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A well-documented addition to the growing literature on the topic and full of intriguing stories, this book sheds some new light on this crucial period during the Cold War. I would highly recommend it to students of U.S. foreign policy and U.S.–China relations.

ZHIQUN ZHU  
*Bucknell University*

**Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy** by Jeffrey A. Bader. Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2012. 171 pp. \$26.95.

In this crisply written account of U.S. foreign policy toward Asia, Jeffrey Bader gives the reader an insider's view of policymaking in the administration of Barack Obama. Bader served as the senior director for East Asian Affairs on the National Security Council from January 2009 to April 2011. He is well placed to discuss policy deliberations on Asia-Pacific matters, and he ably chronicles many of the challenges that Obama faced during the period from the diplomatic crisis sparked by the North Korean sinking of the South Korean ship *Cheonan* in March 2010, to the tensions between China and its Asian neighbors over maritime rights and territory in the South China Seas, to the Fukushima nuclear meltdown triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami that walloped Japan in March 2011.

Though hardly impartial, Bader's account nevertheless will be of interest to political scientists and historians, especially those studying the domestic politics of foreign policy-making. Indeed, his account on this front is refreshingly candid. Although Bader does not privilege domestic politics at the expense of geopolitical considerations, what is notable here is the weight that practical politics is accorded in his account. In Bader's telling, members of Obama's Asia team were alert to the possible negative electoral repercussions of appearing too weak in responding to China's harsh policies in Tibet and Xinjiang or to Beijing's efforts to strengthen its position in the South China Seas. Less surprising perhaps was the administration's sensitivity to pressure from business and union interests in designing its foreign economic policies toward the region.

Some China experts will take exception to Bader's claim that Obama adopted a kind of "good cop, bad cop" approach toward China from the start. They can rightly point out that Bader does not discuss the administration's initial policy of "strategic reassurance," or its vision of a Sino-American "G-2" partnership. Yet Beijing was unwilling to play the role of international "stakeholder" that Washington envisioned. The Obama administration's policy toward China hardened in July 2010, when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

announced at an ASEAN regional forum in Hanoi that the United States was not going to sit idly by on matters having to do with freedom of the seas.

Bader left the administration before Obama's "pivot" to Asia in December 2011. As a result, his account does not address the question of whether Obama's pivot is driven mostly by deterrence, or mostly by reassurance—that is, by the need to dissuade Beijing from throwing its weight around in the region, or by the desire to reassure jittery Asian allies about Washington's steadfastness. At a time when Obama is actively reducing America's footprint in Central Asia, and when growing numbers of Americans are turning inward, many Asian observers wonder whether a larger U.S. strategic retreat may be in the works. Bader's book does not answer this question directly. But it does help the reader better understand why this issue is likely to figure prominently in deliberations over U.S. foreign policy in the next decade.

PETER TRUBOWITZ

*University of Texas at Austin*

**Hard Interests, Soft Illusions: Southeast Asia and American Power** by Natasha Hamilton-Hart. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2012. 256 pp. \$39.95.

Natasha Hamilton-Hart offers a provocative book that affirms and challenges the status of the United States in Southeast Asia. It affirms by detailing broadly held elite conceptualizations of the stabilizing role of the United States in Southeast Asia. But it also challenges by questioning the foundations of those beliefs—especially the assumption that the geopolitical justifications, domestic benefits, and “national interests” associated with the United States are uncontroversial and clear. Rather, the “origins of [pro-U.S.] alignment” of the six Southeast Asian states in question were “solidly domestic” (p. 87) and highly contingent—contingent especially on early domestic power struggles, struggles in which Washington played “active leader,” “cheerleader,” and “paymaster” (chap. 3). Moreover, the persistent dominance of Southeast Asia's early victors (and marginalization of oppositional voices) has practically ensured that Southeast Asian regime interests have “neatly dovetailed” with U.S. economic and geopolitical priorities ever since. Further, an “institutional infrastructure,” “a structure of economic dependence,” “history lessons,” and “information environments” make it “exceptionally difficult” to change U.S.-oriented strategies (pp. 24, 25). At the same time, Hamilton-Hart also suggests vulnerabilities, especially with changing political economies of alignment, new ruling elites, and the entrance of post-Cold War generations into policy circles.

Hamilton-Hart's argument goes beyond familiar arguments about the utilitarian relationship between domestic regime interests and foreign policy