



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY



INFORMATION SERIES

SURVEYING THE LITERATURE: RECENT BOOKS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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Issue No. 460

June 8, 2020

This is the first of a new quarterly series of reviews focusing on recently published books dealing with topical and noteworthy national security issues. Authors and publishers interested in submitting their books on national security for review may contact the Editor at informationseries@nipp.org.

Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 304 pp.

Reviewed By: Michaela Dodge
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“Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others,” a saying (mis)attributed to Winston Churchill goes. In *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China*, Professor Matthew Kroenig sets to prove the adage right—at least as far as a democratic type of government’s propensity to compete with autocracies in the long run. Whether



democracies can outperform autocracies is a particularly relevant question given the current U.S. debates regarding the return of great power competition (between the United States and China, and to a lesser extent Russia).

Professor Kroenig draws on an extensive review of contemporary political science and historical literature on the topic of democracies, authoritarian regimes, and factors that impact their long-term competitiveness. He supplements his research with a series of well-written case studies illustrating the democratic advantage in history. He examines ancient competitions between Athens and Sparta and later Persia; the Roman Republic's struggle against Carthage and Macedon; the Venetian Republic's rise to prominence among bitter competitions with the Byzantine Empire and the Duchy of Milan; and the Dutch Republic's victorious wars against the Spanish Empire. The examination of more recent competitions includes competition between Great Britain and France and the United Kingdom and Germany. Lastly, Kroenig draws on lessons learned from the most recent great power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Time and again Kroenig empirically demonstrates that democracies fare better at long-term competitions than their more closed and authoritarian adversaries. Even when two relatively "open" systems clash, like for example Rome and Carthage or the United States and the Great Britain, the more "open" regimes outperform the more closed ones. Kroenig argues that this is because of strengths inherent in "open" systems' institutions that allow them to benefit from human ingenuity without unduly suppressing it like in autocracies. Consequentially, democracies are more likely to sustain high rates of economic growth for longer periods of time, are more likely to innovate, and to become global financial centers. Their economic strength and innovation underpin their military might and their open institutions and credibility make it easier to forge international alliances that serve as force multipliers in long-term competitions with adversaries.

In contrast, neither Russia nor China care to support centers of economic power independent of the personas of their respective rulers. In fact, they actively squash anything that might look like a challenge to the ruling class. This exacerbates inefficiencies, stymies innovation, and creates opportunities for corruption – at a cost of decreasing their abilities to compete in the long run. They also spend much more on their domestic security apparatus to suppress political dissent than on international power projection capabilities.



Professor Kroenig also shows that democracies can beat authoritarian regimes on turfs traditionally considered their advantage: they are capable of implementing long-term strategic policies (think U.S. policy of containment during the Cold War) and are able to focus and mobilize significant resources in a pursuit of a concrete goal (think the Manhattan Project to build nuclear weapons during World War II).

Even the often criticized “messiness” of a democratic decision-making process appears to work to democracies’ advantage over the long run because it seems to protect them from major policy blunders, including in foreign policy (like invading Russia in winter). “Intense domestic political fights and polarization are not evidence that American democracy has failed; rather, they are proof that the system is working,” argues Kroenig (p. 199). In 1787 after the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked whether the type of government created was to be a monarchy or a republic. Franklin responded, “A republic, if you can keep it.” Professor Kroenig’s outstanding scholarship reveals further the profound genius of the framers of the American Constitution and the enduring benefit of the system they established. Despite challenges inherent in maintaining democratic institutions, the opportunity for a bright future is open for the United States of America. That is just the read we all need right now.

Payne, Keith B., *Shadows on the Wall: Deterrence and Disarmament* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2020), 187 pp.

Reviewed By: Curtis McGiffin
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This review originally appeared in *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Published March 27, 2020, available at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/DesktopModules/ArticleCS/Print.aspx?PortalId=10&ModuleId=1738&Article=2128840>. Reprinted here with permission.

Shadows on the Wall: Deterrence and Disarmament is the latest installment of deterrence thought from Dr. Keith B. Payne and takes on the strategic nuclear deterrence policy debate from a unique perspective. This well-conceived and well-researched book reviews three competing philosophical viewpoints regarding expectations of human and state behavior vis-à-vis nuclear weapons and strategic deterrence within the



current international system. These competing narratives share the same goal of precluding nuclear war but envision very different routes – from nuclear disarmament to the preservation of robust nuclear capabilities. These are the philosophical foundations for the contending arguments in the U.S. nuclear policy debate. While Payne concludes as he begins, that “nuclear war must be prevented and deterrence remains a critical tool for this purpose,” his assessment of these three narratives can educate the reader using a framework and acumen to inform effective nuclear war prevention strategies.

