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BOOK REVIEWS

TAIWAN: PROVINCE OR INDEPENDENT NATION?

Kagan, Richard C. *Taiwan's Statesman: Lee Teng-hui and Democracy in Asia*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2007. 240pp. \$30

Wachman, Alan M. *Why Taiwan? Geostrategic Rationales for China's Territorial Integrity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007. 272pp. \$65

An international issue at or near the top of any list of potential nuclear conflicts is the status of Taiwan. Beijing insists the island is merely another Chinese province, Taipei insists the island is an independent nation, and officially Washington stands with neither view but insists on a peaceful resolution. The two books under review here address this important matter. Both authors, Richard Kagan and Alan Wachman, are experienced academics specializing in China and able to access Chinese sources. Their works join other scholarly efforts to explain the imbroglio over Taiwan, including those by Richard Bush, Alan Romberg, and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker.

The best thing about *Taiwan's Statesman* is its price, which is remarkably low for today's market. However, it is unfortunate that throughout the entire text Kagan does not offer an objective biography of Lee Teng-hui, the former president of Taiwan. He has written instead a hagiography that fails to justify its presumption of Lee as an

internationally important "statesman" or as a seminal figure in the development of "democracy in Asia." This is regrettable, given both the author's scholarly expertise and the importance of Lee in late-twentieth-century Chinese and American history. In addition, *Taiwan's Statesman* contains factual errors, such as an assertion that President Richard Nixon's visit to China took place in 1971 (rather than February 1972), as well as chronological confusion, apparently caused by questionable editing.

Kagan on several occasions describes Lee as a George Washington-like figure. His objectivity is problematic when describing the very difficult position in which Taiwan found itself after 1979, when the United States finally shifted diplomatic recognition of "China" from Taipei to Beijing. Kagan's repetitive description of Lee's "Zen and Christian approach" does not support his contention of Lee as providing "a new model" of democracy for Asia.

This book is best left on the shelf.

A far more important work is *Why Taiwan?* by Alan Wachman, a professor at Tufts University. He undertakes the difficult task of analyzing why this relatively small island, approximately the size of the combined land area of New Jersey and Delaware, is so important to China. How is it, Wachman poses, that in the late seventeenth century the island was viewed by China as “a place beyond the seas . . . of no consequence to us,” when in 2005 Beijing passed the Anti-secession Law threatening the use of military force to prevent Taiwan’s de jure independence?

Relying on an impressive array of primary and secondary sources, Wachman explains the change in China’s view through historical background, legal analysis, and examination of the current state of relations and future possibilities, all couched in both analytical and theoretical terms. He succeeds in this daunting task in just 164 pages, leaving the reader wishing for more.

Wachman decides (correctly in my view) that China’s current modernization of its military was sparked by observation of U.S. prowess in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, heightened and expanded as a result of the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, and is primarily focused on possible Taiwan scenarios, including conflict with the United States. The author also suggests that the variation in China’s view of the salience of Taiwan has been due more to the island’s relative insignificance on the list of national security concerns from the seventeenth century through the first half of the twentieth. China’s rulers were often concerned with more important issues, ranging from the Qing overthrow of the Ming dynasty to Japan’s invasion of China in the 1930s, to the Cold War

perturbations that forced Beijing’s attention elsewhere.

Wachman’s thesis is that China’s primary concern about the island’s status is geostrategic, although he discusses domestic, political, ideological, and nationalistic rationales, including an excursion into a theoretical construct of national awareness. However, he fails to mention the “century of humiliation,” which is somewhat surprising, given the Chinese propensity to dwell on it. Wachman paints a convincing picture of China’s worries about Taiwan’s history as an entrée for foreign invaders; as recently as November 2007 Beijing expressed this concern.

One possible explanation for China’s evolving consideration of Taiwan is that the globalization phenomena of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have simply made the island more accessible and important to the mainland. Geography does not change, per se, but today’s technological and scientific advances have certainly altered its influence in certain political situations.

One criticism is that the author tends to argue his points in a judicial manner; “it is noteworthy,” “how odd it is,” and “as the preceding chapter makes evident” are some examples. He has much greater success convincing the reader with sound geopolitical analyses of the China-Taiwan situation than with word parsing.

That said, Wachman does succeed in demonstrating that many of China’s current military strategists, both academics and military officers, view Taiwan’s importance in geostrategic terms, seeing it as vital to their nation’s security and as having serious implications for national-security policy making in

Beijing, and in Taipei and Washington as well.

For China, that means not allowing the island to become an independent state widely recognized by the international community of nations, but forcing or drawing Taiwan into reunification with the mainland. Beijing has frequently stated its willingness to use military force to prevent Taiwan's independence, but Taipei seems to ignore it, while Washington continues to tread a tenuous line between the two. While Wachman focuses on policy-making motivation and attitudes in Beijing, he makes a significant contribution to our understanding of this complex and dangerous situation.

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Hicks, Melinda M., and C. Belmont Keeney, eds. *Defending the Homeland: Historical Perspectives on Radicalism, Terrorism, and State Responses*. Morgantown: West Virginia Univ. Press, 2007. 233pp. \$27.50

Defending the Homeland is not about homeland defense as defined by the Defense Department—the military defense of U.S. territory from external attack. Rather, what the editors provide is a wide-ranging examination of, first, how the United States has responded to a variety of internal and external threats over its history and, second, how societal reactions to terrorism may unintentionally encourage the terrorist mind-set. The volume comprises nine academic essays from among those submitted to the 2005 Senator Rush D. Holt History Conference at West Virginia University.

As Jeffrey H. Norwitz notes in his introduction, “The greatest battle is to remain a nation of law in the face of a ruthless enemy who would consider this our weakness.” Illustrating the point, Ellen Schrecker surveys our history from the Alien and Sedition Acts to the first “red scare” of World War I, while coeditor Keeney tells the story of strikes and labor violence in West Virginia coalfields in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The writers conclude that we are too easily willing to suspend constitutional rights in the face of sometimes-specious threats to the nation. Even such a luminary as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes accepted limitations to freedom of speech in wartime, saying, “When a nation is at war, many things that might be said in time of peace . . . will not be endured so long as men fight . . . and no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right.”

The book's second section examines the factors that push activists toward radicalism and from radicalism ultimately to killing in the name of social justice or religious purity. For instance, according to Jean Burger's essay on the role of women in revolutionary Russia, tsarist Russia contributed to its own demise by systematically eliminating any peaceful means of bringing education, health, and opportunity to the state's peasants, industrial workers, or women. Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon points out that not only is there a wide variety of terrorisms but that the distinctions between terrorists and “people who use violence and are not called terrorists” grow ever thinner over time. We therefore need to take care that in the effort to perfect homeland security we do not