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### Book Reviews

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# Book Reviews

## Africa

Chris Alden

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### **Battleground Africa: The Congo Crisis, 1960–1965**

Lise Namikas. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.  
£50.95/\$60.00. 288 pp.

This well-researched monograph by Lise Namikas depicts the five-year struggle that gripped the Congo in its transition from Belgian colony to independent state. Using archival material drawn from US, European and Russian sources, Namikas brings to life the unfolding tragedy in Africa's largest territory, from the mercurial conduct of Patrice Lumumba to the cold calculations of a CIA station chief as they laboured to find a solution to a situation that had spiralled out of control. The presumptions of Washington, Moscow and Brussels that they could make easy gains in the changing circumstances that confronted them in the Congo in June 1960 were quickly undermined as the Congolese scrambled to assert their interests in the wake of the demise of colonial authority. Even the UN, led by Dag Hammarskjöld (who lost his life in a still unexplained plane crash in Northern Rhodesia in the pursuit of a solution to the crisis), quickly saw the Congo crisis as an opportunity to strengthen the international organisation.

*Battleground Africa* is a timely reminder of the long shadow cast by the Congo's transition from colonialism to independence, not just for the Congolese themselves, but for the African continent, the superpowers and the UN. Within the Congo, the latent fears of all parties were made manifest: foreign-stoked secessionist movements and assassinations aimed at undermining independence, local politicians willing to exploit ethnicity, regionalism and ideology in the service of their interests, and a UN seemingly unable to either manage complex Cold War politics in New York or act decisively to bring peace to a country in turmoil.

**Songs and Secrets: South Africa from Liberation to Governance**

Barry Gilder. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2012. £20.00/\$55.00. 360 pp.

This is a highly personalised account of the transformation of one man's protest politics against apartheid into those of a soldier in the liberation struggle and, in the end, a bureaucrat within an independent nation's security services. Barry Gilder, who was a young university student when white rule in South Africa was still seen as virtually unassailable, fled the country to join the exiled African National Congress (ANC). It was a journey that would take him from singing folk songs in the coffee houses of London and Amsterdam to military training in Moscow and Luanda, and, ultimately, to becoming a senior figure in the South African intelligence services. Along the way, Gilder encountered South African agents, Soviet intelligence handlers, ANC foot soldiers and a host of familiar characters in the liberation struggle who later became powerful figures in the ANC government. Gilder has a present-at-the-creation perspective on some seminal events in the history of the struggles in Angola and Botswana, lending a realistic tone to the fear and paranoia that preyed on all exiles. The most interesting aspect of the book is perhaps his description of the challenges inherent in building an accountable intelligence service in the aftermath of apartheid, a task that was in danger of being undermined by the political machinations of senior leaders.

Gilder is unapologetic in his depiction of the ANC as the only instrument capable of ridding South Africa of apartheid but, to his credit, the movement is painted in all its shades: idealistic, opaque and flawed as it made its way to power in the Union Buildings. Still, his personal politics do get the better of his judgement at times, most evidently when he describes the post-apartheid period and the corruption scandals that did much to undermine the reputation of the governing party. It is a story that, despite its idiosyncrasies, is well told and provides a counterpoint to that of former comrades of the author such as Andrew Feinstein, whose influential narrative is one of disillusionment and rupture with the ANC.

**External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960–1990**

Stephen Ellis. London: C. Hurst & Co. £20.00. 384 pp.

Veteran researcher Stephen Ellis has provided a comprehensive and highly analytical study of the ANC during its time in exile. Using archival materials and interviews gathered over an extended period, Ellis unpacks the power politics

behind the national myths now promulgated by party stalwarts eager to construct a seamless narrative of struggle and triumph. In some ways, many of the concerns that drove Ellis to write this book were the same as those that motivated Western researchers in the 1980s: the degree to which the South African Communist Party (SACP) controlled the ANC and the links between the ANC's military wing, the Soviet Union and other groups designated as terrorist organisations by the West. Ellis has answers which sit uncomfortably with accepted truths, supported by documentary evidence of the SACP's methodical control of the ANC and new information confirming that the Irish Republican Army trained the ANC's military wing in bomb-making. Even Nelson Mandela is not exempt from this glare, with Ellis asserting that, despite equivocation to the contrary, the former president was also an active member of the SACP in the early phase of the armed struggle.

The marginalisation of the Pan Africanist Congress, the Black Consciousness Movement and even white liberals in the story of South Africa's long struggle to overturn apartheid is one of the deliberate oversights that continue to shape contemporary politics in the country. As telling, however, is the story of how corruption and desire for personal gain took root in many of the personalities among, and practices pursued by, the ANC exiles in the name of liberation. According to Ellis, a reassessment of South Africa is long overdue, and delusions of moral significance and economic standing on the continent keep South Africans from recognising that they live in 'just another country'.

**Crisis in the Horn of Africa: Politics, Piracy and the Threat of Terror**

Peter Woodward. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012. £56.00. 246 pp.

The Horn of Africa has become synonymous with the security challenges of the post-Cold War era, from ethnic strife and piracy to secessionism and state collapse. To characterise it as in a crisis at this point in time, as Peter Woodward points out at the beginning of this book, is to misrepresent what is an ongoing series of deep-set problems that cut across the disparate societies that inhabit the region. Standing at the geographic and cultural crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, the countries of the region are afflicted by persistent resource scarcity, ethnic nationalism, famine, religious extremism, militarisation of societies and external intervention – with results that are predictable as the flooding of the Nile.

