

Book Reviews

The Geopolitics of Red Oil: Constructing the China Threat Through Energy Security

Andrew Stephen Champion, (Routledge, 2016, 206 pages)

Reviewed by Dmitry Shlapentokh*

Potential readers of the book would expect a certain narrative, an assessment of China's quest for gas and oil, and the path to it. Still, Champion surprises them. In this book, China's quest for oil and gas occupies just a third of the text.

Most of the book focuses on China's image in the West, a subject absolutely irrelevant to the title. This rather unexpected approach to China's need for oil and gas stems from the author's general views on foreign policy.

He openly proclaims that he has followed the teachings of such post-modernist luminaries as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.¹ They both believed that objective reality does not exist, and is “constructed” by observers. For Derrida, it was the reader who constructs the text; text here does not exist as an objective category, independent from the reader who has limited freedom in interpretation of the text, but actually as a product of the reader. This implies that the text is as much a product of the reader as of the author.

Foucault's theory was rather different. It implied that objective reality does exist, but it is defined by “discourse,” the predominant frame of thought. It was this “discourse” that really mattered, and not the situation on the ground. This includes whatever could be defined as the nature of the action, including political activities and foreign policy. This is at least the assumption of those social scientists who belong to the Copenhagen School.

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¹Andrew Stephen Champion, *The Geopolitics of Red Oil: Constructing the China Threat Through Energy Security*, Routledge, 2016, p. 10.

In the context of this theory, the author dedicates two-thirds of his book to how China has been perceived by Westerners, and how these perceptions – deeply related to the prevailing “discourse” – shapes the Western approach to China. He predictably starts his narrative with Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant who visited China in the 13th century, during the rule of the Mongol dynasty.² Like all people from medieval Europe, Marco Polo was a religious person. Consequently, he saw in China a perfectly organized religious society, much more advanced than Europe, and the best example to follow. The other Europeans who followed Polo – and there were not many of them – shared his views.

By the time of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the European outlook had changed. Europeans became rationalistic, and this affected their perception of China. On the surface, European intellectuals expressed an interest in China. Still, they began to despise China for a lack of scientific knowledge and implicit backwardness.³ As this strain of European thought continued to develop, it had led to continuous development of China's negative image. From the mighty and cultural giant, as it had been presented in Marco Polo's narrative, it now emerged as a backward country.

China's image had also undergone two important transformations. Instead of wise sages who taught Europeans, implicitly playing the children's role, they became children themselves. The image of the children implied intellectual and emotional immaturity. In China's case, they became bad children: mischievous, dishonest, prone to lecherous behavior, etc. They were unable, in this context, to care for themselves, required control/domination, and needed punishment from adults.

In the other emerging modification, the image of the Chinese was feminized.⁴ They emerged as weak, docile, and safely used for Europeans for their pleasure. This image of China had been dominant throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries.

²Ibid., p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 35.

⁴Ibid., pp. 38-39.

China's image as “child” or “female” had changed after WWII, a change related to the beginning of the Cold War. As the author implies, the USSR was not an objective threat to the US and the West in general, plainly because this objective reality does not exist. The ideological difference between the USSR and the West was the root of the problem. The USSR, with its socialist ideology, was sharply in contrast to the ideological framework of the West, and as such, it was viewed as dangerous. China also became communist, and thus became alien and hostile. The image of Communist China had been blended with the old image of the “Yellow Peril.” These images underscore the alien nature of China to the West in general.⁵

Since China became alien, it also became threatening. When the USSR collapsed, China continued to be a communist state and was perceived as a major threat. As the author implies, China absorbed the negative feeling which Westerners feel toward the USSR.

After spending two thirds of the book describing the changes in Western views of China, and how it is related to changes in Western mentality, the author finally deals with what should have been the major focus of the book: why the US refused to allow China to buy one of the major American gas/oil companies in the early 2000s. As the author implies, this decision was mostly irrational and was derived from the fear of China as representative of the “other.”

