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BOOK REVIEW

The rise of china vs. the logic of strategy

by Edward N. Luttwak

Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA; 2012; 320 pp.;
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The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy attempts to analyse the implications of China's strong economic growth alongside its rapid military development. Luttwak's approach to China's rise is unique as he views the subject not as a 'Sinologist', but from "the universal logic of strategy [which] applies in perfect equality to every culture in every age" (p. vii). Whilst many analysts view China as a rising threat, Luttwak argues that China is on a self-defeating path.

Edward N. Luttwak is a senior associate of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C., who, for much of his career, has been a national security strategist to various United States government agencies, financial institutions, and international organisations. Luttwak argues, "for any country whose rising strength cannot go unnoticed, the 'universal logic of strategy' allows [for] only military or economic growth", thus challenging Beijing's simultaneous attempt at both.

In today's 'Asian Century', it is generally accepted that "the future of the world will be shaped by the rise of China" (p. 1). Whilst Beijing's recent economic growth has arguably declined, it still remains strong at approximately 7 per cent. Given China's recent military developments, the global community has undeniably grown weary. Luttwak (through the logic of strategy) predicts that China's "uninterrupted and concurrent rise in economic capacity, military strength, and global influence" will ultimately lead to "the slowing down or even partial reversal of China's rise" (p. 6).

Luttwak's belief is based on the premise that a large increase in military investment (alongside strong economic growth) "must evoke adversarial reactions" (p. 257), as countries begin to feel threatened in the face of uncertainty. From a regional perspective, there is great concern that a country as large as China may one day threaten the sovereignty of neighbouring states; while key international powers (such as the United States and the Russian Federation) fear that the rise of an authoritarian state may provide instability and poor governance on the global stage.

Luttwak argues that the logic of strategy will force threatened nations to consider "formal or informal alliances against the excessively risen power" (p. 257). The only exception to this relies on China being capable of passing the "culminating point of resistance" (p. 39), where Beijing would have the military power to demand subjection. Failing this, China's rise will be negated through military intervention or trade sanctions aimed at reducing economic growth. Therefore, Luttwak believes Beijing must reduce its military investment if it wishes to retain its strong diplomatic influence and economic growth.

Despite Luttwak's argument being formulated over three years ago, his predictions remain largely valid. With

China's continued development of a 'blue-water' navy, alongside more aggressive claims in the South and East China Seas, there has been an international backlash and condemnation from abroad. As Luttwak predicted, the result of China's strategy has led to military co-operation and strategic ties between countries which have traditionally held animosity towards each other. An example of this is South Korea and Japan, which have now increased their joint naval ties¹ and improved their intelligence sharing capabilities, with the objective of countering China's military power.

Luttwak has argued that China must lower its military expenditure, but has failed to suggest what the level of military expenditure should be. China views a reliable and effective military as a top priority, an opinion likely to have been strengthened by recent hostilities in the Middle East and Russia's annexation of Crimea. China shares borders with 14 different states and holds extensive sea lines of communication which remain vulnerable. Luttwak fails to consider that China's economic rise cannot be secured without it being militarily capable of defending its trade routes and overseas investments. Therefore, arguing that China should substantially reduce its military expenditure is largely unrealistic.

Luttwak argues that Beijing's core strategic failures can be attributed to 'great-state autism', being birthed through China's isolated growth and development. Whilst the formulation of effective strategy has been demonstrated through historic texts such as *The Art of War*, Luttwak argues that Beijing's political elite are subject to cultural stubbornness when searching for 'strategic wisdom' (pp. 13 – 24).

Luttwak further argues that Beijing is faced with increased global resentment. This has been witnessed through various territorial disputes, where China has attempted to use its military power as a tool of intimidation. This strategy has not necessarily been successful, with governments such as Tokyo considering their own military capabilities².

This book provides an alternative outlook on the likely development of China in an increasingly complex world. I recommend it to readers interested in China's trajectory and to those seeking further knowledge in strategy.

Michael Thurston

¹Samuel Mun, 'Destined to Cooperate: Japan - South Korea Naval Relations', *The Diplomat*, 5 February 2014, accessed at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/destined-to-cooperate-japan-south-korea-naval-relations/>.

²Benjamin Carlson, 'China and the Art of (losing) War', *Global Post*, 20 October 2013, accessed at <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/china/131017/china-rulers-art-war-sun-tzu>.