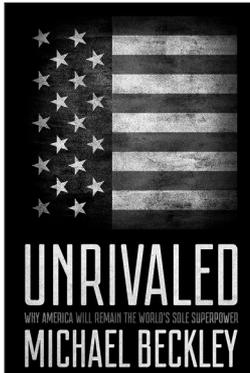


Book Review



Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower

Michael Beckley

Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 2018, 231 pp.

Reviewed by Dr. David A. Anderson

Professor, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

Author Michael Beckley is a Fellow in the International Security Program at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and he is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Tufts University. In *Unrivaled*, Beckley addresses how and why the U.S. will remain the world only super power for the foreseeable future. The author immediately grabs your attention by stating that in spite of the U.S.' relative mediocrity among developed nations regarding state power influencers such as education, government efficiency, and public/private sector infrastructure, the U.S. is home to six-hundred of the top two-thousand businesses in the world. It represents twenty-five percent of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP), forty percent of global military spending, and houses fifty of the top one-hundred universities in the world. Therefore, the U.S. must have underlying strengths that are not readily apparent that gives it sole super power status.

In support of his thesis and to validate his model, Beckley systematically builds an argument rooted in international relations state power theory, a hybrid quantitative state power model he designed, and comparative historical cases analysis. The premise of his analytical approach lies in his belief that the commonly used aggregation of population, GDP, and defense expenditures to derive a state's power overestimates the true power of a state. It overlooks critical factors that have associated costs that erode a state's actual power. It does not account for the costs of such things as policing/governing the state, economic production efficiency, social welfare costs, state security costs, innovation, debt, education, and natural resources, etc. Beckley captures these costs in his created power formula, $GDP \times GDP \text{ per/capita}$, which generates a figure that more accurately discloses a nation's real state power. In other words, his is a power measurement that measures a state's resource use relative to outcomes.

Before ultimately conducting a comparative state power analysis between the U.S. and China—the focus throughout the remainder of the book (China being the only plausible threat to U.S. primacy today)—Beckley tests his model against the power outcomes of multiple historical power

rivalries that have taken place during the past two-hundred years. They include Britain/China 1839-1911, Japan/China 1874-1945, Germany/Russia 1891-1917, and U.S./Soviet Union 1946-1992. The Britain/China and Japan/China cases demonstrate how China, with the world's largest population, GDP, and military is challenged by economic inefficiencies, social welfare issues, and domestic/border security issues and can be defeated by countries that are by all accounts smaller. The Germany/Russia example identifies similar characteristics of the two previous case studies but also highlights the importance of economic efficiencies and military technological innovation that were critical factors in Germany's favor that led to Russia's overwhelming defeat during World War I. Finally, the U.S./Soviet Union illustration exemplifies the appearance of power over substance. The Soviet Union appeared to be a powerful peer rival of the U.S., but was discovered to be a paper tiger that eventually crumbled under the weight of its economic inefficiencies, social welfare failings, geography and collective security cost challenges. With his model now validated through extensive case study examination the author turns his model toward a comparative assessment of China's power relative to U.S. power. What follows are some of the most significant illustrations of his findings.

Beckley's model identifies China's economy as overrated. Its GDP appears as a false indicator of its wealth projection since the Chinese government has a history of providing false economic figures that inflate the economic reality on the ground. With a population one-quarter the size of China's, the U.S. represents twenty-five percent of global GDP, the largest share by any one nation. China is losing businesses and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), has a large debt burden in both the public and private sector, and environmental pollution problems resulting from poor regulation of industry. China's debt burden is notably greater than the U.S. and the U.S. attracts far more FDI to foster economic growth. Most of China's economic growth is in the form of labor expansion and capital growth, not in the more meaningful form of productivity growth. China's new product innovation is one-third of that of the U.S. and its research and development spending is only one-quarter of the U.S. Seventy-six percent of China's working age population has not graduated high school. Only ten percent of China's workforce is college educated whereas forty-four percent of the U.S. workforce is. China's educational system is woeful when compared to the U.S. in developing advanced worker skill sets that directly enhance the economy. China has only seven universities rated in the top 200 around the world and only two in the top one-hundred. The U.S. has fifty of the top one-hundred universities. China faces a forty million worker skills gap by 2030. The U.S. is richer in natural resources such as oil, natural gas, and coal, has more infrastructure, capital, and institutional capacity, a better demographic age distribution, a more favorable immigration pattern, and a more robust educational system/approach to meet its economic needs. Communist capitalism is inescapably proving to be inferior to democratic/liberalist capitalism.

China faces severe state capacity issues from a welfare and security viewpoint. China has poorer health habits and spends one-third as much on health care than does the U.S. Beckley finds this issue alone problematic since by 2055 China will have 410 million people 65 years of age and older. China faces notably more civil unrest than the U.S., thirty percent of China's income is spent on feeding the populous, an economically unhealthy figure for an economy. It also runs a 2.5 trillion dollar social security deficit—a deficit far greater than the U.S. China's national defense is five to ten times less capable than the U.S. and is inferior in all regards. China is also surrounded by enemies and spends a disproportional part of its budget on personnel and homeland security compared to the U.S. with its friendly borders. Fifteen percent of China's defense budget goes toward supporting

border defense troops, alone.