In *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, Woodward attempts to provide both a narrative of the post-Cold War travails of the region and a context for understanding their sources and effects. In this, he is generally successful: the catalogue of secu-

rity issues emanating from weak state structures, chronic poverty, the residual effects of colonialism and the emergence of new ideologies of mobilisation are all laid out clearly for the reader. But, at times, the desire to communicate the rush of events overwhelms the analytical story he wants to tell, leaving readers with a fast-paced chronicle that raises as many questions as it answers. For example, do the origins of the conflict in Darfur reside in regional neglect and racism by the authorities in Khartoum, environmental and developmental failures or opportunism by Darfurian dissidents keen to mimic the successes of the South Sudanese? The book also fails to clarify whether the re-internationalisation of the conflict in Somalia laid the foundation for a sustainable settlement or produced the possibility of a new round of external intervention. Although he addresses these issues in a broad-reaching concluding chapter, Woodward's thorough knowledge of the region suggests that he has more to say on these themes.

## Asia-Pacific

Lanxin Xiang

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### **The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World**

Kishore Mahbubani. New York: PublicAffairs, 2013.  
£17.99/\$26.99. 328 pp.

Kishore Mahbubani's work has always been thought-provoking; as Joseph Nye states on the jacket of *The Great Convergence*, he is 'sometimes right, sometimes wrong, but never boring'. One may look at this book from many different angles, but what is most important about it is whether the author's proposal for 'One World' is logical and practical.

Mahbubani starts with the assumption that the relationship between East and West has never been better, despite widespread pessimism about the global economy and various conflicts – a pessimism that comes mainly from the West. His evidence for this includes global statistical data indicating a significant reduction in combat deaths, a dramatic decline in poverty and the rapid rise of the middle class since the 1940s (pp. 14–24).

The author attributes the establishment of certain new norms to the universal acceptance of modern science and the 'logic of reasoning', which have laid the foundation for what he calls the 'global convergence' (pp. 37; 47). According to Mahbubani, there are at least three such norms: free-market economics, the social contract and multilateralism.

The author may be too optimistic. While free-market economics have been embraced by much of the world, it is possible that faith in this model has been permanently damaged by the global financial crisis. At the very least, the so-called Washington consensus is moribund. Moreover, it is a bit of a stretch to interpret Wen Jiabao's claim to be 'serving the people wholeheartedly' as acceptance of the Western conception of the social contract. The fact that Mahbubani makes his argument for a consensus between East and West with reference to multilateral diplomacy is interesting because in recent years, even China has abandoned the usual unilateral attitude towards major international issues. But it is doubtful that this represents conversion to a universal faith.

Having worked as a diplomat for many years before becoming an academic, Mahbubani is realistic enough to note obstacles to fulfilling his grand ideas. He lists 'seven global contradictions', two of which directly concern China. The first four contradictions are global interests competing with national interests (a standard topic in international-relations theory); the West versus the rest, which is reflected mainly in Western efforts to retain dominance of international institutions; a rather pessimistic view of Sino-American rivalry, which will result in 'global turbulence if [it] follows millennial-old patterns and no longer remains on an even keel', and a concern about the impact of China's global economic expansion on a 'shrinking world' (pp. 118–30). The remaining contradictions relate to tension between Islam and the West, climate change and relations between governments and civil societies.

Mahbubani ends up with several constructive proposals, such as promoting global conversation, abandoning anachronistic Western policies towards the UN and developing a global ethic. This is an interesting book, even if its basic premise remains doubtful both from Western and Eastern perspectives. The author's 'scientific' approach may not convince either side to follow his grand ideas but *The Great Convergence* should be read by anyone who values a cross-cultural view in dealing with global issues.

### **Stumbling Giant: The Threats to China's Future**

Timothy Beardson. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.  
£25.00/\$35.00. 512 pp.

At first glance, Timothy Beardson's book may appear to belong to the 'coming collapse of China' sub-genre, which has mostly been off the mark. Read carefully, however, *Stumbling Giant* presents his case with subtlety and a strong sense of balance, and is far superior to many comparable works by Western academics and journalists, who have become experts on China overnight. Beardson, after all, has lived in East Asia for over 30 years and is a permanent resident of Hong Kong.

Many of the economic and social problems the author presents deserve attention. China's export-led growth model is broken, unemployment is high and becoming systemic, demographic disaster is looming and there is a good chance that the country will fall into a 'middle-income trap', in which economic growth slows and the country fails to challenge for global pre-eminence. Beardson rightly points out that 'to avoid being trapped by its rising wage costs, China needs to make a clear break from its old model of low-cost, low-margin manufacturing and to build a high-technology, innovative economy' (p. 79). In this area, a lack of high-level education, research and development will impede China's aspiration to become a leader in the 'knowledge economy'. The country is failing in innovation, and this factor alone will prevent it from catching up with global leaders in technology, particularly the United States. In the financial sector, Beardson identifies vulnerabilities in major areas. These include the negative effects of high credit expansion on the quality of bank assets, the rise of lending outside of the formal banking sector, relatively high real-estate prices and the increasing imbalance created by the current economic model (p. 135).

The author also refers to well-known sources of Chinese economic and social instability, such as environmental degradation and the lack of a social-welfare umbrella. He recognises that the Chinese government is taking environmental issues very seriously because of the threat they pose to social stability and China's energy security. Beardson does not seem to believe that the country's internal problems will lead to regime collapse, as occurred in the so-called Arab Spring. He concludes that 'there are few obvious challenges to China's system that cannot be handled. It is quite possible that the wishes of the citizenry will substantially change, but even this would not automatically cause regime collapse' (p. 242).

The most interesting aspect of this analysis is the author's emphasis on China's demographic crisis; he claims that 'many factors influence China's future, but none is as important as demography' (p. 434). According to Beardson, the number of Chinese over-65s will treble between 2010 and 2030 (to 300 million), and 'the population should peak before 2030, and then fall by one- to two-thirds by the end of the century' (p. 434).