Dr. Payne is cofounder of the National Institute for Public Policy and professor emeritus at Missouri State University. He contributed to the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* and authored, coauthored, or edited over 100 published articles and 17 books and monographs.

The central thesis of this book is an assessment of the contending philosophies or “narratives” underlying the U.S. nuclear policy debate from the 1960s to the present. This assessment is constructed around three narratives: a nuclear disarmament assertion reflecting idealist thought and two very different deterrence approaches that share some initial points of realist thought. Payne labels these latter two narratives “easy” deterrence and “difficult” deterrence.

First, Payne delivers perhaps the most efficacious and contextual understanding of realism and idealism as they pertain to competing world views and national priorities. These philosophies are informed by varying conjectural expectations of human and state behavior within the contemporary international system. He reminds us that for realists, the enduring interstate system is an anarchic “self-help” world that involves competition and the potential for aggression and conflict. Conversely, Payne reviews the idealist’s anticipation of a cooperative global world order and goal of transforming the international system into one that facilitates and enforces peaceful resolutions of interstate conflict. These two divergent perspectives of the world form the context for his elegant presentation.

Next, Payne deconstructs the idealist’s goal of international transformation and nuclear disarmament as the means to remove the omnicidal risk of nuclear war. The belief is that the current international order can be transformed via a rigorous, mutually complaisant effort so compelling that individual states willingly surrender their nuclear arsenals in favor of “alternative global security mechanisms.” Payne surmises



that to a nuclear idealist, the continued existence of nuclear arsenals poses a greater risk to global security than would their voluntary retirement, and a policy of nuclear deterrence is “an impediment to disarmament because it suggests a positive and important value for nuclear weapons.” Unfortunately, Payne opines that international transformation and disarmament demand a preceding level of enlightenment, mutual trust, and cooperation that has not been seen in the history of mankind and generally is not deemed plausible by realists.

Payne then presents two alternatives to the idealist nuclear disarmament narrative. Couched as “easy” deterrence and “difficult” deterrence, Payne’s bifurcated expressions of nuclear deterrence have common realist starting points but diverge from there. His assessment of these competing alternatives offers the reader a cogent understanding of deterrence that rivals the Kahn-versus-Schelling principles. Since international cooperation cannot be expected and “the world lacks an overarching authority with sufficient power to regulate interstate behavior reliably and predictably,” nation-states must act in their own national interests, sovereignty, and security. Consequently, states are “on their own” to pursue sufficient power to ensure their own existence and purpose. In the realist’s worldview, nation-states generally act in their own survival interest first and foremost. For the realist, “nuclear weapons are a symptom of the enduring realities” of today’s international system, according to Payne. His narratives of “easy” versus “difficult” deterrence provide a splendid framework by which to consume this expert’s rationale.

Under “easy” deterrence, Payne posits that the “essential requirements for stable mutual deterrence are easy to understand, easy to meet, and are largely predictable and reliable.” This narrative, derived from the works of Schelling and Waltz, relies on rational or “sensible” adversaries, “crystal ball” effects, and relatively modest second-strike nuclear capabilities. The key is an obviously easy mental transaction based on mutual fear of intolerable catastrophe or existential destruction. However, Payne carries this deterrence narrative into a clarity that any layman can comprehend. For the modern idealist, the disarmament narrative envisions the fear of nuclear war as a catalyst to enable global disarmament and enlightened transformation. Contrastingly, the “easy” narrative envisages the fear of nuclear war as a reliable means for minimizing the potential of actual nuclear war. These are two very different routes to the same goal of precluding nuclear war.



“Difficult” deterrence, Payne theorizes, shares the goal of precluding nuclear war but acknowledges that deterrence is a never-ending and messy pursuit of peace and stability, devoid of standard formulas or fully predictable behavior. Unlike “easy” deterrence, “difficult” deterrence does not assume all rational adversaries would behave in a foreseeable manner or necessarily calculate the costs and benefits of war akin to American values. Payne clearly describes “difficult” deterrence as an ongoing, complex challenge “with no fixed approach and no corresponding finite and fixed set of nuclear capabilities that can predictably provide the desired deterrent effects.” Moreover, he states, to think otherwise would be a “fatal error.” Thus, the lesson of this narrative is that deterrence strategies must be “tailored” to each adversary and account for each opponent’s characteristics, values, and goals – an effort made difficult because it is imprecise and ever-changing.

