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## Review Essays

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# Review Essays

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## Three New Looks at China

LARRY M. WORTZEL

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Serious questions are being asked in the United States about the nature of China as a political and military actor in the world. Is China a third-world, developing country that is no threat to United States or Asian interests, is it a major power on the verge of being a great power that threatens the United States, or is it somewhere in the middle of these two extremes? This uncertainty has been reflected in the debate in the US Congress over whether to grant China permanent normal trade relations and in the political campaigns for the presidency. Will even moderate improvements in the state of science and technology in China translate into the development of new, deadly weapons? Will each incremental increase in gross national product for China translate into improvements in China's military? Or is China simply a state that is so far behind the West, and especially the United States, that anyone who advises caution in policy with regard to China is simply a "chicken little," crying danger when there is none? These are the questions that the three books under review try to answer.

In *China and the People's Liberation Army*, Solomon M. Karmel expands the thesis of an earlier writer from the United Kingdom, Gerald Segal, arguing that China is a weak power, not a superpower or great power. Karmel starts out by quoting a Chinese text, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Deng Liqun, et al., Beijing, 1994), which argues that to be a superpower, a nation must possess four qualities: a large, diversified national economy; a major conventional military force; a nuclear weapons capability (and the means to deliver the weapons); and a strategic geographical location. He then systematically argues throughout the book that "in China's case, the dilemmas of development are simply too great for the state to exert the type of great power influence over East Asia that the Soviet Union exerted over Eastern Europe and its many satellite states throughout the world." He believes that "China's security and freedom from occupation threats in the postwar period have done little to enhance its power over other states." It is Karmel's thesis that those who argue that China is a great power are misinformed, and those who believe China is a military threat are crying wolf. Having defined his terms carefully in the initial chapter of the book, Karmel goes on to justify his thesis in subsequent chapters relying on extensive primary-source research in Chinese-language publications and Western secondary sources.

In six well-argued chapters, Karmel systematically dismantles China's military force structure, which he views as weak and poorly integrated; its military-industrial complex, which he characterizes as anemic and plagued by inefficiencies and corruption; the defense budget, which he believes is wasting a lot of money on the wrong priorities; and the role of China in Asia, which he defines as increasing in power but still inadequate to qualify China for great-power status. This is a readable book. Its weakness is that it is supported by research that is full of glaring inaccuracies which seem to reflect a lack of familiarity with the military in general and with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in particular.

The author is simply wrong when he explains the force structure of the PLA, saying that the seven regional military commands, analogous to the unified commands of the United States, are subordinate to the army. They are not. The military regional commands of the PLA are subordinate to the General Staff Department and the Central Military

Commission. They are joint, and although the ground forces dominate them, they are jointly commanded and structured. The author is also wrong in his characterization of the development of the General Armaments Department from the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND). Karmel argues that COSTIND turned into a structure of state-owned military-civilian defense industries under a State Science and Technology Commission. In fact, when the General Armaments Department was created, it took over much of the military production, research, and development. However, some production did stay under the old COSTIND, but was more centrally controlled by the state. Harlan Jencks, whom Karmel quotes extensively, has called the new organization SCOSTIND, for "State COSTIND."

In other areas, Karmel's careful culling of sources to prove his thesis has missed such PLA authors as Li Qingshan and Li Jijun, who have published extensively on joint warfare, military production, and strategy. Karmel also fails to credit the PLA for its earlier successes in doctrinal and force structure modernization based on the PLA's study of US Army Field Manual 100-5, on warfighting doctrine, and a thorough review of the US lessons learned from the 1991 Gulf War.

To respond to some of Karmel's arguments suggesting China is a weak power, one needs only to remember that at the mere suggestion that "relations with China would be difficult," the Clinton Administration refused to approve badly needed air and cruise missile defenses for Taiwan. When China suggested that "it would not be good for relations," the Republic of Korea opted not to participate in research on theater missile defenses in Asia with the United States. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum (ARF) was formed primarily to respond to China. Vietnam is seeking a new form of security relationship as a balance against China. With regard to Karmel's claim that China's military industry is poor in general, although it does have its problems it managed to supply Pakistan with a nuclear and ballistic missile capability, it managed to build a force of approximately 400 ballistic missiles for use against Taiwan in a relatively short period, and it has managed to produce a strategic nuclear force capable of hitting the United States. The threat of force from China has deterred elected leaders of Taiwan from scheduling a referendum on national sovereignty and self-determination. And in the United Nations, China has a veto in the Security Council as a permanent member. This reviewer has not accomplished the extensive literature search of Solomon Karmel to define "great power status" versus "superpower status," but all of this evidence suggests that China's power seems great.

If one is going to read Karmel's work, it should at least be read in conjunction with other texts by authors far more familiar with militaries in general and the PLA in particular.

