

Naval War College Review

Volume 64
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 11

2011

The Future of China-Russian Relations

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Recommended Citation

Goldstein, Lyle and Bellacqua, James (2011) "The Future of China-Russian Relations," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 64 : No. 2 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol64/iss2/11>

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BOOK REVIEWS

“ON THE CUSP OF A STRONG ALLIANCE?”

James Bellacqua, ed. *The Future of China-Russian Relations*. Asia in the New Millennium. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2010. 360pp. \$50

China’s rise increasingly forms a dominant theme of discussion in newspapers and academic journals alike, as Beijing’s rapid growth will likely have a major impact on the security of the United States and its prosperity in the twenty-first century. A vital element to understanding the implications of China’s rise is to examine closely the most important of Beijing’s foreign-policy relationships.

This book, edited by James Bellacqua, fills a vital niche in this regard and belongs on the bookshelves of students of East Asia, Central Asia, and European security, as well as on those of general practitioners of international relations. Numerous crucial insights emerge from this rich volume, but among the most important themes is the apparent consensus among the contributors that Russia and China are not on the cusp of a strong alliance to oppose Washington. Rather, as one might expect, this relationship between these massive neighbors is uneasy, awkward, and rife with complexity.

Bellacqua deserves ample credit for bringing together an all-star cast of

writers for this work. Thus Gilbert Rozman begins with sounding a warning that the China-Russia relationship should not be “underestimated,” observing that “all . . . forces in recent years have failed to deter Russia’s leaders from turning ever more toward China.” On one hand, contributors warn that Russia-China military exercises have grown in scope and sophistication, while on the other hand, there are those who note that Russian arms sales to China seem to be in a rather precipitous decline. Rozman’s analysis of the effect of Putin’s leadership on the relationship is especially interesting. For example, he notes that Putin did not hesitate to remove a regional governor who had been stoking anti-Chinese sentiment in the Russian Far East.

An evaluation of the volatility in the evolving Russia-China energy relationship is a particular strength of this book. Indeed, the detailed chapter by Erica Downs is worth reading especially carefully. She makes a strong and logical argument that the twists and turns of their energy relationship have largely been determined by price. Downs

writes, “During the 1990s, when oil prices were low, Russia pushed for expanded energy cooperation, but China . . . was reluctant. . . . The rise in world oil prices . . . turned the tables. . . . China became more eager . . . [and] Russia became increasingly reluctant to commit to deeper energy integration.” Whether this “uncertain courtship” in the energy sector becomes a more serious relationship will depend on “world oil prices, China’s willingness to pay more for natural gas, China’s willingness to play by Russia’s ‘rules of the game’ . . . and Russia’s concerns about the ‘China threat.’”

Another valuable contribution is the collection’s examination of the interaction of regional security issues, such as in Central Asia or on the Korean Peninsula, with the Russia-China relationship. While the Taiwan issue is amply discussed, another regional security issue could well have a similarly potent influence on the trajectory of the overall relationship between the two countries. If Russia goes forward with a large planned sale of weaponry to Vietnam, including Kilo-class submarines, it will no doubt cause new tensions between Moscow and Beijing. This example serves to illustrate the broader importance of understanding the Russia-China relationship for world politics across all regions and therefore underscores the importance of this valuable book.

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Francis, David J., ed. *U.S. Strategy in Africa: AFRICOM, Terrorism, and Security Challenges*. Oxford, U.K.: Routledge, 2010. 216 pp. \$114

After a period of involuntary neglect due to pressing business elsewhere, the United States appears to appreciate Africa’s elevated strategic importance in terms of counterterrorism and energy security, among other things, and to regard regional stability, democratic development, economic reform, good governance, humanitarian assistance, and the fight against HIV/AIDS as subsidiary objectives that are conducive to serving those two interests. This development makes this work by David Francis, holder of the Chair of African Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Bradford, timely. Fortunately, it is also thematically well conceived, with part 1 laying out U.S. security policy and part 2 discussing African responses, the two comprising a broadly complementary set of earnest assessments by perceptive analysts.

In Washington, the conventional wisdom on U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) seems to be that although the Pentagon established it so awkwardly in 2007 that African leaders and populations worried that it was an instrument of neocolonialism, subsequent adjustments in strategic communication have largely allayed African fears. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Theresa Whelan’s tidy and professional précis of the American strategic perspective incorporates standard Pentagon palliatives and spin control. The next three chapters are more probing and provocative.

Daniel Volman makes a forceful argument that “the difference between AFRICOM and other commands—and the allegedly ‘unfounded’ nature of its implications for the militarization of the continent—are not as real or as