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Review of Daniel Mockli's "Strategic Trends 2012: Key Developments in Global Affairs

Bert Chapman

Purdue University, chapmanb@purdue.edu

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Strategic Trends 2012: Key Developments in Global Affairs. Daniel Möckli, ed.
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This is the third annual compendium of essays from this Swiss security studies research institute analyzing international strategic issues. The introductory thematic essay seeks to present how international security trends are moving the world from a multipolar direction to a polycentric focus. This same introduction also contends that global leadership to resolve international political and security problems is lacking and that this will cause political fragmentation and polarization to continue. A result of this fragmentation and polarization is that this will produce international economic, societal, structural, and technological interdependencies framing state behavior and international relations and consequently limiting the extent to which these divergences will produce non-governance and large-scale confrontation in a globalized world. Consequently, in the words of one author, these divergences: “explain why geopolitics is a much more complex phenomenon today than at any time before”[1].

These security divergences are elaborated on in five individually-authored essays addressing China’s increasing international assertiveness, Europe’s strategic weakness stemming from its debt and structural financial problems, sub-

Saharan African conflict, energy's changing geopolitics due to the rise of unconventional energy sources, and the militarization of cybersecurity.

The China essay, written by Prem Mahadevan, stresses how Chinese economic growth has helped enhance its military power. Key questions stemming from this development include whether or not China's geopolitical rise will be peaceful, whether Chinese growth can be sustained as western demand for Chinese products and services declines, whether China can maintain domestic political cohesion, to what extent increasing nationalism within China will affect its geopolitical stature in the Asia-Pacific region, and how the U.S. might respond an increasingly assertive China.

Mahadevan contends that China sees itself as a power reclaiming its traditional importance in the international geopolitical order prior to its 19th century decline as a result of its internal factionalism exploited by assertive western powers such as the United Kingdom[2]. He mentions that the size of China's economy tripled between 2001-2008 and that there is significant concern within China that this economic growth could slow after 2012 to which Beijing has responded by increasing interest rates and deflating a real estate bubble engendered by prolonged speculative investment[3].

This chapter also stresses how restrictions on rural to urban migration have produced a two-tiered class system impeding social mobility with rural workers receiving lower incomes 3.5 times less than their urban counterparts which has produced protests and violence over illegal land acquisition. It goes on to emphasize that Sino-African trade has increased over 1,000% in the last decade and China's willingness to enter into trade agreements with countries regardless of their domestic political and economic institutions. China also seeks to promote noninterference in other country's internal affairs as demonstrated by its veto of a February 2012 UN Security Council resolution on Syria and in 2011 its national police budget became larger than the national defense budget producing a greater emphasis on internal security in tension-filled areas such as Xinjiang province and Tibet[4].

Chinese assertiveness is also demonstrated by its defense budget increasing at an annual inflation adjusted-rate of 12% between 2001-2011. This enhanced military assertiveness is also demonstrated by China learning from U.S. military operations in the Middle East that it cannot hope to win a head on military confrontation with the U.S., but instead seeks to target the U.S. where it is most vulnerable in intelligence and logistics by denying sea-borne U.S. forces access to operational bases near China, targeting US ships with ballistic missiles, and using

cyber measures and anti-satellite systems to disrupt U.S. command and control systems[5].

Mahadevan correctly concludes that China's government has not adopted its policies to accept secondary status in the world system, that it is unlikely to develop the requisite diplomatic, economic, and military strength to rival the U.S, and that if China's strategic community is unable to accept limits on China's strategic ascension it could produce a military miscalculation and confrontation with the U.S[6].

The decline of the European Union (EU) due to its acute debt and structural financial problems is discussed in the second chapter. EU's economic problems include an 10% unemployment rate in early 2012, drastic reductions in defense spending limiting the power projection ability of EU countries, and debt-to-GDP ratios exceeding 80% by 2012 and surpassing 100% in Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal along with only thirteen of the 27 member EU states having debt to GDP ratios of below 60%[7].

These high levels of debt have caused considerable political and economic turmoil in EU countries with many having to implement tough austerity measures including government spending cuts and tax increases which have produced violent unrest in the streets and produced changes in government in countries as

diverse as France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. It has also resulted in EU financial support bailout packages for these countries totaling \$ 1.302 trillion as of early 2012[8]. This crisis has also increased Germany's economic and political influence within Europe, caused increased public disillusionment with the highly centralized nature of EU economic and policy decision-making, placed the Euro's long-term viability in question, caused many to question the EU's long-term sustainability, increased divisions between more affluent northern and less affluent southern EU members, and is increasing concern in many countries over the loss of national sovereignty due to the EU's apparent inability to resolve these fiscal crises.

These events may increase Chinese economic investment and political influence in Europe and chapter author Daniel Möckli is right to hypothesize that internal crisis management is likely to dominate EU policymaking for the foreseeable future. However, his analysis could be strengthened by addressing topics such as Europe's aging population and declining population growth, the problems posed by its growing Islamic population and efforts to successfully assimilate that population into European cultural, economic, and political norms during an era of protracted economic strain, Europe's dangerous dependence on Russian energy supplies, and a popular mindset that governmental largesse,

instead of individual initiative and responsibility, should provide for national and personal economic needs.

In her chapter on African instability, An Jacobs stresses positive trends in this continent's developments such as some democratization and economic growth but also emphasizes ongoing negative trends such as severe conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa based on ethnic and religious differences and conflict over natural resources. Regions experiencing persistent conflict include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and adjacent territories, and Sudan and newly independent South Sudan.