The book has a clear, interesting, and unusual approach to the problem of energy security and, in more general terms, to the perception of one country by the other. It goes without saying that the prevailing attitude in this or that country has shaped its elite perception of the others. One could even suggest that, in some cases, the image of the foreign country tells us more about internal ideological and social conditions of the perceiver than about the object of perception.

The image could distort reality, but even this distortion is also grounded in reality. The reality, its objectivity unrelated to perception, is the basis of any observation and should be taken into account even when the study of perception, or image, is the major goal of the work.

⁵Ibid., p. 46.

Let's reexamine the discussed study from this perspective. Marco Polo and other European explorers who visited China became fascinated with China not because of their religious beliefs, but because of the conditions in Europe. At that time, the strong European states did not exist. Their economic and military potential was quite limited. As a matter of fact, Europe at that time was the object of expansion, or target of Asian powers, against which Europeans could do little or nothing. Mongols would be a good example.

It was not surprising that the centralized and expansive China looked immensely stronger than any European power. Indeed, this was the case.

By the 18th century, most European states were not only centralized but also engaged in the first round of the Industrial Revolution. Non-European powers were usually beaten in confrontations with Europeans. This, for example, was the case with the Ottoman Turks, who engaged in steady retreat under pressure from European power. The early 19th century was marked by the first collisions between European powers and China. The Opium War, the conflict between the UK and China, was the most important among these early conflicts and encounters. It went completely ignored by the author, for it debunks his theory that it was “discourse” and not reality that defines the relationship between the major powers and their perceptions of each other. During the Opium War, the small UK had defeated huge China with just a few battleships.

It was not surprising that in this geopolitical context, China's image started to change, and it started to lose its original Middle Ages/Early Modern History luster. By the late 19th century and early 20th century, China had actually become a semi-colony, and by that time China had been finally emasculated and had become “female” and “childlike” – i.e., the Chinese were seen as an object of use and exploitation by Europeans. These changes in the perception of China were due not to the abstract cultural changes in European minds, but were directly related to China's economic and military weakness. The very fact that China was seen as being “different” from Europe plays no role in this new image. One might note that Japan was also “different” from Europe; even the Meiji Restoration (1867-1911), when Japan tried to modernize/Westernize itself, did not remove the label of “otherness” from the country. Still, they had never lost their masculinity, and were not seen as childlike.

The author's attempt to explain the confrontation with Red China in the early Cold War era could be explained just by conflicts of "discourse," or conflicting images. The irrelevance of discourse, or image, in realpolitik could well be seen in WWI. Germans were definitely not the "other" and had been seen as a European power par excellence throughout all of modern European history. As a matter of fact, Germans regarded themselves as the legitimate cultural descendants of the ancient Romans. As soon as Germans had become the enemies of France, Russia, and the UK during WWI, they immediately became Asiatized and transformed into "Huns."

It goes without saying that Germans did the same when they invaded the USSR/Russia during WWII. At the time, Germans were anxious to Asiatize Russians to justify the invasion and treat them brutally. In this reading, Russians became a new embodiment of Mongols. As in the other case, power and political expediency created a foundation for discursive construction, but not the other way around.

The West's confrontation within the USSR at the outset of the Cold War era was often explained as a conflict of ideologies: as the conflict between communism and capitalism, or in the other reading, as the conflict between Western democracy and totalitarian states with the USSR as the leader. In the case of the USSR, the explanation was essentially the same. The only difference was that Soviet ideologists regarded socialism as "progressive," "true democracy," and "peaceful," whereas the West, with the US as leader, was intrinsically exploitative and imperialistic. The American imperialists, the Soviet ideologists claimed, could not stand the peaceful, prosperous USSR and its allies, and this was the reason for conflict. Both sides claimed that if the other's political and ideological system changed, their relationship would change dramatically and for the better, for there would be no reason for conflict.

The future would show that this was nothing but an illusion. Post-Soviet Russia proclaimed that it was now capitalist and democratic; at least these statements were always made in the beginning of the post-Soviet era. Moreover, the leaders of Moscow at that time announced that they regarded the US as a model to follow. Still, despite ideological and political homogenization, the conflict and tensions between the US and Russia reemerged once again, indicating that the conflict of the Cold War era was due not to ideology, or "discourse," and should be explained as geopolitical conflict of superpowers who vied for global predominance.