Ted Galen Carpenter and James A. Dorn have compiled an excellent edited volume presenting a range of essays on international issues, domestic matters in China, and its industrial and economic future. Titled *China's Future: Constructive Partner or Emerging Threat?*, this is a balanced, realistic treatment of the subject. Carpenter and Dorn have assembled a group of 19 distinguished scholars, strategists, former policymakers, and the most eminent economists on China. The book, which is the product of a September 1999 Cato Institute Conference, examines the history of China in the past 50 years, analyzing trade, human rights, economic production, foreign policy, and national security issues. Not surprisingly, the bottom line in the book on how China will evolve is found in its final chapter-- "The answer will depend, to a great extent, on the fate of liberalism in China: a liberal China will be a constructive partner; a nationalistic and authoritarian China will be an emerging threat." The book lacks a chapter with an in-depth discussion of China's military forces and strategy, which might help answer the question of how serious an emerging challenge or threat China could become. Nonetheless, it is a superb addition to any library on contemporary China.

For Carpenter and Dorn, and their contributing authors, the outcome of China's political future is more important than the military achievements of the PLA. The editors note that China is neither a "messianic power" like Nazi Germany, nor an "expansionist power" like the Soviet Union. They advise that "the prudent course is to treat China as a normal (albeit sometimes repressive and prickly) great power, but avoid the extremes of seeing the PRC as either enemy or strategic partner." In Chapter 6, Selig S. Harrison provides a brief but credible perspective examining China as a regional power in East Asia. Harrison's treatment is realistic and not inflammatory. Nor does he minimize China's present or future capabilities. The real key to the future, to put it in the vernacular of strategists, is the capabilities-versus-intentions equation. A highly or even moderately capable state in a military sense with good intentions should not be considered a threat. Thus it is the nature of the future Chinese state that concerns the authors, not present capabilities.

Two very solid scholars on the Chinese economy, Thomas G. Rawski and Barry Naughton, provide chapters discussing trade liberalization in China and the move to create a market economy from the Stalinist command economy. Both are cautiously optimistic. Several Chinese scholars who hope for economic and political reform in China complement their assessments. The bottom line of this book is that the United States should continue to trade with China, maintain a strong, engaged American military and an active foreign policy in Asia, and hope for the future. I endorse these prudent suggestions.

Robert G. Sutter is an experienced scholar and analyst of Chinese and Asian affairs who has a long history of publications on China at the Congressional Research Service. At present he is the National Intelligence Officer responsible for producing estimates on China and Asia. Thus he approaches his work, *Chinese Policy Priorities and Their Implications for the United States*, with credibility and a wealth of knowledge. The breadth of his treatment of what he sees as China's policy priorities makes this book worth reading. Sutter argues for a balanced view in the United States of China's domestic and foreign policy priorities. He also makes policy recommendations for the United States that seek to avoid what he believes are "excessive swings" in policy toward China. Instead, Sutter argues, both countries should seek realistic assessments based on common ground and agreed differences.

Sutter's treatment of China's policy priorities focuses first on what he terms "the primacy of domestic policy concerns" which dominate Beijing's thinking. He sees the political leadership of China as reasonably unified (or at least less divided) on a number of issues: the importance of domestic stability for continued economic growth; an emphasis on professional and technical competence in leadership and management over ideological purity; a military that remains the main bulwark against popular unrest and discontent, but which is increasingly more professional than in the past; and an assertive foreign policy that focuses on an economic modernization program that is carried out in a stable regional environment. After outlining the major policy concerns in two chapters, Sutter turns to China's foreign relations. Russia, the United States, and Japan each warrant separate chapters. The Middle East, Africa, and Latin America are treated in one chapter, Southeast Asia and the Pacific in another, and the two Koreas and Taiwan are given a single chapter.

The argument for balanced assessments and policies in Sutter's introduction and conclusion is admirable. Such an approach is possible within the context of a critical commentary by the author. In this reviewer's opinion, however, despite the wide range of topics covered very well, Sutter has avoided taking critical, objective stances. Perhaps this approach is an accommodation to his position as an official of the United States government. But it leaves the reader somewhat wanting. To have any real impact an author should make some judgments, and can certainly do so without being polemical or partisan. For instance, in the section on Russian-Chinese arms cooperation, Sutter concludes that "there is a debate in the West over when and if such weapons will alter the regional balance." Many other experts in the field assert the balance has already been altered, and after reading the book one wants to sit Mr. Sutter down and ask, "What do you really think, Bob?"