Concerning international diplomacy, institutions, and alliances, the U.S. remains the overall global leader with negligible international counter balance efforts facing it. The U.S. operates in a relatively globally permissive environment. However, the U.S. and China are both members of the United Nations Security Council—a powerful geopolitical and often counterbalancing position among United Nations member states. The U.S. is a leader among the top international financial institutions e.g., The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization (WTO), numerous regional development banks, and the second largest multilateral trade arrangement, the North America Free Trade Agreement. As a leader and founding member of the WTO, and as a nation in good economic/diplomatic standing among the global community, the U.S. wins some eighty percent of the fair trade complaints it wages to the WTO and forty percent of the cases brought against it. China wins only forty-one percent of the fair trade complaints it brings forward and only twenty-three percent of those waged against it. The U.S. is also the leader of the largest political/military alliance in the world, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. U.S. alliances collectively represent twenty-five percent of the world's population and seventy-five percent of global GDP while China maintains many fragile bilateral/multilateral arrangements with primarily regional partners, and in many cases, just as an observing member. The one exception is the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank which it created and leads consisting of eighty member countries from around the world.

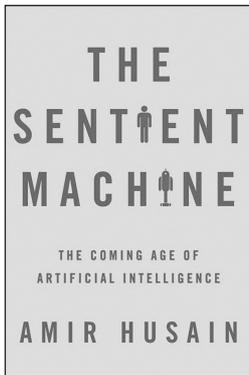
Beckley closes with his perspective on a unipolar world led by the U.S., along with some recommendations for U.S. policy going forward. He believes unipolarity leads to a lower probability of a great power war but it increases the possibility of asymmetric conflict. It can also lead to a continuous over extension of the U.S. government budget by way of economic diplomacy and military power projection in an effort to secure a global environment to its liking. It may also weaken U.S. national unity and the liberalist world order it leads. The U.S. could eventually end up turning on itself over foreign and domestic policy, pitting political party against political party and special interest groups against each other. This may lead to an underlying dysfunction of government and loss of unipolar power. Finally, a global power without global interests could lead to global chaos.

In order to maintain its global power status, Beckley recommends that the U.S. deemphasize the use of the military instrument of power and stress the use of diplomacy to secure its interests. The U.S. should not be worried about securing such things as Middle East oil. After all, no one country can seize control of it. He believes it necessary to double the funding for foreign aid, peacekeeping efforts, and diplomacy. Furthermore, the U.S. should open its doors wider to skilled labor immigration and make its domestic political fundraising apparatus more transparent to ensure the interests of the few are not prioritized over the interests of the majority.

Unrivaled is a skillfully crafted and superbly researched body of work, with over nine-hundred endnotes. The author unquestionably wages a compelling argument for U.S. primacy going forward. The book is full of insightful and intriguing facts and figures that are as interesting on their own merit as they are collectively convincing in support of the author's thesis. It is a plethora of critical analysis of state power indicators, rivaled by few think tank organizations, let alone individual authors.

The sole criticism of the book is in Beckley's recommendations. They do little justice to his investigative analysis, adding modestly to advancing this very important topic. That being said, whether you agree with the author's state power formula, assessment, and/or recommendations, you are thoroughly impressed with the meticulous rigor and thought-provoking effort put forward on

the subject of state power. The book is a treasure trove of information for academics and scholars to debate and advance. Practitioners, scholars, and students of international relations, strategic studies, economics, political science, state diplomacy, government policy, and military professionals will find this book a most interesting read and well worthy of their time. **IAJ**



**The Sentient Machine:
The Coming Age of Artificial Intelligence**

Amir Husain

Scribner: New York, New York, 2017, 214 pp.

Reviewed by Chaplain (Maj.) Marlon W. Brown
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In a time in which technology both excites and frightens, *The Sentient Machine* is a useful primer for anyone seeking a thorough explanation of the current and future applications of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Amir Husain approaches the topic as a true believer in AI's dominant future. As a computer scientist, technologist, and inventor holding two dozen patents, Husain speaks from practical experience and personal passion. He convinces that AI is progress that we must embrace.

The work is organized in three major parts. The first is an effort to clearly define the technology of artificial intelligence for a lay reader. Knowing the term is thrown around exhaustively and often carelessly, Husain helps the reader clearly define the technology and differentiate between artificial narrow intelligence, like Apple's Siri, and artificial generalized intelligence, a coming technology that combines intention and self-awareness. He follows with coverage of current and impending applications of AI in such diverse fields as healthcare, finance, and—importantly—warfare. The final part concludes the work with a focus on philosophical considerations surrounding the future birth of sentient machines. The book clearly proclaims that AI is both already here and quickly approaching.

Husain packs his book with significant insights for anyone interested in AI's impact on national security. Information about AI's importance in everything from physical security to cyber security dominates the middle part of the book. An entire chapter is dedicated to "Warfare and AI" in which the author celebrates a future war when "human decision-making is almost entirely absent from the observe-orient-decide-act loop." He exhorts the military minded reader to embrace AI instead of ignoring it. Husain believes the U.S. must develop, work with, and trust the technology, recognizing that adversaries will forever exploit it for their interests even if we do not.

While technical subjects can often be daunting for casual readers, Husain tones down the technicalities for the benefit of a popular audience. He illustrates many of his points with welcome references to pop-culture, ancient myth, and world religion. Illustrations from the world of *Star Trek*