On the whole, this is a fascinating, well-rounded book. Most of the author's arguments will readily find an audience, but perhaps more so in China than the West, where the prevailing view – shaped by a typically Anglo-American obsession with the rise and fall of great powers – is that China is overtaking the United States. Although this book is primarily aimed at Western readers, it offers much sound advice for China's leadership and intellectual elite. Few Chinese people seriously believe that China will overtake the United States because they recog-

nise the severity of the country's problems even more than the author does. For example, Beardson seems to have underestimated the depth of the legitimacy crisis faced by the Chinese Communist Party.

**Asia's Space Race: National Motivations, Regional Rivalries, and International Risks**

James Clay Moltz. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.  
£27.50/\$40.00. 288 pp.

On a visit to Washington in early May, newly elected South Korean President Park Geun-hye coined the phrase 'Asian paradox'. The term refers to the deepening economic interdependence of Northeast Asia and its uneasy coexistence with tensions over various historical issues, which spill over into the political and security realms. Moreover, she stated that 'unlike Europe, this region does not have a framework for multilateral discussions, and this just simply doesn't make sense'. James Clay Moltz's book on Asia's space race is a timely reminder of this paradox.

The author rejects the approach of abstracting decision-making on Asian space programmes with 'a rational-actor model and "black-box" assumptions'. Instead, he prefers a 'bottom-up approach' in seeking to understand the role space plays in national politics, culture, history and economic development (pp. 7–8). The main issues Moltz explores are Asian countries' reasons for becoming more active in space, the kinds of capabilities they seek in both the civilian and military sectors, and how their activities will affect US interests (pp. 7–8).

According to the author, national motives for developing space programmes traditionally focus on three goals: scientific-technological progress, national security and international prestige. In the case of Japan, although it is the most accomplished space power in Asia, its five decades of achievement in space science, human spaceflight and satellite technology excluded military space activities until 2008. Part of the reason for this is the country's close military ties with the United States. In 2008 the Japanese Diet removed restrictions against military uses of space, and Japan is now motivated by perceived threats from both China's rise and North Korea's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Specifically, Japan will focus its space capabilities on three main security concerns: independent reconnaissance capability, communication with ships and troops deployed overseas on UN mandates, and missile defence (p. 63). In the area of commercial space technology, Japan's market is limited due to fierce competition from cheaper providers, such as China and Russia.

China's space programme is primarily driven by domestic politics, as its success enhances the Communist Party's legitimacy. But national security is



becoming increasingly important. For a long time, China has expressed an interest in building a stronger treaty-based security structure for space, but its 2007 anti-satellite test squandered this initiative. China also gives priority to commercial space services. Its space-launch record has been consistently good, with 135 successful launches as of early 2011 (p. 101). US observers are divided over whether China is preparing for a space war. Moltz argues that China 'has not used [military] technologies aggressively so far, nor has it pursued a strategy of concentrating its assets in military space weakness pointed to by foreign analysts' (p. 106).

Another major player in the Asian space race is India. Until recently, the Indian space programme was exclusively for civilian purposes, but this has begun to change as the country 'has emerged politically, economically and militarily as a larger player on regional and international scenes. India also seems to be stimulated by China's advance into human spaceflight, worrying that the Chinese military may use space to seek damage to its military assets' (pp. 133–34).

South Korea has also made great progress in its space activities in recent decades. It began missile programmes under former President Park Chung-hee, who was worried that US troops would be pulled out of South Korea in the 1970s. As North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes advanced, South Korea worked to expand its military space effort. Space technology also increasingly plays a role in South Korea's economy because domestic use of satellite communications and navigation is extensive, but the country's progress in space will depend on government funding, and it remains a middle power in the Asian space race. This book is unique for telling the story of the race from a comparative perspective.

**The Chinese Question in Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Change, and the Chinese Factor**

Marlène Laurelle and Sébastien Peyrouse. London, C. Hurst & Co., 2012. £40.00/\$60.00. 256 pp.

The authors of this book start with the assumption that there is a 'Chinese question' in Central Asia, which they avoid defining within the framework of what is usually – and misleadingly – called the new Great Game. Instead, through detailed study and analysis, they contend that there are five Chinese questions for each of the Central Asian states, leading to a very complicated picture. The authors argue that 'existing publications on relations between China and Central Asia generally limit themselves to discussing energy issues and security questions'. The purpose of this book is to go beyond such geopolitical analysis by 'articulating the role of an external factor, namely China, and

domestic societal changes in neighbouring Central Asia' (p. 9). This approach is fresh and timely.

China's role in Central Asian states can be seen in these countries' efforts to solve problems arising from post-Soviet independence. Borders and ethnic diasporas are the most important areas of concern. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all faced border disputes with China that were legacies of the previous regime. These states managed to negotiate border-settlement treaties with China in an amicable manner. But the issue of diaspora, especially the Uighur diaspora, which has a significant presence in these new countries, remains difficult. During the Soviet era, the Uighur in Central Asia were Russified and mostly secular. But after independence, this community became increasingly divided, presenting a challenge to both China and the Central Asian states. The 1996 establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the first multilateral body in the region, was from a Chinese perspective partly motivated by the Uighur separatist problem. Security cooperation was designed to be at the core of the organisation: not only traditional security, but also non-traditional cooperation aimed at curbing Islamist terrorism. However, the SCO quickly expanded its remit to include economic activities, and environmental and cultural exchanges. Of course, each member of this organisation has a different agenda. For Moscow, the body is a vehicle to commit Beijing to multilateralism and curb China's growing influence in the region. For Beijing, the SCO helps institutionalise its legitimacy in the region. Central Asian states use the organisation mainly as a buffer between Russia and China, allowing them to mediate between the two giants if a conflict arises. Moreover, as SCO countries are mostly authoritarian regimes, the body is also a political 'axis of convenience', especially in their fight against Western influence (p. 37).

