

***Great Powers, Grand Strategies: The New Game in the South China Sea.* Edited by Anders Corr. Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 2018. Hardcover: 328pp.**

The South China Sea has been at the forefront of Asian geopolitics since China constructed seven artificial islands in the Spratly Islands in 2013–16. China’s terraforming caused a great deal of alarm not only among the other claimants but also rival Great Powers. As such, it is important to explore how the South China Sea dispute is being defined by Great Power politics. In that context, Anders Corr’s edited volume, *Great Powers, Grand Strategies: The New Game in the South China Sea*, represents a timely contribution to the topic. The book is a collection of studies that examine the grand strategies of the Great Powers as well as key bloc actors such as ASEAN and the European Union.

China inevitably figures prominently in the book. In addition to Corr’s introductory chapter, three chapters, by Bill Hayton, Ian Forsyth and James E. Fanell, examine China’s strategic motives in the South China Sea. Two chapters, by Sean R. Liedman and Tonfi Kim, focus on US strategies in response to Beijing’s ambitions in the South China Sea. In addition, there are three other chapters each devoted to Japan (by Takashi Inoguchi and Ankit Panda), India (by Gordon G. Chang) and Russia (by Stephen Blank). Finally, two chapters, by Leszek Buszynski and Peter M. Solomon respectively, analyse the South China Sea strategies of ASEAN and the European Union. Bernard D. Cole, a long time observer of Asian naval affairs, provides an excellent concluding chapter.

All the chapters in the book provide important insights into the South China Sea policies and strategies of the Great Powers, as well as those of ASEAN and the EU. They are rich in empirical research and sophisticated in their analysis. In short, this book constitutes an important contribution to the understanding of Great Power politics and rivalry in the South China Sea.

However, the book could have approached the issue of grand strategy more systematically. The volume does not contain a thematic chapter that lays out an analytical or theoretical framework which employs the grand strategy perspective. As a result, the various chapters do not benefit from a unifying or well-defined grand strategy concept to inform their individual cases. In fact, few chapters even attempt to consciously employ a grand strategy framework to make sense of the countries under study.

The book would have benefited from employing the realist school of International Relations to explain the motives and preferences of the Great Powers and thereby their grand strategies. For example, offensive realism suggests that due to the anarchic international order, Great Powers seek to establish spheres of influences within their own regions to gain security. Indeed, the quest for regional spheres of influences, followed by global primacy, informs the grand strategies of the Great Powers. Another theory which sheds light on the motivations behind the grand strategies of the Great Powers is the power transition theory which emphasizes the long-term revisionist motives of rising powers and their inevitable conflicts with status quo powers which try to defend their positions and spheres of influences. Here, grand strategies involve contests over power, status and influences. Finally, defensive realism tends to emphasize the role of the security dilemma in the shaping of Great Power strategies. Due to the anarchic nature of the international order, states tend to exaggerate each other's malign intentions. They therefore use internal and external means to balance against other major powers which are perceived as posing threats to their security. This leads Great Powers to try to maintain the balance of power.

These International Relations theories could have provided the book with a more robust framework for understanding the strategies of the Great Powers in the South China Sea. Indeed, current Great Power rivalries in the South China Sea largely reflect the dynamics prescribed by offensive realism, power transition theory and defensive realism. We can interpret current geopolitical rivalry in the South China Sea either as an outcome of competition between the Great Powers over spheres of influence, or as an outcome of the security dilemma and the resulting balancing/counter balancing caused by the Great Powers' mutual fear of each other, or a combination of both.

A conceptual or analytical framework which is informed by International Relations theory would have yielded a clearer picture of the "grand strategy issue" that the book seeks to tackle. Without this framework, the various chapters in the book often fall back on a diverse range of ad hoc factors to make sense of the "grand strategy" of a particular Great Power towards the South China Sea. This ad hoc nature of analyses contradicts the grand strategy approach, which by definition implies some kind of strategically unified preferences of the Great Powers in question.

For example, in the chapters on China, the authors emphasize how a diverse range of domestic level factors, such as nationalism, bureaucratic politics, ideas of historical rights and contingent reactions to another claimant party, affect China's policy in the South China Sea. What is lacking in the analyses is the strategic logic of China's rise and the implications for the South China Sea. As a result, readers are left with the question: What exactly is China's grand strategy for the South China Sea?

However, the absence of a conceptually coherent and theoretically informed "grand strategy approach" should not obscure the book's contributions to the ever-expanding literature on the South China Sea. The chapters, individually and together, allow the reader to gain a comprehensive picture of Great Power politics in the South China Sea. Readers will gain insights into the strategic calculations of all the Great Power actors who have strategic interests in the South China Sea, including China, the United States, Japan, India and Russia.

ZHANG BAOHUI is Professor of Political Science and Director of Centre for Asian Pacific Studies at Lingnan University. Postal address: Department of Political Science, Lingnan University, Hong Kong; email: bzhang@ln.edu.hk.