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China's Search for Security

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BOOK REVIEWS

IS CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY DRIVEN BY PERCEPTIONS OF VULNERABILITY?

Nathan, Andrew J., and Andrew Scobell. *China's Search for Security*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2012. 406pp. \$32.95

The nation's "rebalance" to Asia has been greeted by a plethora of new books on Asia-Pacific security issues. In contrast to the many worthwhile specialist works now available, *China's Search for Security* stands out as an ambitious attempt to offer a one-volume overview of China's security situation as seen from the Chinese point of view. Both authors are established and respected scholars. Andrew Nathan is best known as an editor of the *Tiananmen Papers* (PublicAffairs, 2002), while Andrew Scobell is author of the well-regarded *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). This work began as a revision of their 1997 collaboration *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress*, but the rapid changes in the Asian security landscape in the last decade have made *China's Search for Security* essentially a completely new volume.

The authors begin by asking what drives Chinese foreign policy and who makes decisions in the Chinese system. Their clear, cogent explanation of the state,

party, security, and intelligence elements that constitute the Chinese foreign policy-making elite is exceptional and is perhaps the best part of the book. The authors conclude that a small elite group still has the ability to "sustain strategic policies in a disciplined way over long periods of time." While arguably better informed and more constrained by other elements of society than in the past, the elite remains largely isolated, with the risk that it will make major mistakes or fail to adapt to changing circumstances.

Scobell and Nathan contend that Chinese foreign policy is driven primarily by perceptions of vulnerability. Chinese elites see the world as "a terrain of hazards" comprising four interlocking circles of threats: territory China administers or claims; border states, which include the United States as a Pacific power; six nearby multistate regional systems; and the rest of the world. Within this construct, the authors do an admirable job of presenting the history of China's relations with each of its key neighbors. Scobell and Nathan suggest that China engages the fourth ring

(comprising three-quarters of the world) only to serve specific interests. Though those interests are expanding, most of the finite attention Chinese leaders give to international issues focuses on challenges within and near its borders.

Presenting China's obsession with its territorial integrity, Scobell and Nathan explain Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in a sophisticated and integrated overall context. They conclude that China is not expansionist but rather unyielding within its identified historical claims. By focusing on these four core geographic areas and relegating discussion of the South China Sea and the Senkaku Islands to chapters on China's relations with Japan and Southeast Asia, however, the authors understate the sometimes elastic nature of Chinese claims. In this context, the authors' focus on elite political decision making arguably underrepresents the growing impact of popular nationalism on high-profile sovereignty issues. Nationalism, they concede, is "the only important value still shared by the regime and its critics" in Chinese society.

Finally, Scobell and Nathan present the instruments of Chinese power, focusing a chapter each on the economic, military, and "soft power" tools at the disposal of the Chinese Communist Party. They conclude by offering three possible trajectories for Chinese development: economic success and authoritarianism (the "Singapore model"), political democratization, and regime failure. The authors do not betray which of these outcomes they view as most likely. Consistent with their presentation of the Chinese point of view, they conclude that China no more knows its own future than does anyone else.

Reducing a topic this complex into one volume is inherently an exercise in intellectual triage, and some topics are naturally underrepresented. Issues of cyber warfare, the Internet, and the political impact of new media are touched on, but their full complexities as mechanisms of Chinese soft power, potential threats to regime stability, or means of economic espionage are not fully explored. Consideration of People's Liberation Army capabilities, while deftly crafted, comprises less than forty pages. The Chinese navy's three years of sustained operations in the Gulf of Aden are mentioned only in passing. Readers interested in details of Chinese military capabilities and institutions will want to consult more specialized texts.

With this limited caveat, *China's Search for Security* is the best one-volume introduction to Chinese security issues in print. At once rigorous and readable, it offers U.S. Navy officers headed to the Pacific a chance to consider the region through a Chinese lens. Specialist readers may disagree with specific points of interpretation but will be impressed by the scope of the survey and the synthesis presented.

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Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin, 2012. 638pp. \$22

Author David Crist writes, "Conspiracy theories abound in the Middle East in part because there frequently *are* so many conspiracies." Every chapter of *The Twilight War* pulls back the curtain and sheds new light on many previously