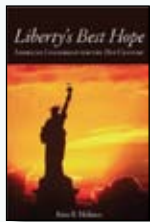


Off the Shelf

As the United States prepared for the 2008 Presidential election and subsequent transition of power, many authors and organizations published books, papers, articles, and editorials addressing challenges that the United States faces or will face. Some address a specific problem, such as poverty or nuclear proliferation, and others attempt to provide all the answers in exhaustive and voluminous tomes. From the many excellent publications available, I selected two books that stood out because of a unique approach or message. One is a short, pithy survey covering the gamut of threats facing the United States and challenging its role as the world's primary defender of liberty. The other contends that the United States is heading for war with an allied China and Russia. Whether one agrees with the conclusions and recommendations in these two books, they will certainly precipitate interesting debates on national security strategy.



**Liberty's Best Hope:
American Leadership in the
21st Century**
by *Kim R. Holmes*
Washington, DC: Heritage
Foundation, 2008
192 pp. \$12.95
ISBN: 978-0-89195-278-7

In this short volume, Kim Holmes presents a succinct yet thorough survey of the major challenges facing the United States along with recommendations about how to approach them. Holmes states, "We [Americans] have lost the idea that safeguarding and advancing liberty is the foundation of our claim to leadership" and says that his purpose in writing is to "examine the many challenges to American leadership in the world . . . and to provide recommendations on how to overcome" them (p. xviii). The book is a quick, informative read that provides highlights of the issues it addresses.

Holmes covers the most salient issues across the political, military, social, and economic spectra in the first part of the book and dedicates the second part to recommendations on how to reinvigorate American leadership and improve the international security environment on terms favorable to the United States and its allies. Its topical approach is one of the book's strengths and should make it attractive to busy policymakers and senior military leaders. This same brevity, however, could be criticized as a lack of depth on any given topic and would thus be considered a weakness by readers who seek more detail.

As might be expected in a publication from the Heritage Foundation, this book takes a conservative perspective on international relations and past and present American politics. This conservative bent is perhaps most visible in a rather worshipful portrayal of Ronald Reagan in the preface and an almost wistful longing for his style of leadership throughout; for example, the "vision of a 'tamed' America following the rest of the world

is our future unless we restore Reagan's faith in America" (p. 186). Nonetheless, this book is at least a good starting point or refresher on the current challenges that America faces, and, in the end, Holmes does a good job pulling so many topics together in a short volume.



**The Next Great Clash: China
and Russia vs. the United States**
by *Michael L. Levin*
Westport, CT: Praeger Security
International, 2008
216 pp. \$44.95
ISBN: 978-0-313-34592-0

"rising China" and "resurgent Russia" have become common phrases in international relations and defense circles these days. Indeed, we have been surprised by unprecedented events (such as the People's Liberation Army Navy deploying to the Indian Ocean to join the international effort to combat pirates near Somalia) and witnessed some old things that seem new (such as Russian bombers approaching U.S. Navy ships and U.S. territory). Clearly, China and Russia are high on the list of national security priorities for the United States, and dealing with each separately presents distinct challenges. Over 7 years into the war on terror, and with no clear end in sight, what if China and Russia teamed up against the United States? Michael Levin posits precisely this: "A Sino-Russian alliance against the United States will constitute *The Next Great Clash*" (p. 8). It is worth noting that Mr. Levin is not a military man, politician, or academic and that he writes from

his own perspective, which, after living and working in Russia and China on various business and consulting projects, he believes allows him to be "unfettered by the restrictions placed on government officials, [and] unburdened by the rivalries that stifle academia" (p. 8).

Levin begins the book by analyzing and comparing various economic and international relations theories, including George Modelski and William Thompson's theory about "long cycles" of global political leadership and economic innovations, John Mearsheimer's "balance of power" theory, Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory, and Michael Klare's "resource wars" theory. He points out that each of these theories concludes the United States is headed toward war with China. Levin then spends most of the book tracing the history of the relationship between China and Russia from the 1600s to today, culminating in a description of how the two nations have allegedly been conspiring and cooperating to undermine U.S. foreign policy. Levin concludes his argument by cautioning the United States to watch out for China because "even without a decisive military advantage . . . China's combination of asymmetric capabilities (especially cyber warfare), its continental depth, the overwhelming concentration of its population in rural areas, and the distance across the Pacific could neutralize America's military superiority, while China's strategic partnership with Russia provides a protective outer ring shielding its western and northern periphery" (p. 121). Levin may not enjoy universal concurrence among military leaders and civilian policymakers, but he makes a good argument that is strongly aligned with those of several influential thinkers and in accord with some recent events.

—R.E. Henstrand