

BOOK REVIEW

China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations edited by Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-59114-693-3.

China's increasingly assertive—many would say aggressive—actions in the South China and East China Seas have captured the attention of the media and policy and academic communities. The most disconcerting aspect of those activities is that they have principally involved Chinese paranaval forces, with which the United States and its allies in the region have had little success confronting. This is an understudied topic and an urgent issue that must be addressed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson are faculty members of the China Maritime Studies Institute at the Naval War College and are experts on the Chinese navy and China's maritime activities. They are thus uniquely qualified and well-positioned to organize a conference of experts to discuss issues related to this topic. *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* is an outcome of such a conference.

Through the writings of 23 authors, this five-part edited volume presents this central thesis: China's maritime operations in the South China and East China Seas, which prominently feature paranaval forces, have confounded the United States and its allies in the region. In particular, America's allies are unable to successfully defend against Chinese paranaval forces.

One can draw many implications from this thesis. However, as indicated by the recommendations offered in the final section of the book, the authors agree on one in particular: China's operations in the "gray zone" must be confronted, and the United States must be willing to adopt a tougher stance against Chinese operations, including the use of US naval forces, if necessary. On this point, Michael Mazarr's analysis on how to deter Chinese actions deserves careful reading, because he outlines the deterrence possibilities and limitations for the United States and its allies. To support the volume's central thesis, the authors utilize the writings of Chinese naval and coast guard officers, government regulations, statements by senior Chinese officials, and real-life examples to explore the topic from the perspectives of history, strategy, doctrine, operations, and paranaval assets.

The product of this effort is a real contribution to our understanding of China's gray zone operations. In particular, the edited volume provides an excellent assessment of China's paranaval capabilities. In this respect, the chapters in Parts 2 and 3 of the volume are strongly recommended for their clear and in-depth treatment of the history, organization, operations, and assets of the China Coast Guard and the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia. In this manner, the authors are able to provide sound assessments of China's policy, institutional, and material advantages and limitations in conducting gray zone operations.

However, *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* is not without limitations. As is the case with all edited volumes, especially those derived from conferences, there are variations in the quality of the chapters. In this vein, three chapters require greater scrutiny. The chapters by Katsuya Yamamoto and Tomohisa Takei have unfortunately acquired a propagandistic tone, which might have been unavoidable given the authors' affiliations with the Japanese navy. By contrast, Adam Liff's analysis of Japanese responses to Chinese gray zone operations is far more measured, rigorous, and objective. In addition, it is unclear to this reviewer how Takei's analysis of the three types of operations (peacetime, gray zone, and war) "in terms of time and intensity" (p. 245) adds to our understanding of China's gray zone operations.

The third chapter in question is Bernard Moreland's comparative case study of Vietnam's and the Philippines' responses to Chinese gray zone operations. After studying his analysis, this reviewer is left wondering whether it would have been better to compare the Philippines' responses with Japanese responses. These two countries have more in common with each other than with Vietnam. The most important shared characteristic is that they are both US allies. In addition, comparing the Philippines' responses with those of Japan would allow a more comprehensive assessment of the maritime situations in East Asia. Moreover, such a comparison will show that US

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support for its allies in the region has been inconsistent, which will result in a more sophisticated conclusion than the one drawn by the author.

This assessment of the three aforementioned chapters leads to perhaps the volume's most glaring weakness. Aside from the two articles by former and present Japanese naval officers, the book does not present the perspectives of US allies and partners other than Japan. The volume's contributions would have been enhanced by the perspectives of naval officers or relevant government officials representing the Philippines and Taiwan.

Despite these weaknesses, this is a book that should be recommended to both specialists and nonspecialists. The latter, in particular, should appreciate the lack of jargon and the chapters' clarity of presentation.

As mentioned earlier, this book is a real contribution to our understanding of China's gray zone operations. This reviewer hopes that it will motivate more analysts to study this topic with the aim of contributing to better-informed US policies for addressing the challenges presented by the Chinese paranaival forces.

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