Red China was attached to the USSR, and this was the reason why the US was hostile to Red China. Still, after President Nixon visited China, this relationship changed. China was still a communist country, and surely fell into the category of “other,” at least from the perspective of the US' elite. However, this “otherness” had played no role in the Chinese-American relationship, and they had improved steadily until the collapse of the USSR.

One might note that Washington has strongly protested China's actions, even during the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square. The reason once again was that China became less “other,” but quite a pure geopolitical pragmatism. Washington experts were perplexed as to where the USSR was heading. Some assumed that the hardliners would finally come to power again and the USSR could reemerge as a dangerous rival. Thus, they assumed, it would be wise to keep China as a potential ally in the new Cold War. These facts of the US-China relationship were ignored by the author, and for a clear reason: these facts clearly show that it was not ideology/discourse, but geopolitical reality that defines the US' approach to China. The author's transition to the present-day China-US relationship also does not hold ground.

As the elements of capitalism become more and more visible in China, the country has become much more similar to the US; in any case, it became much less “other” than in the '70s and early '80s.

Still, the US-China relationship has become much tenser than in the '70s and '80s. Once again, the reason has nothing to do with ideological and discursive differences, but is still a matter of geopolitical pragmatism. The USSR had collapsed and post-Soviet Russia seemed to be in the process of freefall throughout the 1990s. At the same time, China had emerged as potentially a rival to the US. Moreover, Cold War rivalry between the USSR and China almost disappeared, and some observers were entertaining the possibility of a Russia-China alliance.

Consequently, the views of the American government on China changed. It became increasingly concerned with Chinese control over important natural resources, which could enhance China's economic development.

To summarize:

The author produces an original study, which attempts to apply the premise of post-modernism to explanations of US-China conflict over access to gas and oil companies. However, the book has serious problems.

First, the major part of the book is hardly related to economics or geopolitics. It mostly relates to cultural history, the way the West has approached China. The second, and most serious problem with the book, is the author's approach to the very nature of international relationships. He holds that the whole of international relationships are based on nations' perceptions of each other, which has nothing to do with reality. Reality actually disappears in his interpretation, and becomes almost entirely shaped by "discourse," which in many cases, emerges from almost nowhere. This could hardly provide an adequate explanation of US' relationship with China.

The cause of tensions is not in "discourse," not in China's "otherness," but in China's rise. It became the true competitor of the US regardless of the fact that present-day China is much less different from the US now than in the 1970s.

The book is interesting, engaging, and useful in some ways, when it deals with Europe's, and the West's in general, views on China. Unfortunately, it can hardly provide an adequate explanation of foreign policy of great powers, and the US-China relationship in particular.

Not War, Not Peace?

Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism

George Perkovich & Toby Dalton, (Oxford University Press India 2016, 310 pages)

Shahzadi Tooba Hussain Syed*

Not War, Not Peace? Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism is written by America's acclaimed scholar on India-Pakistan matters, George Perkovich and a former U.S. intelligence officer, Toby Dalton. Perkovich is the Vice President for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and works primarily on nuclear strategy, nonproliferation issues and on South Asian security. Toby Dalton is the co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment and his work addresses regional security challenges and the evolution of the global nuclear order.

The broader theme of the book is evident from its title "Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism". The challenge is how to change the thinking of the other side? Answering this question, the authors have presented some policy objectives of India which mostly aim at satisfying the domestic political-psychological need for isolating Pakistan. The book aims at motivating Pakistan to act decisively against terrorists, and to deter Pakistan from escalating the conflict. The book has six chapters that share a common theme of policy options available to India.

The first chapter, titled 'Decision Making Setting' identifies lack of civilian expertise in defense and security matters as well as the military's limited input in the decision-making process as the key challenges for informed decision-making in India. Moreover, the authors argue that in order to deal with the problems like military's limited input in defence planning and defence procurement, Indian decision-making system needs significant reforms.

