



# LITERATURE REVIEW

**Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 432 pp.**

In a rare instance of bipartisan agreement among U.S. defense officials, the idea that a revisionist China should become the U.S. “pacing threat” has now reached something of a broad-based consensus in the field. Although many agree on the growth of the China threat, there is sizable disagreement among scholars on the question of what motivates China’s actions. Are China’s defense and foreign policies driven primarily by President Xi’s unique personality and ambitions? Is China simply reacting to its changing perceptions of the threat environment or is it proactively implementing a decades-long plan for regional, and ultimately, global hegemony? And given China’s de facto policy of secrecy, how can Western analysts know which theory is right?

Rush Doshi, now the Director for China at the National Security Council, enters this debate with his book *The Long Game*, which advances a deceptively simple thesis: Chinese leaders have unique attributes made manifest in how they rule, but they all generally act within the confines of long-established principles written in official Chinese Communist Party (CCP) documents and speeches. In short, CCP leaders believe what they write.

Readers attuned to the possibility of CCP propaganda or misinformation will (rightly) be wary of such an approach, but Doshi adequately addresses these concerns by noting that analysts should not place blind trust in CCP documents. Rather, what makes these CCP documents worth considering is both who made them and whether Chinese foreign policy tracks with what is stated. That is, if Chinese action matches the actions proposed in the documents, then the documents gain credibility as authoritative sources for Chinese thinking. Doshi also helpfully provides an appendix that clearly states his hierarchy of trustworthiness for Chinese-language sources.

The main research focus of *The Long Game* is on three periods in modern Chinese history that roughly correlate with changes in China’s general approach to foreign policy: 1989-2008 (the stage when China pursues a strategy of “blunting” U.S. power in Asia), 2009-2016 (the stage when China builds its power relative to the United States), and 2017 to the present and beyond (the stage where China expands its power and presence globally to displace the United States as the world’s superpower). Each section examines the domestic and foreign imperatives behind Chinese foreign policy – especially relating to the United States – for each era and documents a number of illustrative examples.

For instance, Doshi explains the relatively rapid deterioration in U.S.-Chinese relations from 1989-1991 through the lens of three major events: the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the Gulf War, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Each event dramatically altered China’s threat perceptions and immediately lead to changes in the way CCP leaders began discussing and writing about the United States. According to CCP leaders, even the most mild criticism from U.S. leaders about China’s bloody deeds in Tiananmen Square was evidence that the United States sought regime change in China. Even while successive U.S. presidents in the 1990s and 2000s welcomed a growing and prosperous China to the world economy, CCP



leaders saw a subversive U.S. strategy of “peaceful evolution” that would remove the Party’s control over the economy and Chinese citizens.

These persistent misperceptions in the U.S.-China relationship causes Doshi to be skeptical of the value of Western accommodationist efforts towards China. In essence, the United States cannot assure a China that does not want to, or cannot, be assured. As Doshi demonstrates, if China has a deep-seated grand strategy – built and reinforced since the time of Mao – to displace the United States first in Asia and then the world, then the United States must not continue from the assumption that it can change China’s intentions if it only finds the right combination of words and actions to demonstrate good intent.

Instead, Doshi calls for the United States to adopt asymmetric military means to counter China’s regional ambitions in the first island chain, mainly: anti-ship cruise missiles, long-range precision strike, mine warfare, and large-payload submarines. He also calls for re-invigorated U.S. efforts to push back on unfair or illegal Chinese practices in trade institutions. Interestingly, Doshi notes that exposing the corrupt ties between officials in China and other states where China is seeking to build facilities has limited those kind of projects in the past and could be a low cost way of frustrating some of China’s economic and political ambitions.

*The Long Game* is not without its flaws, but they are not fatal to the book’s thesis. For instance, Doshi writes at length about how China has co-opted or disabled a number of international economic institutions – which, while true, perhaps overstates the importance of some of the institutions for affecting state policies. More substantially, *The Long Game* demonstrates convincingly that China does indeed have a grand strategy that incorporates all the tools of state power to advance its aim of displacing the United States – but on what foundation is China building this grand strategy? That is, Doshi focuses heavily on China’s foreign and military strategies, but only lightly touches on the domestic base that provides the power to these strategies. Domestic political control is obviously central to the CCP’s grand strategy, but this relationship is left unexplored.