Of the three narratives explored, idealism and “easy” deterrence offer society much greater comfort and perhaps a false sense of stability and security. Idealism projects a new and more peaceful world order without nuclear weapons while “easy” deterrence expects deterrence to preclude nuclear conflict without the need to transform the international order. Payne’s clear-eyed assessment questions both the idealist solution of a timely, profound transformation of the international system and the “easy” deterrence expectation that all sensible leaders will respond with predictable caution if confronted with a nuclear deterrent threat to their societies. He adds, however, that the “difficult” deterrence narrative offers little comfort or ease; it alone confronts the two apparent realities that the timely, global, and cooperative transformation necessary for disarmament is unlikely and that effective deterrence ultimately is far from easy “because leadership decision-making is variable and unpredictable.” Payne concludes that this is the challenge that must continually be met because “nuclear war must be prevented and national security preserved.”

This book is a must-read for those serving in the nuclear enterprise or those interested in international relations. Dr. Payne’s 187-page disquisition presents the most cogent review of today’s competing nuclear narratives, and his conclusions provide a new framework by which to devise a strategy to achieve a stabilizing deterrence effect.



Fred Fleitz (ed.), *Growing Challenges for America's Nuclear Arsenal* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Security Policy Press, 2020), 113 pages.

Reviewed by: C. Dale Walton
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Future historians likely will treat the Covid-19 crisis as the definitive end of the Post-Cold War Era, marking it off as an era of approximately thirty years, which, in turn, can be sub-divided into two periods – the early years from 1989 or 1991 (depending on one's preferred date for the end of the Cold War) to 11 September 2001, and the years thereafter. The former was a period of U.S. triumphalism, and the latter largely of disappointment, but both now are past. The Post-Cold War global order was already crumbling long before the present crisis – feeding off, and feeding, the many U.S. strategic frustrations of the last two decades in a seemingly unending loop – but Covid-19 definitively demolished it.

The publication of *Growing Challenges for America's Nuclear Deterrence* thus is extremely timely. This short collection of essays, edited by Fred Fleitz, the president and CEO of the Center for Security Policy (CSP) – and, recently, the chief of staff for then-National Security Advisor John Bolton – brings together a number of experts to address current U.S. nuclear strategy and prospects for the future. The volume also contains a November 2000 short issue brief by Frank Gaffney, the founder of the CSP, providing advice to the soon-to-take-office George W. Bush Administration. The inclusion of this two-decade old brief is useful, as it illustrates how sluggish the discussion of U.S. nuclear policy has been in recent decades; the uncertainties that Gaffney addresses concerning the long-term reliability of the U.S. nuclear stockpile not only are unresolved, but are far more pronounced than when the brief was written.

The chapters in *Growing Challenges* address a variety of issues relevant to the future of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Fleitz provides both an introduction and a chapter on the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, while Michela Dodge's chapter focuses on the nuclear triad. Matthew Kroenig's chapter, "Myths of US Nuclear Weapons Policy," as its title indicates, addresses common misperceptions related to nuclear matters. John C. Hopkins argues for the resumption of U.S. nuclear testing, and provides a basic outline for doing so. Peter Huessy's chapter, "An Overview of Foreign Nuclear Weapons Programs," is the longest in the book, with particular attention paid to the Russian arsenal. Robert Joseph and Eric Edelman write about the difficulties of concluding arms



control treaties that are beneficial to U.S. national security, with a focus on New START and the future of U.S.-Russian arms control. Mark B. Schneider argues that low-yield nuclear weapons are a valuable deterrence tool, and Peter Vincent Pry makes the case that electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapons present an enormous potential threat to the United States.

Overall, *Growing Challenges* provides a quite valuable brief introduction to some of the most important questions related to U.S. nuclear decisionmaking. The work clearly is intended as an introduction or “refresher” for generalist policymakers and other readers who do not closely follow the development of debates over U.S. nuclear policy, and it serves this function well. It is not, and does not present itself as being, a carefully balanced presentation of views from across the policy spectrum. The views and recommendations in the book quite clearly lean toward a “hawkish” perspective in regard to nuclear policy.

To describe *Growing Challenges* as a hawkish book is, however, backward-looking in a critically important sense: in general, the authors’ recommendations certainly are assertive by the standards of the 2010s. They might, however, soon be perceived rather differently. That, in turn, speaks to the timeliness of the book and the need for serious debate on the issues raised in this volume. As this review is being written, the world is in general economic chaos—the collapse in energy prices alone virtually guarantees further pain and instability in many countries over the coming months and years. At the same time, Beijing appears to be on the cusp of seeking a definitive resolution to the “Hong Kong Question,” and a thousand other global problems threaten to spin out of control. The sooner the U.S. policymaking establishment truly begins to grapple with the strategic implications of the “Covid-19 Era”—an undertaking that must include serious discussion of the role of the U.S. nuclear arsenal going forward—the better.

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