

Book Review: Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia

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***Worldviews of Aspiring Powers** considers domestic foreign policy debates in five emerging influential world powers: China, Japan, India, Russia and Iran. Featuring leading regional scholars, each essay identifies the most important domestic schools of thought and connects them to the historical and institutional sources that fuel each nation's foreign policy experience. **Ilana Rothkopf** encounters some US-centricity, but overall finds that this in-depth text bridges the gap between comparative politics and International Relations.*

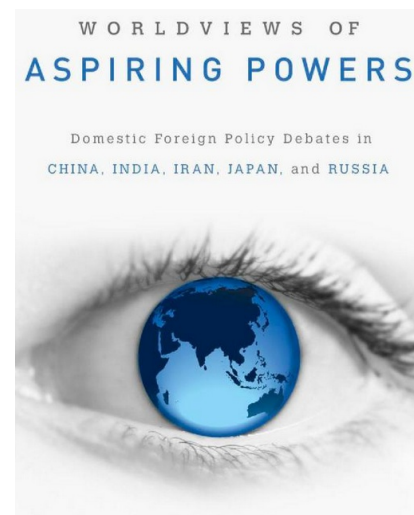


Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia. Henry R. Nau. Oxford University Press. October 2012.

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In his book *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, Christopher Hill defines foreign policy as the sum of external relations conducted by an independent actor in international relations. But what are the parts that converge to create this sum?

This book, which emerged from a brainstorming session at the George Washington University's [Sigur Center for Asian Studies](#), assesses the domestic worldviews of "aspiring" Greater Asian powers and the interaction of these worldviews with foreign policies. The term "aspiring" conveys the conflicted relationship that countries have with their rise to power. Editors [Henry R. Nau](#) and Deepa M. Ollapally, both international politics scholars and Greater Asia specialists at GWU, seek to illustrate that one can compare internal foreign policy debates in these powers cross-nationally. The editors, both of whom are also contributors, have assembled a cohort of both United States and "in-country" authors to "safeguard against ethnocentrism."



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In a comprehensive introduction, Nau introduces readers to the team's research design and analytical framework. This framework addresses the scope, goals, and means of foreign policy actions, and the five chapter case studies (China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia) exemplify the complexity and cross-national scope of this "schools of thought" approach. Nau argues that in all cases, shifts in domestic debates may influence foreign policy actions just as much as external or structural events. The authors of this volume seek to identify and track the occurrence of these shifts and their impact on policy. This foreign policy spectrum comprises three broad schools of thought: nationalist, regionalist, and globalist. In each country chapter, authors relate in-country debates to these three categories and mainstream International Relations paradigms. The introductory chapter serves as a useful resource to readers as they engage with subsequent case studies

In *Worldviews*' introductory case study, authors David Shambaugh and Ren Xiao label China as both "the world's most important rising power" and a "conflicted rising power," for its prominence on the global stage and the competing internal discussion on China's role in the international realm. This chapter identifies seven foreign policy camps: nativist, realist, major powers, Asia-first, global south, selective multilateralist, and globalist, which differ in their take on China's self-perception and related policy objectives. These seven schools align roughly with the spectrum present in Nau's introductory chapter, though their borders are not set in stone. For example, characteristics of Nau's "nationalist" school, such as emphasis on hard power and national sovereignty, are found in China's nativist and realist camps. Issues of particular prominence in this debate include China's relationship with the U.S., the use of soft power, and global governance.

The authors' analysis focuses primarily on China's debates as structured by research institutions, universities, and foreign policy officials; they suggest that Chinese foreign policy debates provide little official information regarding public perceptions of international affairs. Nonetheless, they also recognise an active, unofficial "blogosphere," characterized as largely "hypernationalist." This chapter may have benefited from a more considerable discussion of these unofficial public debates.

Farideh Farhi and Saideh Lotfian characterise Iran's foreign policy as "mostly descriptive and without articulation of a coherent model to follow" (p.115). Meanwhile, they eschew the depiction of Iran's foreign policy debates as a polar contrast between "pragmatism" and "ideology" that dominates the existing literature. The authors suggest that the common linkage of this dichotomy to Iran's "moderate" and "conservative" politicians is highly insufficient, because it overlooks the extent to which the ideological shift of the 1979 Islamic Revolution frames the entire debate. This chapter suggests that Iranian schools of thought differ on the means of achieving Iran's foreign policy objectives rather than the objectives themselves, which centre on security and Islamic identity.

Farhi and Lotfian divide Iran's foreign policy "schools" into three distinct categories with two subdivisions: Islamic idealists, offensive and defensive regional power balancers, and rejectionist and accommodationist global power balancers. The authors insist that these schools are neither fully articulated nor distinct positions, and do not align with specific politicians or government ministries. This chapter also acknowledges a number of contradictions in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy debate, such as the use of Shi'i Islam as a foreign policy tool, which challenges the message of Islamic unity.

The Russian case study, entitled, "Russia's Contested National Identity and Foreign Policy," emphasises Russia's unique status as a simultaneously "emerging" and "diminished" world power. Authors Andrew C. Kurchins and Igor Zvelv place particular emphasis on the influence of Russia's recent imperial greatness on its contemporary self-perception, a common trend in the International Relations literature on post-Soviet Russia. This identity debate informs and impacts Russia's foreign policy. Furthermore, the authors argue, this debate remains rooted in realism, and is preoccupied with "the west." This chapter and the aforementioned Iran study arguably go the furthest in their examination of the origins of collective national identities and worldviews, and the impact of these origins on policy decisions. For example, the authors note a shift in the Russian debate in the 1990s from those they term "pro-western liberals" toward "great power balancers" after a perceived failure by the United States and Europe to treat Russia as an equal great power.

Nau and Ollapally demonstrate that one can certainly compare foreign policy debates across countries in a meaningful manner. However, this is not an introductory text, as it assumes familiarity with mainstream International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis theories and references them mostly in passing. Additionally, this volume is mildly U.S.-centric, and at times reads as though it is geared toward American policymakers: in addition to a discussion on domestic perceptions of relations with the United States, each chapter also includes a subsection about the “implications [of domestic debates] for the United States.” Nonetheless, this is a well-crafted study that presents a new and useful framework for comparing countries. It bridges the gap between comparative politics and International Relations, and emphasises the relevance of Foreign Policy Analysis as an International Relations subfield. Nikola Mirilovic and Ollapally’s conclusion also suggests some excellent avenues for future study, including a deeper analysis of the origins of these worldviews, and the application of this framework to other cases such as South Africa, Brazil, and Turkey.

Ilana Rothkopf completed an MSc in International Relations at the LSE in 2012, and holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science and Middle East studies from McGill University. Her research interests include foreign policy analysis, religion and international relations, political identity and the Middle East. [Read more reviews by Ilana.](#)