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American analysts, policymakers, and strategists increasingly tend to define US-China relations as a new “Cold War,” where the international system’s two dominant powers compete for status and influence across multiple regions and domains. While some academics resist this characterization and argue that the Cold War was distinctly ideological and that the US-China competition is primarily material, they agree with its overall premise that US-China relations have become internationalized. As a result, many of the recent best books on US-China relations have eschewed the study of the two states’ bilateral relations for analyzing aspects of their global rivalry. Books like Keyu Jin’s *The New China Playbook* (Viking, 2023), Chris Miller’s *Chip War* (2022), Ali Wyne’s *America’s Great-Power Opportunity* (Polity Press, 2022), and Hal Brands and Michael Beckley’s *Danger Zone* (W. W. Norton, 2022) come to mind.

Then throughout American policy, a similar reconceptualization of US-China relations concerns itself more with maintaining the US-led international order than the countries’ bilateral relations. Former President Donald Trump first codified this shift in perspective in his *National Security Strategy*, identifying global great-power competition with China as the primary focus. President Joe Biden maintained this view and developed the concept of “integrated deterrence” with Beijing in mind. While Trump and Biden dealt directly with Beijing, they also expanded their approaches to China to include alliance relations, outreach to the “Global South,” support for Taiwan, expansion of multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, the development of a global industrial strategy, and policy coordination with the Group of Seven (G7) economies.

Within these new analytic and policy parameters, Evan Medeiros has edited and published *Cold Rivals: The New Era of US-China Strategic Competition*—an expansive, textbook-like volume that presents...
an almost entirely bilateral account of US-China relations, despite the title’s reference to the Cold War. While comprehensive (and even repetitive) in its coverage, the book’s lack of international contextualization results in an artificial sense that US-China relations exist in a vacuum—or that Medeiros made the editorial decision to direct his contributors to ignore global affairs, international security, and other indications that great-power relations, in particular, occur within a global order. Regardless of Medeiros’s intent, the book systematically—and dryly—chronicles US-China relations (rather than analyzes them) and is more concerned with documenting the policies, meetings, events, and personnel involved in US-China affairs than commenting on their significance within global affairs.

A counterargument to this critique is the importance of such scholarship, particularly as it provides a historical account of US-China relations and chronicles its evolution. Conceding this point, the question becomes what value Cold Rivals adds to the existing body of scholarship on bilateral US-China ties, such as Robert G. Sutter’s US-China Relations (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), Andrew T. H. Tan’s Handbook on US-China Relations (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), John Pomfret’s The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom (Macmillan, 2016), or Lyle Goldstein’s Meeting China Halfway (Georgetown University Press, 2015), among many others.

One contribution Medeiros makes is the inclusion of three Chinese authors who offer insights into Chinese outlooks on US-China relations, including contemporary issues. Aside from their different perspectives, they provide an important dissenting voice to the volume’s otherwise American scholars. Including additional perspectives from international scholars would have significantly increased the volume’s utility.

Among the other contributing authors, Arthur R. Kroeber’s and Paul Triolo’s chapters stand out for their treatment of two of the most critical areas of modern-day US-China competition—economics and technology. Their chapters provide important insights into the priorities, policies, and developments underpinning US-China relations during the Biden-Harris and Xi Jinping administrations. Both authors have published extensively elsewhere on the same issues they cover here.

It is unclear what audience Medeiros envisioned for this edited volume. If it was the Chinese studies community, the book offers little new insight into the nature of US-China relations or how they might evolve. If it was policymakers, the volume falls short, as it almost entirely ignores the broader strategic environment in which US policy must be made and executed—an environment the Biden-Harris administration considers carefully in its policy-making process.

Medeiros likely edited the volume as a potential textbook for university students interested in learning more about US-China relations in all its manifestations, including its contemporary history. Nevertheless, the book’s main fault lies in its overly clinical and dry prose. Rather than exciting the next generation of US-China scholars, the book’s tedious language will likely put them off.

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