

1991

Power and Insecurity: Beijing, Moscow, and Washington: 1949-1988

Michael T. Byrnes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Byrnes, Michael T. (1991) "Power and Insecurity: Beijing, Moscow, and Washington: 1949-1988," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 44 : No. 1 , Article 27.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol44/iss1/27>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Nelsen, Harvey W. *Power and Insecurity: Beijing, Moscow and Washington: 1949-1988*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub. Inc., 1989. 165pp. \$25

Now that we are in the last decade of the twentieth century, with events in the international arena spinning out of control, and with historic and seemingly fixed national alignments changing like the winds, Harvey Nelsen's *Power and Insecurity* is a most welcome book. In 178 pages, Nelsen, a former U.S. government intelligence analyst and author of the *Chinese Military System*, attempts to explain the Sino-Soviet dispute in terms of national security parameters.

Starting out his work as a history of a bilateral relationship, Nelsen quickly found that "at every turn, U.S. policies intruded on my attempts to fathom Sino-Soviet bilateral relationships, thus the book became a triangular analysis." Examining this triangular relationship, Nelsen's analytical tool is the theme of "power and insecurity." Nelsen concludes that the key to understanding the Sino-Soviet relationship is neither ideology nor economics. It is, instead, a focus on national security interests and threat perceptions that drive the actions of these two nations and thus shape their relationship.

Since the publication of *Power and Insecurity*, domestic events in both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have moved dramatically. Given these events, however, Nelsen might have drawn

different conclusions concerning the roles that ideology and economics play in forming the external relationships of the two nations.

Rather than being minor factors, as Nelsen contends, ideology and economics define the national security interests of the Soviet Union and China. In the Soviet case, Mikhail Gorbachev has been driven by an economic situation that has become the most severe threat facing the Soviet Union today. For the Chinese government, the events of Tiananmen Square have led the communist party leadership to view the trend toward Western-style liberalization as an ideologically based threat to national security.

In both cases, it is domestic factors that constitute the basis for the threat to national security and thus the major force shaping the bilateral and triangular relationship.

Nevertheless, Nelsen provides a sound background from which we can better understand the dynamic Sino-Soviet relationship. In the potentially turbulent years ahead, it would do us all well to improve our understanding of the operation of one of the most important trilateral relationships in the world. In this sense, anyone interested in U.S. national security would profit from reading this book.

MICHAEL T. BYRNES
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
Naval War College