The biggest story in the region, of course, is China's economic expansion, from which Central Asian states also benefit. But China's focus on energy and resources divides these states into the categories of resource-rich and resource-poor. China has been active in infrastructure investment in Central Asia, with a view to increasing access to the region's rich mineral and energy resources. Most Central Asian states have taken the opportunity to revamp their aged infrastructure and communication systems. As a result of this Chinese stimulus, each has developed its own version of a Chinese question. In Kazakhstan, for example, Chinese investment has created problems relating to labour conditions, energy and land. The Kyrgyz Chinese question is reflected in unresolved border demarcation problems and bazaar-trade competition. Tajiks are more worried about pan-Turkism, and hence willing to support Chinese policy in dealing with the

Uighurs, while for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, two very repressive regimes, the Chinese question has not yet 'registered to the same extent' in public life (p. 191).

The authors conclude that societies in Central Asia are largely exposed to the effects of globalisation through China, and that Beijing has managed to strike the right balance of interests in the region. However, it is uncertain whether there will be a social and political revolt against these regimes, in the manner of the Arab Spring (p. 200). Overall, this is a very useful book for readers wishing to obtain a detailed and balanced view of a complex, oft-ignored region.

**The China–India Nuclear Crossroads: China, India, and the New Paradigm**

Lora Saalman, ed. and trans. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. £34.99/\$49.95. 240 pp.

This book is a first attempt at discussing nuclear relations between India and China from the perspectives of leading experts from both countries. The topic seems odd. To begin with, China is a recognised member of the international nuclear club, while India is not. Moreover, since the early 1960s the countries have been strategic rivals more often than not. It seems a daunting task to establish, or even seriously discuss, nuclear relations between the states. The task for the contributors to *The China–India Nuclear Crossroads* is therefore to identify common ground, from 'no-first-use' doctrine to fast breeder reactors.

China and India seemingly have very little in common in terms of security perceptions. Chinese nuclear-weapons policy focuses on deterring the United States, while Indian nuclear-weapons policy is designed to deter China and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan. In this area, there is no meeting of minds between India and China at all. In terms of nuclear posture, although both countries have declared their support for a doctrine of no first use, Beijing also wants to retain the option of credible minimum deterrence with regard to the United States. New Delhi, on the other hand, urges a bilateral declaration by India and China to alleviate its fear of Sino-Pakistani collusion, but China has been unwilling to acknowledge India's nuclear status. Moreover, one Chinese expert even suggests that India's nuclear strategy also includes establishing and maintaining 'credible minimum deterrence' (p. 41).

A more serious problem is the absence of any effective mechanism through which China and India can deal with nuclear accidents. Although conventional confidence-building measures between the two states were established in 1996, there has been no agreement on de-targeting, non-targeting and other methods

of de-escalating tension. Therefore, as one Indian expert points out, 'even though China and India have initiated a strategic-dialogue mechanism, have agreed to cooperate on civil nuclear energy, and have operationalised a hotline, the chances for accidental nuclear fallout between them have not been institutionally addressed' (p. 60).

This book has proved once again that China and India are not thinking on the same wavelength. As Lora Saalman argues in the last chapter, 'one actor, India, finds everything China does to contain a signal, while the other actor, China, misses all the signals' (p. 185). China is obsessed with the United States, while India is fixated on China. When it comes to the nuclear question, there are many points of comparison between India and China. But because of the countries' positions in what Saalman calls the US–China–India–Pakistan strategic stability continuum, they tend to miss this vital aspect of their bilateral relations.

## Russia and Eurasia

Angela Stent

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### **Can Russia Modernise? *Sistema*, Power Networks and Informal Governance**

Alena V. Ledeneva. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. £55.00. 314 pp.

Modernisation became the major theme in Russia during Dmitry Medvedev's 2008–12 tenure as president. Medvedev pledged to diversify the economy away from its addiction to energy rents and introduce an effective governance system. However, by the time he left office, it was clear that the modernisation campaign had produced meagre results.

Why has Russia found it so difficult to modernise its society and economy? Alena Ledeneva, professor at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, argues that 'Russia cannot modernise without modernising the network-based governance patterns referred to as *sistema*' (p. 2). Basing her research on anonymous interviews with a variety of Russian insiders, the author analyses Russia's hybrid political system, which blends pre-modern ways of running the state with the communications techniques of the modern world.

Ledeneva stresses the continuity between the current Russian system and both the imperial and Soviet periods in Russian history. The key to understanding Russia's governance puzzle 'is a vicious circle generated by the ruler's dependence on informal leverage. Informal power is an attribute of any formal

status' (p. 14). In the absence of transparent institutions of state power, and where the rules of the game are only fully understood by a few players and can change without warning, there are many obstacles to decision-making and to implementing policies that could spur Russia's modernisation.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has created his own version of *sistema*, argues Ledeneva, in which *blat* (the use of personal networks for obtaining goods and services in short supply) and *otkat* ('kickbacks') are key to making the system function. But Putin has become a captive of the system. The author shows how, although the president shaped it by mobilising his personal networks, the system is beyond his control. He has become a hostage of elaborate power networks that perform both private and public functions.

Ledeneva concludes that the current system acts as a major barrier to bringing Russia fully into the modern world. The way in which Putin peremptorily announced his job swap with Medvedev in September 2011 symbolised the dysfunction of the system, she says, because it reflected personal ambition rather than the needs of the system itself. It motivated a section of the educated, urban, professional middle class to express its opposition to the system, and this disquiet continues.

Could Russia move beyond the current *sistema* and begin to create the political and economic institutions of effective modern governance? Ledeneva has produced a detailed analysis of how the system works but not of how it might be changed. It has deep roots in Russian history but is inadequate for the demands of today's globalised world. Russian history is characterised by long periods of authoritarian stability, followed by revolution and discontinuity that, in turn, lead to restoration. The key question arising from today's *sistema* is whether the generation born after the collapse of the Soviet Union will have the will and ability to propel Russia into the twenty-first century.

**Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin**

Ben Judah. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.  
£20.00/\$30.00. 380 pp.

'Russia is one of history's great failures' (p. 38). This is journalist Ben Judah's verdict on the country in which he has travelled widely during the past few years. His judgement is somewhat surprising, given Russia's still respectable growth rates, \$500 billion in hard currency reserves, nuclear arsenal and the international clout it continues to wield via its vote – and veto – on the UN Security Council. Nevertheless, Judah is convinced, to paraphrase Marx, that Putinism contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

In this sprawling narrative, Judah recounts the now-familiar story of Putin's rise to power and the role that the late Boris Berezovsky played in facilitating his ascent through 'operation successor'. Judah argues that Putin's loyalty to his former boss, St Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, endeared him to President Boris Yeltsin and his allies – as did Putin's lack of resources, which guaranteed his dependence on them. Nevertheless, during his first term, Putin systematically shed the Yeltsin clan, culminating in the arrest and imprisonment of oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky. During his second term, he completed the vertical of power (a hierarchical system run from the Kremlin), reined in the regions and presided over an economic boom as oil prices rose to \$147 a barrel in 2008. But, after the financial crash, Putin's vertical of power turned into a vertical of discontent.

The system began to undermine itself in 2008, writes Judah, when Putin switched places with Medvedev to become prime minister: 'by choosing Medvedev to play the role of president to circumvent a constitutional term limit, and allowing him to drum up support for a "modernization agenda", the regime built up a narrative, infrastructure and constituency for reform that it bitterly disappointed' (p. 326). Hence the adverse reaction by educated urban elites to the September 2011 *rokirovka* (the castling move in chess) that returned Putin to the presidency: 'the beginning of the end of Putinism by consent' (p. 326).

Judah knows his way around Russia and has interviewed Russians from all social classes. He highlights the pervasive corruption, dysfunctional bureaucracy and decaying infrastructure that prevent Russia from becoming a truly modern state. Yet he falls into a trap familiar to Russia-watchers: he surveys the fundamentals and concludes that Russia cannot continue as it is without imploding. The author argues that Putin has created a system which he cannot leave without risking a fate similar to that of Tsar Nicholas II. He urges the West to develop a backup plan to cope with unforeseen, potentially violent contingencies.

Perhaps. One thing we know from the past millennium is that the system tends to survive and perpetuate itself against all odds. The last time Russia imploded was in 1991. Putin is determined that there will not be another catastrophe similar to the Soviet collapse. Judah's predictions of the system's demise may be premature.

### **Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad**

James Sherr. London: Chatham House, 2013. £17.99. 144 pp.

Why has it been so challenging for the United States and Europe to deal with post-Soviet Russia? James Sherr, associate fellow at Chatham House, has pro-

duced a trenchant critique of Russia's overall approach towards power and influence in the contemporary world, which, he argues, is significantly different from that of the West. This monograph, the final publication of a multi-year project on the means and ends of Russian influence abroad, highlights the importance of Russia's "'soft coercion": influence that is indirectly coercive, resting on covert measures (penetration, bribery, blackmail) and on new forms of power, such as energy supply, which are difficult to define as hard or soft' (p. 2).

Sherr situates his discussion in the broader sweep of Russian history, arguing that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not represent the sharp break from the past that Western observers initially believed – or hoped – it would. This is particularly true of Russia's relations with its near abroad. The author argues that 'the Russian Federation and its post-Soviet neighbours remain burdened by this heritage of autocracy and empire' (p. 22). The contiguous empire was the core of the Tsarist patrimonial system, one supported by Slavophiles and Westerners alike. After 1917, the communists were equally committed to maintaining control – through force, if necessary – of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union and, after 1945, of their East European allies. Mikhail Gorbachev unsuccessfully tried to use soft power to hold together the inner and outer Soviet empire. But, as Sherr argues, after the Soviet collapse, Russia's unresolved historical baggage created a set of security needs that were incompatible with those of most European powers.

After 1945, West Germany based its legitimacy on repudiating the state that preceded it and compensating its surviving victims. Post-Soviet Russia, says Sherr, 'soon began to base its legitimacy both on repudiation of and continuity with its predecessor' (p. 44). The unwillingness to squarely confront its Tsarist and Soviet past explains the hybrid nature of the Russian body politic and the Kremlin's tendency to view sovereignty as a contingent, rather than absolute, principle. Sherr details the ways in which Russia exerts influence: uncompromising diplomacy that exhibits continuity with its Soviet past; business dealings in which the distinction between public and private ownership is blurred; use of energy supplies for both commercial gain and political influence; and promotion of Russian culture, Russian-language electronic media and the Russian Orthodox Church. Scherr concludes that 'Russian high culture ... [is] Russia's purest soft power asset' (p. 90).

The author sees the ultimate aim of this uniquely Russian approach to the outside world as creating an international environment that allows Russia to maintain its domestic system of governance. Scherr advises Western governments to pursue hard-nosed policies toward Russia, eschewing public sermons

and paying more attention to the Russian people, instead of focusing solely on those in power.

**Russian Politics: The Paradox of a Weak State**

Marie Mendras. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2012. £25.00. 350 pp.

Putin's third term as president, which began in May 2012, and Russia's increasingly assertive international posture have led some to depict the country as on the rise, with ambitious global goals. Not so, says Marie Mendras, research fellow at the Centre for International Studies and Research. Her aim in this book is to focus on the evolution of the post-Soviet Russian state, arguing that the muscular image that the Kremlin seeks to project belies the reality of a weak state and a leadership that is becoming isolated from its own people and from the outside world.

Mendras traces Russia's current situation to the early post-Soviet period, when the Yeltsin administration failed to build the institutions that were necessary for a strong state. The adoption of Russia's 1993 constitution marked the end of constitutionalism, which she defines as 'the process of building a state subject to the rule of law based on respect for the pre-eminence of the Constitution under the control of an independent constitutional court' (pp. 79–80). The separation of branches of government and free, fair elections were also prerequisites for an effective modern state – and were never established.

