

***The United States in Asia.* By Robert G. Sutter. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. Softcover: 303pp.**

The ongoing debate over America's leadership role in Asia has been heated since the end of the Bush administration. Robert G. Sutter's book makes three important contributions to this debate. First, he evaluates the history of US relations with Asia; second, he examines US policy priorities towards major Asian countries; and third, he identifies the international strategies of Asian governments and their objectives and expectations regarding their relations with the United States. By connecting the past with the present, and comparing and contrasting the perspectives and policy choices of the United States and Asian countries, Sutter contextualizes America's prominent role in the complex and rapidly evolving economic, political and security environment of the Asia-Pacific region. In doing so, Sutter directly challenges the view that US leadership in the region is in decline.

The book can be divided into four main parts. The first part (Chapter 1) establishes US policy objectives in Asia. Sutter convincingly argues that over the course of more than 200 years of engagement with Asia, the United States has pursued three longstanding goals, namely (i) maintaining a balance of power favourable to it, (ii) promoting US economic interests, and (iii) spreading American values. Every administration, however, has prioritized these three objectives differently.

The second part (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) analyses current US interests and concerns in Asia. Using a priority list, Sutter puts China and the Korean Peninsula at the top, followed by Japan and then Southeast Asia. Sutter skillfully and meticulously frames US policy choices towards these countries with reference to the discourse between governmental and non-governmental actors in the United States. This approach enables the author to capture the influence of domestic politics in US policy towards Asia and how Washington's policy choices are often governed by domestic political and economic interests rather than in reaction to regional trends or changes in the policies of Asian governments.

In the third part (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8), Sutter goes on to identify the determinants of Asian governments' policy calculations towards America as well as their priorities and concerns. The author draws attention to the interesting contradiction between the attention that countries in the region devote to US economic, political and security policies and objectives — which are considered the main

factors regional policy-makers must take account of — and the fact that these policies and objectives constitute something of a riddle for outsiders to understand. This situation creates intense uncertainties for Asian governments. Sutter attempts to get beyond these uncertainties with a detailed examination of Asian countries' objectives and concerns. His analysis not only sheds light on what regional governments really want, but also confirms his findings on the divergence between US policies and the realities of the region. While acknowledging recent difficulties the United States has to face in Asia — which is at the root of the widely held view that the United States is in decline — Sutter, however, claims that Washington's long established leadership role in the region has not been fundamentally undermined. In the last part (Chapters 9 and 10), Sutter supports this contention by marshalling three main arguments. First, today America's difficulties are not as serious as in the past, such as during the post-Vietnam war period. Second, he posits that current trends in Asia will actually help sustain US leadership. For one thing, the policy calculations of regional governments, including China, must take the United States into account. Third, he compares advantages and challenges of the United States to those of China and comes to the conclusion that the regional configuration reinforces US primacy.

Based on this optimistic view, Sutter repeatedly soothes the pessimism about America's declining role in the Asia Pacific. Claiming that foreign policies made out of such perception would certainly be counterproductive, Sutter points to the importance of the US acting in a calm and deliberate manner. He criticizes the Bush administration's unilateralism, which he considers the main cause of the US frictions with the Asia Pacific. Thus, he makes several recommendations for the United States to promote and protect its interests. For instance, he calls for a consultative and accommodating approach which is more responsive to the interests of Asian countries.

The United States in Asia is a carefully researched and crafted book that provides readers with a balanced view of the US role in the region. Sutter writes in a compact and highly informative manner, though sometimes the reader can feel lost in the mountain of information and events. All in all, the book is useful for readers with an interest in empirical facts of US-Asia relations and students of international relations in the Asia Pacific.

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