On a final note, although *The Long Game* was written and published just before the open-source revelations about China’s massive nuclear buildup, Doshi’s methodology could have fairly easily predicted it – making this work all the more credible. China’s nuclear history, with long periods of minimal growth in capabilities and numbers and then a sudden explosion of activity, finds a parallel in Doshi’s recounting of China’s acquisition of its first aircraft carrier. After creating a false cover story for its purchase, China towed the aging aircraft carrier from Ukraine all the way to China where it sat idle for years – with only minimal maintenance to keep it afloat. Then all of the sudden, when China decided it was time to stop hiding its capabilities and biding its time, it chose to modernize the old aircraft carrier, and indigenously produce three more in rapid succession. Nuclear experts and China watchers have been pondering the reason behind China’s rapid nuclear buildup, but Doshi’s logic provides a credible explanation: CCP leaders made a political decision that the era of “hide and bide” has passed, and expanded Chinese military capabilities will allow expanded – even global – Chinese political ambitions.

*The Long Game* makes a valuable contribution to the field by interpreting the often-impenetrable official CCP jargon and revealing China's grand strategy on a global scale – a fact that U.S. policymakers would do well recognize quickly and act upon accordingly.

*Reviewed by Matthew R. Costlow  
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**Dmitry Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics, and Strategy* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 255 pp.**

In his excellent work, Dmitry Adamsky traces the increasing role of Russia's Orthodox church in Russia's nuclear weapons complex and offers an insight into an area usually ignored by experts on Russia's nuclear doctrine and strategy. His contribution to the field is as innovative as it is invaluable.

After the Soviet Communists' attempt to uproot religion from Russian lives, the end of the Cold War presented an opportunity for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to obtain its pre-Soviet standing within Russian society. In this initially very difficult effort, the ROC obtained an unlikely supporter in Russia's nuclear weapons complex, demoralized and on the brink of a collapse in the mid-1990s. Adamsky distinguishes among three distinct parts in the process of the ROC's resurrection within the Russian military: the Genesis Decade (1991-2000); the Conversion Decade (2000-2010); and the Operationalization Decade (2010-2020). Each of them explores state-church relations, the nexus between faith and nuclear weapons, and strategic mythmaking. This approach makes it easy to follow the argument and understand it in a broader context rather than as an isolated phenomenon limited to Russia's nuclear forces.

During the Genesis Decade, the ROC positioned itself as an institution that could meet a void left by Communist ideology and provide confidence to the military, vilified by the Russians as one of the reasons for their economic woes. The process of the ROC's gaining increasing importance within the military started at the grass-roots level. The cooperation and clerical interest were deepest and most significant within the nuclear corps and nuclear industry. Both suffered massive problems related to brain drain, lack of funding, and dealt with a loss of status within Russian society. The ROC decided early on to affirm the importance of Russia's nuclear weapons not only to Russia's security, but also to keeping Russia's Orthodox character. The ROC shielded the nuclear complex from "political-social ostracism, lobbied for funding, supported it in overcoming value disorientation and a miserable social attitude, helped it to reinvent its self-identity, and injected new meaning into its professional life."

The ROC became more involved in foreign policy and national security issues during the Conversion Decade. It managed to obtain political support and became indispensable to

fostering national ideology promulgated by then-new President Vladimir Putin. As the author states, “nuclear weapons and Orthodoxy became major aspects of Russia’s greatness, both internally and externally.” As the nuclear complex recovered, it did not forget the ROC’s advocacy in the 1990s. Orthodox priests became more active and more embedded in day-to-day activities of Russia’s nuclear forces. Nuclear platforms were consecrated and renamed after Orthodox saints. President Putin renewed the institution of military clerics in 2009. The Russian nuclear Orthodoxy matured, with two dicta at its core: “to stay Orthodox, Russia should be a strong nuclear power,” and “to stay a strong nuclear power, Russia should be Orthodox.”

The Operationalization Decade saw further deepening of trends that started in the previous decade. Even as Russia’s foreign policy became more belligerent, the ROC continued to provide its support and blessing. The opposition to the West and its purported spiritual degradation became some of the leitmotifs of the Putin regime and were endorsed by the ROC. Patriotism and Orthodox faith became intertwined in the regime’s ideology and a part of the military ethos. Priests became involved in operational activities of Russia’s nuclear forces, including going on nuclear submarines and being embedded in operations abroad.

Besides highlighting an aspect of Russia’s nuclear forces that barely anyone paid attention to within the U.S. strategic community, Adamsky’s work is well executed from a technical standpoint. He relies on a variety of primary resources and in-person interviews. He marries all the rich data with his in-depth knowledge of nuclear deterrence and Russia’s strategic culture to produce a book that will become a standard for researchers exploring the nexus of national security and religion. And just like any truly valuable scholarly work, Adamsky’s book raises almost as many questions as it answers, in part because the story of the ROC’s influence within the Russian nuclear weapons complex continues to be written. What do these trends mean for deterrence? Do they translate into new opportunities to exploit a potential rivalry between Russian government structures and the ROC? What is the extent of the clergy’s influence on nuclear operations? These and other important questions deserve further study.