When Putin succeeded Yeltsin, his major task was to restore stability and solvency after the 1998 financial crisis and the political disorganisation of the late 1990s. This restoration involved narrowing the political space, especially in light of the colour revolutions in former Soviet satellite states. Mendras argues that the Russian authorities are 'obsessed with the danger of an Orange Revolution' and have focused on minimising the challenges to the current system (p. 2). Hence the claim that Russia belongs to a distinctive civilisation and the proclamation of a 'sovereign democracy', which is essentially a warning to the West to stay out of the country's domestic affairs.

The author states that another major Russian concern is for the West to accept that the in-between countries in Russia's neighbourhood stay under some form of Russian control. The Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 reminded Russia's neighbours that Moscow was willing to use military force to achieve its goals, and was intended to deter further enlargement of Euro-American institutions into former Soviet countries.

Mendras' analysis focuses on the historical legacies that have made it difficult for post-communist Russia to create a strong state. But her analysis also



reminds the reader of the rapidity with which things change in Russia, despite the continuities with the past. The book was originally published in French in 2008 and, although it has been somewhat updated, ends with the December 2011 protests that shocked the Putin camp. Mendras' conclusion from those events is that the current system cannot last. However, in the summer of 2013, the protests have withered away and Putin remains firmly in the Kremlin. Mendras describes a system in which the Russian population has been willing to exchange economic well-being for political freedoms. With Russia's growth rate set to decline in coming years, the current social compact could once again be challenged.

**Russia, the Near Abroad, and the West: Lessons from the Moldova–Transdniestria Conflict**

William H. Hill. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012. \$55.00. 296 pp.

For over two decades, four frozen conflicts have undermined the stability of post-communist Eurasia. Two of them – South Ossetia and Abkhazia – were unfrozen by the Russia–Georgia war in 2008. The other two – Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria – remain in limbo after years of inconclusive multilateral negotiations. Why have these conflicts proven so intractable?

This book provides a rich, detailed, authoritative explanation of the Moldova–Transdniestria conflict from a man who is uniquely qualified to tell the story. William H. Hill twice served as the head of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Moldova, charged with negotiating a settlement to the conflict – from 1999–2001 and from 2003–06. He discusses a series of failed attempts to find a solution to the Transdniestria issue, but his focus is on the abortive 2003 Kozak Memorandum.

Hill attributes Moscow's continuing support for separatist forces in all four frozen conflicts to its resentment of NATO's intervention in the Balkans, to NATO enlargement and to Western criticism of Russia's military actions in Chechnya. Nevertheless, Russia has been party to the ongoing OSCE efforts to resolve Transdniestria's status. It is, however, unclear whether Russia's chief goal is to prolong its role as key negotiator or to actually achieve a settlement that would eventually diminish its role in the region.

The closest that all sides came to a settlement was when Dmitry Kozak, then deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, presented a plan that would have reincorporated Transdniestria into Moldova by creating an asymmetric federal state. Whereas the Moldovan Prime Minister Vladimir Voronin was willing to accept this plan, the OSCE and the EU believed that it would give

Transdniestria veto power in the new legislature, and that Russia would have inordinate influence over the new state's security arrangements. While Putin prepared to fly to Chisinau and demonstrators for and against the plan rallied in the streets of the Moldovan capital, EU representative Javier Solana sent a clear message to Voronin: 'If you sign this Memorandum, you can say goodbye to your hopes for European integration' (p. 152). Voronin then called Putin and said no. Hill attributes Voronin's veto to his fear both of domestic opposition and of a long-term Russian military presence.

The failure of the plan, in the author's view, highlights the very different agendas that the West and Russia have in former Soviet states. These agendas make any settlement unlikely for the foreseeable future: 'what Western leaders in 2003 saw as a minor matter of blocking an unworkable political settlement in a small, remote post-Soviet divided state, Kremlin leaders saw as a direct geopolitical challenge and defeat on turf that had been theirs, relatively unchallenged, for centuries' (p. 7).

Moscow viewed the West's opposition to the Kozak Memorandum as part of a concerted plan to weaken Russia and deny its rightful 'sphere of privileged interests' in the near abroad. This pervasive zero-sum thinking, Hill argues, will limit Russia's ability to evolve into a respected European player.

## Arms, Arms Control and Technology

Bruno Tertrais

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### **Cyber War Will Not Take Place**

Thomas Rid. London: C. Hurst and Co., 2013. £14.99. 218 pp.

Two decades after the pioneering RAND studies heralding the 'coming cyber war', such a threat increasingly makes headlines, to the point that it was presented as the dominant issue in the first meeting between US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping in June 2013. It is therefore tempting to see the topic as the twenty-first century equivalent of the nuclear threat, which dominated the US–Soviet relationship during the Cold War.

Not so, claim a few contrarian Western analysts – a small group among whom Thomas Rid, reader at King's College London, is a new and influential voice. His book grew out of a widely-read article that appeared in the January 2012 issue of the *Journal of Strategic Studies*. Its title comes from Jean Giraudoux's play *La Guerre de Troie N'aura Pas Lieu* ('The Trojan War Will Not Take Place'). The pun may

have been intended, given the importance of so-called Trojan viruses, a type of computer malware.

