Kashmeri, Sarwar A. *China's Grand Strategy: Weaving a New Silk Road to Global Supremacy*. Philadelphia: Praeger. 2019. 171 pp. (ISBN: 978-1-4408-6790-3)

Sarwar Kashmeri in *China's Grand Strategy: Weaving a New Silk Road to Global Primacy*, adopts a very favorable view of China's grand strategy and rise to power, and argues that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) foreign infrastructure assistance program will bring mutual prosperity, development, and higher living standards to recipient nations, ushering in a new age of Chinese global leadership based on authoritarian capitalism. Kashmeri undermines his analysis and predictions, however, by attributing to China a contradictory and ultimately incompatible combination of realist and liberal motives for the BRI. While maintaining that China primarily introduced the BRI to serve its own security interests, Kashmeri also insists that gains from exchange will be equally shared with BRI recipients, none of whom are military allies of China. The numerous instances cited by Kashmeri of unfavorable treatment of BRI recipients indicates that China is primarily seeking to use the program to maximize returns to China, rather than raise recipient living standards or foment goodwill as the author predicts.

Following a brief introductory chapter, Kashmeri places the Belt and Road Initiative within the context of Chinese grand strategy, which also consists of Deng Xiao Ping's growth-promoting capitalist economic reforms and the modernization and strengthening of naval power to protect China's coasts from foreign invasion. Kashmeri describes the evolution of the $1.3 trillion Chinese-led BRI investment program from One Belt, One Road (OBOR) to the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. The BRI was to create a web of infrastructure, comprised of roads, railways, telecommunications, energy pipelines, and ports, that would enhance economic interconnectivity and facilitate development across Eurasia, East Africa, and more than 70 partner countries. Infrastructure would be constructed within land belts of linked countries, connecting China with Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, and the Mediterranean Sea, via central and western Asia and along maritime roads connecting China's coastal ports to ports in the Indian Ocean, East Africa, and Europe via the Suez Canal.

To fund BRI projects, China supplied low interest loans with long repayment periods through existing state-owned banks (Agricultural Development Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Export-Import Bank of China), and the newly created Silk Road Fund, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and New Development Bank. The Chinese government's international network of 480 Confucius Institutes were to provide public relations for the program.

In chapter three, Kashmeri outlines China's economic and geopolitical/security motivations for the BRI. He presents the program as a type of Marshal Plan "on steroids," arguing that the construction of infrastructure in developing countries will advance China's long-term economic interests by raising living standards and consumption and promoting the formation of a middle class, which will increase demand for Chinese products.

Unencumbered by American style military alliances, China will use the aid to cement commercial ties and build good will in the nations that receive BRI projects. BRI-constructed infrastructure will enable China to overcome the "Malacca Dilemma" in which 60% of China's trade, and most strategic imports of oil and gas, flow through the narrow, highly vulnerable Straits of Malacca. BRI-constructed transportation corridors in Pakistan and Myanmar will provide alternate import routes for oil and gas, while ports and rail infrastructure in Africa will provide China access to critical natural resources. Kashmeri views China's projection of military power into the gas rich South China Sea through military modernization and base construction on reef islands as a further attempt to secure control over critical trade routes and lower risk by diversifying sources of oil and gas.

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Kashmeri draws a mistaken analogy between the BRI and the U.S. use of Marshall Plan aid to raise European living standards following World War 2. While the U.S. needed the industrial might of its Western European NATO allies to deter the Soviets, aid to BRI recipients would not contribute to strengthening a pro-Chinese military alliance. Some BRI recipients, in fact, are NATO members.

The deceptive terms of excessive BRI lending, which include requirements to employ Chinese workers and adjudicate disagreements in Chinese courts, and Chinese takeovers of BRI assets do not derive from Kashmeri's claimed steep "learning curve," but from the economic and security incentives which drive the BRI program.

While China's security plan to acquire outposts along critical trade routes and construct infrastructure to secure access to natural resources requires friendly local political leadership, it does not require that China expand the domestic market or raise the living standards of BRI recipients.

Chinese domestic economic actors have taken advantage of the BRI to press their interests. Firms in the aluminum, steel, cement, and construction industries see large-scale extractive and infrastructure projects overseas as a solution for massive production over-capacities and an underutilized Chinese workforce. Over-lending results from Chinese state-owned banks competing to lend on projects without coordinating lending.

Rather than build good will, Chinese investment in natural resource extraction and infrastructure may ultimately turn popular opinion in BRI recipient countries against China. Nations undertaking large-scale fixed-cost investments overseas often encounter the problem of an "obsolescing bargain" in which economic bargaining power shifts to the host country following initial investments. China may feel compelled to intervene politically to preserve its property rights, especially in Pakistan, which is to serve as a critical conduit for oil supplies. Political interference will likely engender anti-Chinese sentiment.

A lack of "soft power" may also mean that China will face stronger opposition to its rise. Democratic institutions and support for the rule of law and international organizations helped check excessive use of American power, precluding challenges to U.S. hegemony following the Cold War. Authoritarian China lacks those restraints, as made clear by the recent repression of one million Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the violation of the one country, two-systems agreement in Hong Kong and subsequent oppressive crackdown (with Kashmeri's encouragement on Twitter) on protesters. As China abandons the model of self-restrained Confucian rule in favor of Xi Jinping's centralized control, Chinese power will appear more threatening and inspire fiercer resistance.

U.S. grand strategy towards China is evolving, rather than absent as Kashmeri claims. If the U.S. remains true to its democratic roots and identity, it will check China's authoritarian challenge.

In summary, Kashmeri *China's Grand Strategy* is more interested in providing favorable public relations for the Belt and Road Initiative than in presenting a logically consistent hypothesis to explain Chinese grand strategy. The same realist self-interest that motivates the BRI is leading China to wield its power to secure one-sided gains from the program's recipients. I only recommend the book for those interested in learning the Chinese perspective of the nation's Belt and Road Initiative.

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