The probability of Indian proactive operations and the impact of use of air power to deter Pakistan against using terrorism as a policy option have extensively been discussed in chapters two and three of the book. The authors analyzed that the Cold Start Doctrine is unable to address the question of motivating Pakistan to disband the India

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centric groups by waging large-scale land operations. The authors have presented a US and Israeli surgical strike model but also mentioned that tactically it has failed to produce any strategic impact that could help win the larger conflict. They maintained that the lack of accuracy in identifying terrorist targets in Pakistan would create hurdles in achieving the objective. They highlighted the deficiency of Indian Intelligence capabilities by pointing out the need for accuracy in identifying the targets.

In chapter four, the authors provide an overview of the history of covert operations between India and Pakistan, and simultaneously acknowledge India's covert operations in Baluchistan and Karachi. The authors write; "...it is safe to say that India has not been purely abstemious in the use of covert agents and actions against Pakistan... But Indian authorities have been very careful to preserve their reputational advantage over Pakistan in this domain of statecraft." Another chapter, titled 'Covert operations', traces the evolution of Indian covert operation capabilities under the political guidance of successive Indian governments from 1990's onwards. Authors are of the opinion that the success and failures of covert operations have not ended their utility around the globe, and the real test for statecraft is how well it can bargain with its adversary by leveraging the pressure generated through covert operations abroad.

The next chapter deals with 'Nuclear Capabilities'. It tries to assess the potential changes that India could make in its nuclear doctrine and force posture in order to complement its army and air centric operations. The ultimate aim is to achieve the objectives of compelling Pakistan to abandon proxy warfare and prevent it from escalating the conflict in the event of large scale Indian military operations. Since the existing Indian Nuclear Doctrine may not be suitable to cater for land operations inside Pakistan, India could consider adopting "limited nuclear options" to counter Pakistan's use of tactical nuclear weapons. The question then arises: would how India's adoption of 'limited nuclear options' enhance Indian deterrence against Pakistan?

In the last chapter, the authors consider “Non-Violent Compellence” by making use of various factors such as diplomatic pressure, soft power projection, information campaign, naval blockade and sanctions etc. These five strategies have been presented as useful tools for compelling Pakistan to change its course vis a vis India. These are suggested as preferable policy options mainly because these would help India achieve its objectives without fighting. An approach including these strategies would bring India reputational advantages also. Non-violent compellence is “softer” means of motivating Pakistan than the violent covert operations or conventional war. It may therefore be unattractive from the standpoint of Indian domestic politics.

The authors conclude that an appropriate mixture of coercive and non-coercive strategies coupled with domestic Indian reforms in defence and intelligence sector will enable India to address its most important foreign policy challenge i.e. Pakistan. They opine that 'Not War, Not Peace' (neither peace nor war) will be a foreseeable future for India-Pakistan relations.

All the options presented and discussed in the book are based on the Indian allegations that Pakistan is generating cross border terrorism. India however has not been able to prove “Pakistani hand” in any of the incidents allegedly linked with Pakistan. The fact is that Pakistan itself is a victim of terrorism. The book provides idealistic approaches and options to India and seems to largely undermine Pakistan's capabilities as a nuclear power to counter the coercive options. Idealistically India can adopt the mix of coercive and non-coercive options to achieve its objective but realistically adoption of coercive measures/options presented in the book would be devastating for the whole region because, in achieving the larger political objectives of war, escalation dynamics cannot be ruled out.

Nuclear Weapons and International Security

Ramesh Thakur, (Routledge, 2015, 262 pages)

Reviewed by Saima Ali*

Ramesh Thakur is currently the Director of the Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament in the Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University. Educated in India and Canada, Thakur has held full time academic positions at universities in Australia, Canada, Fiji and New Zealand. He is a former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, principal writer of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's 2002 UN reform report a "Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Commissioner", and with ANU Chancellor Professor Gareth Evans, author of its 2002 report on R2P. He is presently a professor at Crawford School of Public Policy, the Australian National University and Editor-in-Chief of Global Governance. He is also the author/editor of 50 books and 400 journal articles and book chapters.