*Cyber War Will Not Take Place* is a methodical attempt to demonstrate that there is not – and will probably never be – such thing as cyber-war: ‘a highly problematic, even a dangerous, concept’ (p. 37). Rid describes classic Clausewitzian war as being violent, instrumental (that is, as a means to an end) and political. In fact, according to the author, few cyber attacks have even one of these features, and all nefarious cyber activities are mere variations on either sabotage, espionage or subversion. Although he notes that Stuxnet, which attacked Iranian nuclear installations, took computer sabotage to an entirely new level, he also believes that – so far, at least – a cyber attack that produces a level of pain comparable to that caused by a strategic air campaign is ‘plainly unimaginable’, even if it involves an attack on infrastructure (p. 17). Another reason that the term cyber-war is misleading, of course, is the attribution problem. Publicly known cases of a successful attribution (such as the 2011 episode involving the Georgian government and a Russian attacker) are rare, and cases in which a government can be identified as the perpetrator are even rarer.

Rid usefully distinguishes between aggressive cyber attacks, which are not necessarily intentional and instrumental, and cyber weapons, which are computer codes aimed at ‘threatening or causing physical, functional, or mental harm to structures, systems, or living beings’ (p. 37). As the author puts it, ‘code ... does not come with its own explosive charge’ (p. 13). He notes that cyber capabilities have also proven unable to take effective control of weapons such as drones.

The book re-examines the poster children of the cyber threat, a small number of well-known events that took place in the past three decades. He shows that interpreting the gigantic explosion of a Soviet pipeline in 1982 as the work of a CIA-planted virus is highly problematic. He correctly points out that the origin of the cyber attacks on the Estonian government in 2007 and the Georgian government in 2008 was never ascertained, and that their effects were relatively minor – hardly the stuff of Hollywood thrillers. Rid acknowledges that the supervisory control and data acquisition systems that operate industrial infrastructure are becoming more vulnerable in some ways, but argues that oversight, vendor security and the complexity of the systems are making them less vulnerable overall. Both Stuxnet and Shamoon, the virus that attacked oil company Saudi Aramco, required insider access to be effective.

For these reasons, Rid convincingly argues that if cyber-war has any meaning, it is as a metaphor, not as the description of a form of genuine warfare. Logically, he also refuses to consider cyberspace as the fifth domain of conflict because it permeates the other four (land, sea, air and space). This short but dense, well-

constructed book concludes with rapid, intriguing demonstrations of the ways in which cyber attacks favour the defensive over the offensive, comparisons with nuclear weapons are misplaced and the militarisation of cyber security is unwarranted.

**Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age**

Francis J. Gavin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012.  
£21.50/\$35.00. 218 pp.

**The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics**

Paul Bracken. New York: Times Books, 2012. £19.99/\$29.00.  
320 pp.

**A Short History of Nuclear Folly: Mad Scientists, Dithering Nazis, Lost Nukes and Catastrophic Cover-ups**

Rudolph Herzog. Jefferson Chase, trans. New York: Melville House, 2013. £18.99/\$26.00. 256 pp.

What should we learn – if anything – from the history of the Cold War that would be useful or relevant to dealing with contemporary nuclear challenges? Three new books have very different takes on this question.

Francis Gavin's argument in *Nuclear Statecraft* is essentially threefold. Firstly, that there is more continuity than is generally acknowledged between the Cold War and today. Secondly, that there was a disconnect between the public and academic debate about nuclear weapons and strategies, on the one hand, and the actual world of political and military decision-makers, on the other. Thirdly, that geopolitics and ideologies did far more to shape the Cold War than military hardware or abstract strategic theories.

There are several problems with *Nuclear Statecraft*. One is that it is essentially a collection of previously published, if revised, academic essays that have been cobbled together, and it shows. The author sometimes seems to be at pains to link them together. The second problem is that there is a mismatch between the proclaimed ambitions of the book and its rather short length, small number of case studies and use of few non-American sources. The third problem is that many of its claims and findings are not exactly new. To argue that it is a myth that nuclear weapons stabilised international politics during the Cold War (at least until the 1960s), and that proliferation is a new challenge, is to come close to creating straw men. Most analysts of strategic affairs are well aware that when China detonated its first nuclear weapon in 1964, it was perceived to be the quintessential rogue state. It is not exactly original to underline the tension

in Western policies between claiming that nuclear weapons are stabilising and supporting non-proliferation. To discover that there was a mismatch between the stated nuclear policies and their implementation at the level of planning and procurement, as well as between the ideas of the arms-control community and those of US political leaders, is hardly groundbreaking either.

At the same time, Gavin's approach is often subtle and convincing, especially when he discards both the agonist view of nuclear history (which emphasises the risks of nuclear weapons) and the sanguinist view (which emphasises their benefits), instead insisting that the so-called nuclear revolution often obscured the geopolitical and ideological dimensions of the Cold War. In the end, *Nuclear Statecraft* is an excellent collection of historical essays which includes interesting insights, but is hardly the 'game-changer for the field of security studies' that the blurb on the back cover advertises.

Gavin has good grounds to say that 'scholars and policymakers must begin to think differently about the periodization of nuclear history. Too much has been made of the sharp divide between the Cold War, post-Cold War, and post-September 11 international environments and their influence on nuclear politics' (p. 101).

Despite calling his book *The Second Nuclear Age*, Paul Bracken does not disagree. Early on, he makes the point that his focus is a second nuclear world that began to emerge with the establishment of new nuclear powers in the 1960s. In other words, his analysis focuses on the multi-nuclear strategic landscape of the twenty-first century more than a new, well-defined age.

This is not an academic book at all: there are no footnotes (although each chapter mentions its main sources) and the author often writes in the first person. But *The Second Nuclear Age* is heavy on analyses, concepts and ideas. And it certainly does not shy away from detailed strategic analysis at a time when nuclear strategies are said to be less relevant than in the past. For instance, Bracken carefully calculates Israeli deterrence requirements if faced with a nuclear-armed Iran. The author is technologically savvy, and it shows.

