diagnoses need to be ignored, lest

the doctor be responsible for unnecessary medical treatment. It is unfortunate that we do not have similar education for national security officials regarding threats to the nation. With such training, there is a chance we could avoid at least some of the overreactions to misperceived threats that have burdened recent American foreign policy.

There is a significant and growing literature addressing the issue of threat inflation, and Christopher A. Preble and John Mueller's edited volume *A Dangerous World?* is an important contribution in this area. Published by the Cato Institute, it is a collection of sixteen essays by an array of authors, each delving into a different aspect of the U.S. threat environment. Their aim is to question the assumptions that underpin so much of U.S. national security policy: that we live in a perilous world riven by uncertainty and threats, and only a robust, expensive, and active defense preserves the homeland's security.

To this end, the work addresses a wide range of topics, each examined by a different contributor. Francis Gavin and John Mueller separately examine America's history of nuclear alarmism, noting that predictions of imminent explosions in a number of nuclear weapons states have been commonplace for decades. Lyle Goldstein argues convincingly that the threat China poses to the United States is a limited one (he uses the memorable phrase "panda claws") and he claims China's rise can be countered with low-cost strategies. (As of this writing, recent devaluations of the yuan raise the possibility of a future Chinese retrenchment, further reducing the need for a potent American counter.) Former U.S. intelligence officer Paul Pillar explores substate threats (including

terror groups), asserting that America is too quick to seize on new threats. Since 9/11, more Americans have drowned in their bathtubs than have been killed in the United States by terrorist attacks, and improved security cannot account for the entirety of this disparity.

Michael Cohen asks whether other aspects of personal welfare, such as health security, should also be addressed in our discussions of security. Daniel Drezner explores the economic benefits of American military pre-eminence, and finds them elusive. The United States has spent trillions on homeland defense and overseas confrontations since 9/11, Drezner notes, while the total economic impact of 9/11 itself was "only" \$100 billion.

Elsewhere, Christopher Fettweis examines the pervasive anxiety in American national security culture, arguing that "geopolitical fear" has become something of an American tradition, passed on from generation to generation. "Wealth creates insecurity in individuals, and it seems to do so in states as well." Benjamin Friedman explores the issue of threat inflation, arguing that America's vast power "distributes the costs" and "concentrates the benefits" of confrontational policies, creating constituencies that promote (and even become dependent on) maintaining a state of unnecessary vigilance.

In many respects, America can afford to exaggerate the world's perils. There is no meaningful political pressure to reduce the budget of the Department of Defense, and America's national security expenditures, large though they are, constitute only a fraction of the federal budget. At the same time, one must also consider the risk that threat inflation poses to American

lives. More Americans were killed as a consequence of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 than on 9/11 itself. But there is also the long-term causal impact of the U.S. invasion. The existence of ISIS is another unintended consequence of the American invasion.

It is true that there are dangers in this world. But Preble and Mueller's volume constitutes an antidote to America's tendency to imagine grave peril, and serves as an important counter to the American proclivity to overstate the benefits and understate the costs of an assertive global military posture. The editors argue that America is largely free of threats that require military preparedness or balancing behavior. In his chapter, Fettweis argues that America's tendency to exaggerate the world's dangers can be altered, since it is based on a system of beliefs that can be changed over time. Let's hope he's right.

ANDREW STIGLER



Hassan, Hassan, and Michael Weiss. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York: Regan Arts, 2015. 288pp. \$16.95

The surprising success of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in seizing control of large parts of northern and western Iraq in 2014 has generated many questions for policy makers and the public. How was this group so effective so quickly? Where did it come from and how did so many observers miss its rise? What threat does ISIS pose to the region and beyond?

Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss address these questions in this recent book about ISIS. The work is part history of

the ISIS movement and part analysis of its nature and strategy. The authors' backgrounds—Weiss is a prolific journalist and Hassan a knowledgeable Syrian analyst at the Delma Institute in Abu Dhabi—combine brilliantly to explain the rapidly evolving events on the ground within the context of the political-military issues in the region. Hassan and Weiss interviewed current and former ISIS movement fighters in Syria, dissected ISIS propaganda videos and statements, and combined other scholarly analyses of ISIS to produce what I consider to be the most accurate assessment of ISIS currently available.

The overwhelming strength of the book is that Hassan and Weiss get the history of ISIS right. Although it is often mistakenly thought of as a recent phenomenon, the authors correctly trace the group's evolution as a core of Salafist-oriented fighters who joined together under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq in 2002–2003. Zarqawi's unique outlook, based in the same Salafi-jihadist school as Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda, imprinted on the ISIS movement early and has been the biggest factor in the popularization of its distinct ideology and the evolution of its tactics and strategy. The authors capture this dynamic, as well as ISIS's subsequent transformation from a foreign fighter-based organization to a more indigenous Iraqi-led group that eventually split with Al Qaeda.

Because of their understanding of ISIS history, Hassan and Weiss are able to demonstrate the ideological foundation behind ISIS's strategic targeting and why the group takes on such a large spectrum of enemies at once. The authors are also able to explain ISIS's genocidal strategy and how the group promotes its own atrocities to inspire fear in its enemies.