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***Wars of Ideas: Theology, Interpretation and Power in the Muslim World*, edited by Ilan Berman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 163 pp.**

Although the 20-year U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan has now ended, the threat to U.S. and Western civilization posed by radical Islamic extremism—exemplified most vividly by the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—has not. While the United States turns its attention to dealing with great power competitors like China and Russia, no one

should believe that the United States is now forever safe from those whose fundamentalist ideologies preach hatred against Western values and the principles for which the United States stands.

The nature of the ongoing struggle between Western values and the forces of religious intolerance represented by the global jihadist movement is the subject of Ilan Berman's new book, *Wars of Ideas: Theology, Interpretation and Power in the Muslim World*. The collection of essays by contributors sheds important light not only on the nature of this ongoing theological and ideological competition but provides a blueprint for countering the dangerous beliefs of its most fanatical adherents.

As Berman notes, despite the fact that "successive U.S. administrations have struggled to craft a cogent strategy" to counter the insidious pull of an ideology that is antithetical to the principles of freedom and democracy that are the hallmark of Western civilization, "the United States has stopped short of articulating the means and methods by which it might be possible to undermine and dilute that 'totalitarian vision'." Therefore, he argues that the United States "finds itself at an inherent disadvantage" in the war of ideas, "without standing to weigh in authoritatively on Islamic thought and ideology."

Berman, however, suggests a plausible way forward. He notes that "moderate nations" in the Muslim world have experience countering the radical narrative of jihadists and that the United States should work with them to learn their approaches and empower them as appropriate to help create a "potential antidote to the message and vision of today's Islamic radicals."

The experience of other Muslim countries is described in detail by various expert contributors to the book, who explain the evolution of Islamic radicalism and how it is being addressed in societies as diverse as Morocco, Indonesia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia. For example, Moroccan authorities have focused on broad-based political, security, socio-economic, and religious reforms as part of their efforts to counter violent Islamic extremism. In Indonesia, the outreach efforts of unofficial Muslim organizations, working in concert with government authorities, have helped dampen the attractiveness of radical and extremist elements within the Muslim community. And in the UAE, the government has utilized a "soft power" approach, relying on public diplomacy, preaching political and religious tolerance, engaging in international outreach, and investing in various activities that promote moderate and tolerant forms of Islam.

Although the 2017 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* and the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* both correctly highlighted the reemergence of great power competition, the implementation of these strategies has occasionally been portrayed as a binary "either/or" choice, often described as a "pivot": in other words, the United States can focus its efforts on the counterterrorism mission or on deterring potential aggression from great power competitors.

The ignominious U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is the poster child that has come to symbolize the transition away from the primacy of counterterrorism that has characterized the last two decades of American defense planning toward countering the growing foreign

policy assertiveness and military aggressiveness of China and Russia. Yet, Islamic extremism remains a potent threat, regardless of how much attention U.S. policy makers devote to it. Consequently, failing to construct a successful strategy to counter it would be a grave mistake. As Berman points out, “the U.S. counterterrorism mission is today increasingly at risk of being crowded out by other priorities,” noting that “Islamic extremism still poses a resilient, multifaceted threat—both to the United States and to its allies and international partners.” His advice to U.S. policy makers is sound: the United States must “learn from nations now on the front lines of this war of ideas,” and “engage, assist and empower those countries” to ensure success.

As Berman correctly concludes:

The Muslim World, after all, is hardly a monolith. Throughout the Middle East, Africa and Asia, one can find numerous examples of interpretations of Islam that are fundamentally different from the intolerant, exclusionary creed embraced and promulgated by the likes of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Amplifying those ideas and traditions—and diminishing those of Islamic extremists—is essential to reshaping the contours of the struggle now taking place within the Muslim faith.

*Wars of Ideas* is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand the enduring threat to Western civilization posed by Islamic extremism and how various Muslim states have sought to marginalize it. Berman has adroitly orchestrated a collection of scholarly essays—bookended with his own expert analysis—that dissects the historical, philosophical, cultural, and ideological underpinnings of the global jihadist movement with remarkable clarity. It is refreshingly substantive, analytically rigorous, and highly informative, avoiding the sweeping generalities that often masquerade as strategic insight. Berman’s book is also a warning to policy makers that the United States has yet to craft a counterterrorism strategy that effectively negates the menacing ideology of the global jihadist movement—as well as a call to work collaboratively with moderate Muslim states in this endeavor. Those responsible for American national security should take heed.

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