Trained in scenario planning and games analysis – in a US tradition maintained in particular by the Hudson Institute and the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment – Bracken encourages the reader to think about the innovative ways in which new actors might play their nuclear cards in a time of crisis. The book is lively and includes the narration of some of the recent politico-military games that the author participated in. Bracken suggests that the non-deterrence functions of nuclear weapons – such as blackmail or bargaining, which were secondary during the Cold War – will become prominent in the second nuclear age, and that Western analysts are not yet ready to deal with such a reality. This

second nuclear age will also be more complex because of, inter alia, the geographic and strategic connections between the players and the importance of nationalism among nuclear-armed countries. Bracken encourages the reader to study the organisational behaviour of new nuclear nations. His fictional tales of regional nuclear crises are intriguing and thought-provoking. A student of Herman Kahn, he is worthy of his mentor.

Bracken's book also includes a fascinating account of a previously unknown major game entitled *Proud Prophet*, played in 1983, which included actual decision-makers and, according to the author, was the most realistic exercise involving nuclear weapons conducted by the US government during the Cold War. He relates that 'the game went nuclear big time, not because Secretary Weinberger and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were crazy but because they faithfully implemented the prevailing US strategy' (p. 88). This allegedly led to a major overhaul of US nuclear strategy.

Some readers will frown at Bracken's style: the author is often exceedingly assertive in his historical and political judgements. Others will be annoyed by his disparagement of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The author's suggestions for dealing with the new nuclear realities are provocative but not always well thought out. But regardless of whether one agrees with the author's ideas, *The Second Nuclear Age* is one of the most important food-for-thought books on contemporary nuclear challenges of the past 20 years. It should be required reading in Washington, where the quality of thinking about nuclear weapons has indeed 'reached a dangerously low level', and where it sometimes seems that disarmament and non-proliferation have sucked in most of the energy devoted to thinking about nuclear weapons (as well as about nuclear terrorism, an issue that the author does not deal with – mercifully, given the amount of coverage it has received over the past 12 years (p. 217)). This could help decision-makers to, at least, be a little less surprised when the first major nuclear crisis of the second nuclear age occurs – and even perhaps help them in working to avoid it.

Even less academic is *A Short History of Nuclear Folly*: a short indeed, sometimes amusing, pamphlet by journalist Rudolph Herzog (translated from the German). Starting with an interesting recollection of the invention of the uranium enrichment centrifuge in the 1940s by Austrian engineer Gernot Zippe, Herzog goes on to tell some of the weirdest tales of the nuclear age. Most of them have been well chronicled elsewhere, but others less so. The latter include John Wayne playing the role of Genghis Khan in a radioactive Nevada desert; the plan to create a new canal through Nicaragua using 925 nuclear devices (an artificial harbour in Alaska would have needed only five of them); the doomsday machine imagined by Leo Szilard (400 cobalt-salted bombs to extinguish all life on earth); the con-

ception of nuclear-powered airplanes and automobiles (the crowd-pleasing *Ford Nucleon*) and a Belgian bishop's obsession with constructing a nuclear reactor in the Congo. The book includes interesting and occasionally eye-popping iconography. What Herzog does not show, however – since his book is not organised in a chronological fashion – is that there has been a learning curve on nuclear safety and security issues. The author may be right to wonder whether 'people have gotten much wiser or more responsible since 1945', but the fact is that the days of exceedingly imaginative – and sometimes, frankly, insane – projects using nuclear technology are over (p. 216). He does not show that there are now far fewer serious accidents involving nuclear weapons or hazardous experiments in nuclear energy, despite the multiplication of civilian and military users of nuclear technology.

Reading Herzog, it is hard to avoid thinking that we live in a very different nuclear age from that of the 1950s and 1960s. In the end, both the proponents of continuity and those of discontinuity may have valid arguments. And to look for a small number of clear-cut turning points in nuclear history may be futile.

#### **The Last Full Measure: How Soldiers Die in Battle**

Michael Stephenson. New York: Crown, 2012. \$28.00. 480 pp.

This is a disappointing but formidable book. It is disappointing in the sense that, despite its subtitle, it is very selective in the way in which it covers its topic. The book is only about land combat and, occasional references to other cultures such as Japan notwithstanding, is mostly about how Western soldiers die on the battlefield. The subtitle is to be taken literally: this is about how soldiers die in combat and not in war; almost nothing is said about disease, which was the primary killer of soldiers throughout history until the late nineteenth century. Its sweeping timeframe, from prehistory to Iraq and Afghanistan, forces it to make shortcuts and rapidly cover many historical episodes. Finally, because it is a military history book in the classical sense of the term – chronological and fact-rich – it stays close to its subject. The book will leave researchers somewhat frustrated at the paucity of in-depth analysis and statistics on long-term trends.

But *The Last Full Measure* is also a formidable book. Well written and thoroughly researched, it is often gripping and seamlessly alternates between military tactics and often-moving personal testimonies, which are the subject of long quotations. The book is more about the complexities of human emotions – fear, rage, honour and friendship – than about the frailties of the human body.

It is deserving of its claim to lineage in John Keegan's brand of deductive history. And, despite its limitations, Stephenson does make interesting analytical points. For instance, he reminds the reader that the death rate of battles in prehistoric times was lower than that of contemporary combat, but societal mortality due to war was much higher due to the frequency and ubiquity of fighting; he aptly compares the vulnerabilities of modern tanks with those of mounted knights and he recounts that mines, booby traps and improvised explosive devices were already some of the primary causes of combat deaths for US forces in Vietnam and the Soviet military in Afghanistan.

One of the book's recurring themes is that what we often perceive as novelities of the late twentieth century are in fact long-term trends. That the distance between soldier and victim began to widen quickly with the introduction of the arrow was 'no better or worse than the unmanned drone or the man with his finger on a computer key' (p. 8). As early as the late nineteenth century, the 'intimate relationship with death and killing on the battlefield' had begun to become rarer, due to the industrialisation of war (p. 87). And as early as the First World War, 'the general tenor of warfare had become long-distance, mechanical, anonymous, processed' (p. 225).