There is only passing, tangential mention in the book of the statements by Presidents Clinton and Jiang Zemin about the nature of US-China relations, and no discussion of whether their declaring that China and the United States are working toward a "constructive strategic partnership" was wise, overstated, or hyperbole. And what was the effect of that statement on America's allies in Asia, who believed they were the center of US foreign policy, not the "Middle Kingdom"? David Lampton and Gregory May argue in *Managing U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century* that such a formula was not particularly useful. Once more, this critical subject could have been treated more thoroughly, with critical commentary by the author. On the Korean Peninsula, Sutter is absolutely correct when he argues that one of Beijing's main goals is to reduce the US presence in South Korea, trading with the wealthier and better-developed South while maintaining its traditional support for the communist North. But how does Beijing manage to advocate some form of confederation for North and South Korea, while insisting that no such formula is possible for the separation between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China?

In sum, none of the three books reviewed here should be read as a stand-alone treatment of the broad issue of China. Solomon Karmel's book presents the least realistic and critical account of China's significant military and foreign policy clout. Ted Galen Carpenter and James Dorn take the most objective and critical positions, and Robert Sutter's work provides an excellent, broad-brush synopsis of the associated policies. If I were teaching a course on the subject, I'd recommend the latter two books.

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## Review Essay

### Strategic Reading on Latin America

**RUSSELL W. RAMSEY**

The quality of strategic literature in the English language on Latin American security issues continues to improve. While the success of democratization and privatization in Latin America is the subject of wholesome debate, there can be little doubt that better books on regional security issues now exist for productive use by the military analyst, policymaker, professor, or entrepreneur than could be found during the Cold War.

Once again, Robert Buckman's annual entry from the Stryker-Post Series, *Latin America, 2000*, wins the prize as the one-volume book of choice for the strategic analyst. This is the 35th edition on the Latin American region, updated annually by the professor of journalism from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Buckman is also an Army Reservist with a Joint Chiefs of Staff billet. His thumbnail regional introduction is guardedly optimistic; his country-by-country presentations give historical sketches followed by recent economic, political, and national security trends. Editor Phil Stryker has made this series remarkable for ideological neutrality, factual integrity, and low cost; Buckman's summary on the Colombian drug war is excellent.

The next book in order of value is Patrice Franko's unique volume, *The Puzzle of Latin American Economic Development*. Franko has translated the jungle of economic terminology about Latin America, often distorted by the writer's own ideological slant, into clear, objective words, showing the humanistic dimension of the various policies. Thus, Raul Prebisch's import substitution and ultra-nationalistic economic policies are explained as an unsuccessful alternative to economic liberalism in the late 1950s. Professor Franko connects these policies to the dependency theory of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and others, showing how this interpretation led to unsuccessful experiments with Marxist economics in the Western Hemisphere. After detailing the paradigm shift to the neo-liberalism of the 1980s, she revisits her five-point agenda for modernization stated at the outset of the book. These issues are: balance between internal and external economic activity, promoting stability alongside change in economic policy, balancing the needs

of the poor with those of the entrepreneurial sector, the role of the state in development, and the conflict between contemporary economic success and future strength. For any course or seminar on the economics of regional security in the Western Hemisphere, this is the book of choice.

Professors Michael LaRosa and Frank O. Mora have jointly written and edited *Neighborly Adversaries: Readings in U.S.-Latin American Relations*. It includes a survey essay by LaRosa and Mora, followed by six sections of readings on US-Latin American relations, each with a summary essay by the editors. The six sections include a philosophical overview, the 19th century, the 20th century to World War II, the early revolutions following World War II, the regional conflict era when the Cold War spilled over into Latin America, and the post-Cold War period. By carefully culling the best and most typical portrayals of US-Latin American relations in each of these eras, the authors bring sunlight and logic to much that has been dark and polemical within the scholarly community. They quote Ambassador George Kennan's 1950 analysis of communism in Latin America, attempting to tie the region to his earlier Cold War paradigm known as the "Mr. X" article, that great 1947 policy watershed which initiated the era of deterrence and containment. They extract the core of President John F. Kennedy's rationale for the Alliance for Progress, and also a salient critique on why the alliance did not create political democracies capable of withstanding the impetus to military dictatorship during the Cold War assault on several governments by Soviet-sponsored Cuban subversion. This excellent book gives the reader a way to view US relations with Latin America without diving into the murky waters of ideology; Professors LaRosa and Mora show the strengths and the weaknesses of the US national security policies, the region's governments, and the several kinds of revolutionaries who challenged the existence of some governments. Again, this is the clear choice for a single-volume reader on US-Latin American relations.