Some of these conflicts feature indigenous disputes within these countries while others feature transnational groups such as Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army whose area of operations encompasses the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Uganda. External economic investment in Africa by the BRIC powers (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) is also a mixed blessing as it brings foreign capital into these countries to facilitate some economic development. However, much of this development is focused on mineral resource extraction with individuals and governments in these countries believing that such investment is more concerned with promoting BRIC countries increased demand for natural resources instead of promoting sustainable development within these countries. This concern was

partially reflected in Zambia's 2011 presidential election as the victorious candidate Michael Sata campaigned on an anti-Chinese platform expressing concern that Chinese investment was exploiting Zambian resources and workers instead of enhancing national development[9].

The persistent role of corruption by African political elites is also addressed as is the influence of natural resources such as coltan (a rare earth metal critical in electronic device development) with 80% of global coltan/tantalum reserves being in the Democratic Republic of Congo[10]. Additional examples of ethno-religious conflict include the African vs. Arab confrontation in Sudan's Darfur region, Sudanese support for Islamist uprisings in Eritrea, Somalia, and Uganda, and the influence of the Islamist Al-Shaabab in Somalia. The role of maritime piracy in areas as far-flung as the Gulf of Aden, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Seychelles Islands is also examined.

Jacobs rightly stresses positive developments such as multilateral African efforts to deploy peacekeeping forces AMISOM to Somalia, the continuing contradictory Chinese emphasis on trade promotion and resource extraction without caring about domestic political or human rights conditions in African countries, and ultimately stressing that only a miniscule amount of Chinese investment improves the average lives of Africans. Her analysis could be

strengthened further by discussing the rise of the dangerous Islamist Boko Haram movement in Nigeria and how to resolve the problems caused by the Mugabe regime in thwarting Zimbabwean economic and political development.

In his energy chapter, Jonas Grätz believes the emergence of unconventional oil and gas signifies a break with established energy supply trends. He goes on to contend that the geographic locations of these unconventional resources (e.g. Australia, Brazil, Canada, Congo, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine) enhances supply diversity instead of concentration. Additional attributes of this supply diversity is that production of these commodities is driven more by economics than politics and that it will enhance consumer choice in global energy geopolitics.

This section goes on to mention that oil demand grew by an average of 1.4% annually over the past decade with much of this growth coming from Asia and that 2011 was OPEC's best year ever for revenue despite Iranian and Libyan political tensions. It goes on to mention that governmental investment constraints are a key cause of high oil prices, that existing oil reserves will meet global demand for over 40 years, that access to investment opportunities is restricted by many oil exporting countries, that national oil companies of these countries hold nearly 88% of conventional reserves and do not have the incentives and financial support to upgrade their infrastructure, and that

investment risk in petroleum industries has increased due to high and volatile taxes and domestic resource nationalism[11].

Canada and Venezuela are major sources of unconventional oil with oil sands and extra-heavy oil reserves respectively in these countries. U.S. oil production could increase drastically if federal restrictions were eased on drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and other federal lands and waters. Liquefied natural gas and shale gas reserves remain untapped in many countries and environmental concerns such as fracking will have to be resolved before these resources can be optimally accessed.

China is likely to continue increasing its oil imports from the Middle East and Africa and will have to transport these and other commodities from and through volatile areas such as the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca. China is gradually increasing its naval power projection capability to provide security for this traffic and is also looking at Canada as a possible oil supplier in order to counteract Russian energy geopolitical aspirations in northeast Asia.

Large-scale potential U.S. exploitation of domestic natural gas resources such as the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania and environs and the Bakken Oil range in North Dakota and environs will increase U.S. clout in international energy markets

and may have already resulted in annual U.S. oil imports accounting for only 45% of consumption in 2011[12].

There are more sound than unsound observations in this chapter. An example of a poor assessment is the author's claim (p. 96) that the Obama Administration decision to reject the Keystone XL Pipeline link to the Canadian oil sands may be a wise geopolitical strategy. In reality, this only exacerbates U.S. dependence on unreliable foreign oil sources. Grätz is also wise to mention the troubling dependence of many European countries on Russian oil and natural gas, their lack of military capabilities to uphold global energy markets, their acute dependence on US willingness and ability to provide access to these markets, Germany and the United Kingdom's fixation on decarbonization and renewable energy and Germany's abysmal decision to jettison nuclear power, which he contrasts unfavorably with Poland's efforts to prioritize supply security and economic competitiveness.

The last chapter on the militarization of cyber security by Miriam Dunn Cavelty is the weakest one in this collection. Its strengths include listings of various national cyber security policy documents, descriptions of various kinds of cyber conflict such as cyber terrorism and cyber crime, and definitions of types of cyber malware and attack nodes including spyware and Trojan horse. Unfortunately,

the author is a proponent of “critical security studies” and claims that U.S. policymakers have politicized this issue. She goes on to audaciously claim that there is no identifiable enemy threatening U.S. governmental, military and commercial cyber networks[13]. Additional claims in this chapter include alleging that cyber security “discourse” is American in origin without recognizing that it is a global phenomenon, and that it primarily affects businesses without affecting military or government systems. This appallingly smug European coffee shop naivete, unfortunately, fails to reflect the vast volumes of data and analysis demonstrating the acute threats U.S. and other western governments and militaries face from state-sponsored information warfare from countries such as China and Russia and non-state cyber security threats from self-appointed hacktivist groups like Anonymous and Wikileaks. It also fails to consider the extensive financial resources and human capital these governments and military invest in to adapt to and seek to counter these continually evolving threats[14].

Despite the extensive flaws in the concluding chapter, the other chapters in this annual compendium contain insights that making this an informative and, occasionally, enlightening analysis of current and emerging international geopolitical trends and developments.

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Professor Bert Chapman
Government Information, Political Science, and Economic Librarian
Purdue University
chapmanb@purdue.edu