

Book Review

Gregory O. Hall, *Examining US-China-Russia Foreign Relations: Great Power Politics in a Post-Obama Era*, Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2023, 166pp. + xvi.

Gregory Hall offers a compact yet rigorous analysis of what he calls the evolving strategic triangle between the United States (US), China, and Russia contextualized in the post-Obama administration. Through the lens of neoclassical realism, Hall explored in greater depth the changing nature and function of the US–China–Russia strategic triangle from the end of the Cold War up to the present by updating his previous analysis in 2014.

The book is divided into two parts consisting of a total of seven chapters. For the first part, Chapter 1 provides an overview of relevant International Relations (IR) and foreign policy theories and explains the refined strategic triangle framework. Chapter 2 surveys the global landscape in the contemporary period, with special emphasis on the interests and maneuverings of the great powers. Chapter 3 surveys the presidency of Donald J. Trump and US domestic and external affairs during his tenure. Meanwhile, Part 2 updates and expands on the discussion in the previous study of the functioning of the strategic triangle dynamic. In Chapter 4, the author explained why the triangle endures as an important feature of international politics. Chapter 5 surveys the domestic environments of the great powers. Chapter 6 presents an overview of great power relations in the 21st century revealed as a series of epochs in the affairs of the strategic triangle. Lastly, Chapter 7 examines the Russia–Ukraine crisis and its implications for the strategic triangle. The concluding chapter highlights important findings of the study and briefly considers critical issues and prospects for the future of triangular affairs and beyond.

Themes and Analysis

Hall's main contention is that since the mid-2000s, the politics of US-China-Russia strategic triangle have been increasingly influenced by factors related to their respective domestic environments. Hall utilizes agency and context for each of the three great powers, expanding on previously established frameworks to include a comparative analysis of each actor's domestic environment for foreign policy and the interplay between the domestic and external contexts. In IR terms, the book identifies and illustrates how factors including systemic, state and societal, individuals, and small groups influence the foreign relations of the US, China, and Russia. Hall concludes by exploring the future prospects for great power relations and for global affairs. Incorporating both theoretical and empirical data to offer a fresh and timely look at the myriad challenges facing the three powers, this book provides an excellent companion to students of foreign policy, international security, and post-Cold War international politics.

The book highlighted Hall's three major findings. First, the international system remains in transition. Second, the strategic triangle itself is adjusting to this global power shift, highlighting China's evolution as the world's number two great power due to the worsening US–China (Axis-1) and US–Russia (Axis-2) relations. His third major finding pointed out that key domestic dynamics are having a greater influence on the politics of the strategic triangle in the early 21st century.

Writing Style and Accessibility

Hall follows a clear, logical structure by introducing a conceptual framework early on, rooted in neoclassical realism, and then he systematically applied it to various case studies involving each of the three major powers. While Hall is grounded in international relations (IR) theory, he avoids excessive jargon. He connects abstract ideas to concrete policy actions, making his arguments relevant to both scholars and informed general readers. Each chapter in the book has a clear purpose, and there's little repetition. This economy of language makes it efficient to read without sacrificing depth. He adopts a scholarly tone—measured and impartial – even when discussing controversial events like Russia's invasion of Ukraine or US-China trade tensions. He rarely editorializes, keeping the focus on strategic implications.

Hall writes with upper-level undergraduates, graduate students, and policy analysts in mind as readers do not need deep IR training to follow his arguments, though some basic knowledge of Cold War history or international politics helps.

Key concepts, such as neoclassical realism, strategic triangle theory, and authoritarian populism are explained clearly. He also tried to provide a comprehensive context by providing real-world examples from the Trump era, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific help make theoretical points more digestible and engaging. The author provided up-to-date and relatable concepts which could be easily grasp and understood by the reader.

Overall Assessment

Hall offers a concise yet analytical entry into the interplay between systemic dynamics and domestic forces shaping the US-China-Russia relations. By integrating IR theory with current geopolitical events and domestic contexts, the book serves as an effective primer for students and scholars of contemporary international politics.

It is safe to conclude that Hall's book is theoretically sound, but not overly technical. It is well-organized, concise, and readable, which could also serve as a good entry point for intermediate readers of IR and foreign policy. Incorporating both theoretical and empirical data to offer a fresh and timely look at the myriad challenges facing the three powers, this book provides an excellent companion to students of foreign policy, international security, and post-Cold War international politics.

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