John Peeler's 1998 volume *Building Democracy in Latin America* examines the elusive question that scholars and policymakers alike have examined so often, namely, the fact that Latin America has historically tried to portray itself as a region of peace-loving democratic republics but has produced several brutal dictatorships and a larger number of partial democracies. He establishes his position early that democracy in Latin America is possible but not inevitable. In the introductory chapter he examines the political theory extant in the establishing of Latin America's nation-states, concluding that shortcomings of implementation are the cause of Latin America's departure from the theoretical models of democracy. Professor Peeler's subsequent chapter on early Latin American democracies concludes that variegated evolution from a "civil oligarchy" into a full democracy occurred in Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile, and Venezuela. Choosing Paraguay, Mexico, and Cuba for his chapter on authoritarian regimes, the author suggests that none of these three countries rests upon an inevitable trajectory toward full democracy, yet that each has provided some important democratic features. In his overall evaluation he equates democratic success with strong linkage between electoral choice and public policy, concluding that Latin America's history of balancing radical reform with governmental stability under a constitution will provide some successful governing systems. But Peeler finds neither populism nor neo-liberalism to be acceptable panaceas, returning again to the paradigm of a successful linkage between voter will and public policy. This book is not comprehensive, save for its superb bibliography, but it does offer vital new ways to evaluate emerging democracy in post-Cold War Latin America.

A longer book of edited readings with commentary is Larry Diamond, et al., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*. For Central America the authors address Mexico and Costa Rica; the Dominican Republic is the Caribbean entry; and the South American continent is represented by essays on Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela. Although not written to a precise format, each essay includes historical trends, recent economic development, recent political evolution, and evaluation of overall political-economic integration. Some include a discrete section on US policy toward the subject country, and some include a prognosis for future democratic performance. The introduction is, in essence, an essay on what constitutes a democracy in Latin America. It follows the methodology and contents seen in Professor Seymour Martin Lipset's 1981 classic *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. (While Lipset, the nation's professor emeritus of socio-political integration, is one of the editors of this collection, none of the essays appears under his by-line.) The introduction and nine country analyses are strong, but the book fails in not having a final essay that synthesizes the trends. Each essay, nevertheless, is a stand-alone gem, written by an acknowledged national expert. The book would serve well for a course on comparative politics in Latin America, and as background reading for national security professionals who will work in the countries analyzed.

Joseph S. Tulchin and Ralph H. Espach are coauthors and coeditors of *Security Cooperation in the Caribbean Basin*. This region is the maritime front door of the United States, over whose stability and control a century ago the United

States became a world-ranked naval power. Following the authors' joint introductory essay about the region's strategic importance, there are three topical sections: the post-Cold War Caribbean security agenda, nontraditional threats to that region, and cooperative security measures extant or planned. "Drugs and the Emerging Security Agenda in the Caribbean," by Professor Ivelaw L. Griffith, is one of the finest essays available on the topic. Item by item, Professor Griffith names a condition pertaining to the illicit drug problem, derives the security threat it imposes, and then connects it to Caribbean and US society. At essay's end, the reader can see how comprehensive and overwhelming the illegal narcotics plague really is, yet can also see the sectoral linkage behind both the threat and the possible solutions. "A Call for the Redefinition of Regional and National Interests," is a short essay by Dominican Republic General Jose E. Noble Espejo. He points out that most security measures in the Caribbean have traditionally been taken bilaterally between the United States and each of the small countries, and calls for the adoption of a truly regional anti-narcotics strategy. The summary essay by Tulchin and Espach posits that the Caribbean Economic Community (CARICOM) and a Caribbean anti-narcotics strategy cannot succeed independently, and that each must be coordinated politically with the other. They also opine that the United States' "anachronistic stalemate with Cuba" is counterproductive to overall regional security. This book should be mandatory reading for any college course on the Caribbean region and is a model for short, excellent texts in regional security studies.

*MERCOSUR: Regional Integration, World Markets* is a 1999 study authored and edited by Professor Riordan Roett. MERCOSUR is the world's only regional trade agreement under the World Trade Organization concept which uses a Spanish acronym--for Mercado Comun Sureño (in English, "Southern Common Market") based on its primary members Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, with Paraguay and Uruguay in an affiliated status. The issue is vital to Western Hemisphere security, for the so-called "ABC" countries (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) anchor the South American continent, and upon them depends the region's stability and future growth. Following an introduction by Roett, there are essays by experts on trade, Brazil, industrialization, membership, and relationships with the European Economic Union. The chapter on Brazil is critical to any study of regional security, for the South American giant conducts 70 percent of all MERCOSUR's trade and is the world's 9th-ranked economic power. In his summary essay, Roett shows how partisan squabbling and petty nationalistic posturing in the United States damages MERCOSUR as well as US interests in that potentially powerful region. This book provides invaluable readings for a course on Latin American economics, as well as for studying regional security.

While other excellent English-language books exist, this collection will take the serious student of Latin American security issues deeply enough into the milieu to formulate solid policy ideas.

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