

BOOK REVIEWS

***Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances.* By Mira Rapp-Hooper. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020. Hardcover: 272pp.**

The debate over Donald Trump's foreign policy legacy may not be settled for decades to come, but it is hard to dismiss the notion that few presidents in American history have been as openly critical of Washington's global network of alliances—or done as much to refocus public and academic discussion about the role of alliances in US national security strategy—as President Trump.

Taking aim at Trump's anti-alliance rhetoric and policies while casting a wider aperture in her analysis of America's history of alliances, Mira Rapp-Hooper reveals how alliances have always been controversial, poorly understood and politicized, with the burden-sharing debate that Trump has reignited being far from new (p. 78). Rapp-Hooper argues that everyday voters and scholars each bear some of the blame for the general scepticism surrounding alliances (pp. 2–3). She sets out to correct the anti-alliance narrative by identifying the ultimate value of alliances in preventing the emergence of rival spheres of influence that she asserts will take hold in places where and if the US alliance system erodes. To buttress her argument, Rapp-Hooper presents a scrupulous cost-benefit analysis of America's alliances. Drawing on counterfactuals, she demonstrates that alliances have rarely backfired on US national security policymakers and are indeed cheaper than the alternative of ad-hoc decision-making.

Coursing through the book is the tension between the utility which Rapp-Hooper ascribes to America's alliances and the simultaneous need for their renewal or revitalization. For instance, while Rapp-Hooper recognizes that Washington has retained and repurposed

its alliances since the end of the Cold War, she also argues that policymakers today need a new alliance logic (p. 5). Additionally, she maintains that alliances are invaluable for US national security, yet are inadequate to meet the contemporary challenges of revanchist threats from a rising China and a declining Russia (p. 12). Ultimately this tension is somewhat unresolved, but readers will likely find Rapp-Hooper's defence of alliances' utility persuasive, even if they need updating to meet the circumstances of the twenty-first century. American alliances may have been rudderless and lacking in purpose without a clear enemy since the end of the Cold War, but if the strategic challenge posed by China becomes clearer to Americans and Southeast Asian states (as seems to be occurring), this development may revitalize those alliances as a result (p. 114).

Rapp-Hooper suggests that the biggest threat China poses is not to the American homeland or territorial security per se, but rather the prospect of a Chinese sphere of influence which excludes US access in the Pacific (p. 181). In defending alliances around the logic of preventing rival hegemony from constructing their respective spheres of influence, however, Rapp-Hooper may have fallen into a false binary between alliances and spheres of influence (p. 196). In reality, we may see increased hedging by uncertain allies and partners (p. 146), which could lead to a sort of hybrid order featuring the simultaneous prevalence of rival spheres of influence amid weakening US alliances. In fact, there are already signs of such a hybrid order emerging. The Philippines and Thailand, America's two treaty allies in Southeast Asia, have aligned more closely with Beijing in recent years, partly due to estrangement from Washington arising from growing illiberalism in both countries as well as economic and strategic pragmatism on the part of Manila and Bangkok. Thailand does not regard China as a security threat and sees enormous economic advantages to cooperation, while Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has solicited Chinese investment and downplayed the South China Sea dispute. The lack of consensus among Southeast Asian states regarding China and the threat it poses to their security undermines the ability of small and middle regional powers to prevent the creation of a Chinese sphere of influence. The illiberal nature of various US allies and partners in Southeast Asia further complicates Washington's efforts to forge a coalition to resist Chinese coercion and promote a rules-based regional order that emphasizes liberal or democratic values. It seems more likely that Southeast Asia will exhibit democratic regression and increasingly reflect some of the illiberal aspects of Beijing's governance model,

despite the region's continued reliance on the United States and other external powers like Japan and India to balance against the security threats arising from expanding Chinese power.

Rapp-Hooper pushes back on the narrative of a "new Cold War" that has dominated recent debates by carefully distinguishing the threat that revisionist China and Russia pose today from the past challenges the United States faced in the Cold War (p. 181). However, as her book makes abundantly clear, American national security decision-making and its efforts to shore up the alliance system must be informed by a robust understanding of US alliances grounded in historical analysis.

In some ways, the present challenges to America call for a "back-to-basics" approach, with a renewed emphasis on deterrence (p. 180) and restoring US credibility. As Rapp-Hooper explains, more effective alliance coordination and deterrence need not come at a higher cost and may actually be less expensive than a strategy based on reactionary ad-hoc decision-making. Indeed, Rapp-Hooper argues that much of the expenditure to deal with today's challenges will not be spent directly on the military (p. 190). There are more nuanced ways in which Washington can wield global power, as President Joe Biden's selection of John Kerry as his administration's climate envoy suggests. Rapp-Hooper also offers sound policy recommendations, such as clarifying Washington's redlines on cyberspace and re-joining the modified Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade deal (p. 182). Rapp-Hooper manages to package a robust argument and rich historical overview of alliances into less than 200 pages, making this book a strong contribution to the debate on the future of US alliances.

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