Ramesh Thakur has written extensively on issues of nuclear disarmament and arms control. In these collected essays, the first from 1986 and the latest from 2014, he maintains a consistent voice, eloquent and extremely well informed. This volume collectively conveys more than three decades of study and writings on the challenges posed by nuclear weapons. Subsequently, in introductions to the current nuclear state of play, the book deals with the challenges of nuclear weapons in three parts. Part I refers to Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament and tries to explore if the power of ideas can tame the power of the state. It also gives us an insight into the nuclear debate and the envisioning nuclear features. Part II, elaborates on the regional challenges in Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East. Part III, the last part, talks about the stepping stones to a nuclear weapon free world, NPT, the global nuclear security and the problems of nuclear weapons and suggests the remedial measures.

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While discussing nuclear non proliferation and disarmament, the author talks about the theoretical approaches in peace research, aiming at exercising control on arms and violence, the role of UNO and how best to bring a balance between theory and practice. He further elaborates on the global governance and the logics on which the theory meets practice and finally gives his opinion suggesting the role of international bodies in the next few years.

Professor Thakur, while sharing the nuclear debate, expresses his concern that the nuclear weapons pose some genuine moral dilemma for the global nuclear balance characterized by strategic parity or essential equivalence. He categorically opines that nuclear wars cannot be fought and won. The need for controlling the arms race is a must but technical and political reasons cannot be overcome easily.

Envisioning nuclear futures, the author expresses his concerns that even the nuclear threat cannot stop incidents like the Kargil conflict (1999). In this context, the international treaties have also failed to deliver. An enduring resolution of any conflict must strike a balance between the two competing pulls of realism and justice. Simultaneously, the CTBT has failed to achieve its desired results. The UN must come forward with a new resolution to cater for the prevailing insecurity owing to the nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

At any rate, while the nuclear era now has a long history since 1945, the continuities are also prominent. The means of delivering nuclear weapons, the theories administering their likely use and claimed deterrence worth, as well as some of the key actions of arms control, were started over the 1950s and 1960s. This means that the discussion of three decades ago can still be relevant to our current situation. It can also mean that at times we appear to be going round in circles with nothing actually resolved.

There is poignancy in this collection, for this is a record of agreements for control and reductions made but rarely observed. Even when the breakthroughs came, they were the result, by and large, not of compelling advocacy but of political developments. The anxious crisis management of the early 1960s led to the Test Ban Treaty and the hotline; later the superpower detente led first to strategic arms reductions and then to the moves towards the end of the Cold War: the

breakup of the Soviet Union saw the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and then unilateral cuts in short-range systems. There has been less proliferation than might have been feared, in part because of the norms created by the Non-Proliferation Treaty but also because the political incentives have not been strong enough for countries to accept the risk of acquiring nuclear weapons.

The difficulty or the weakness with Thakur's stance is that while he is serious about his study, in the end he is also an advocate of a particular outcome.. He starts by making a distinction between Strategic Studies and Peace Studies. I am not sure in terms of practice that this distinction is as sharp as it once seemed to be. On issues such as humanitarian involvement, for example, there is a strong “for and against” debate to be found in both traditions. But Thakur is reflecting the original inspiration behind Peace Studies that scholarship could and should serve the cause of peace.

Those outside the Peace Studies community might counter that they did not see it as their job to promote war, but that researchers must also accept that good analysis could lead them into uncomfortable positions that challenged their instinctive policy preferences. The risk of advocacy is that it distorts analysis. Thakur reflects a serious determination for acceptance that there is somehow a contest between nuclear disarmament and nuclear deterrence, in which the former must prosper as the latter is discredited.

Anyone who deals with the nuclear issue cannot escape the responsibility to think through how we ought to deal with the challenge posed by nuclear weapons and how we can reduce their potential for expected catastrophe. Thakur believes in this responsibility in full yet in a way his analyses would be more compelling if he were not so concerned to make them fit with his advocacy. In the end, there is no reason why recognizing the examples of deterrence at work cannot be combined with the aspiration for nuclear abolition because of the unavoidable risks connected with having numerous nuclear weapons around the globe. The book, “Nuclear Weapons and International Security” provides useful material for research on the subject of nuclear non-proliferation in particular and Arms control and Disarmament in general.

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Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses



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