

**Michael E. O'Hanlon.** *The Senkaku Paradox: Risking Great Power War Over Small Stakes.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2019. x + 258 pp. \$27.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-8157-3689-9.

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In *The Senkaku Paradox: Risking Great Power War Over Small Stakes*, Michael E. O'Hanlon illustrates how a future Chinese incursion to seize the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, claimed by China and Japan, might result in large-scale US military action and escalate into nuclear conflict. What other issues might push great power competitors to armed conflict, and can nuclear escalation be avoided? This work also analyzes similar potential small-stakes conflict in Taiwan and the Baltics. Instead of responding as a liberating large-scale force in these instances, O'Hanlon argues, a strategy of proportionate US military response combined with economic warfare is the best approach to countering an adversary's initiative and preventing escalation. As a senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, O'Hanlon is deftly attuned to the potential for strategic consequences resulting from limited conflict. He has written other books focusing on US security policy in both China and eastern Europe as well as an analysis on the future of land warfare.

In the first chapter, O'Hanlon familiarizes the reader with small-stakes issues that could escalate into larger great power conflict and presents his argument that a new strategy should be considered. O'Hanlon attributes US reliance on large-force response to an "activism and assertiveness" approach to national security policy that has exis-

ted since World War II (p. 5). While he acknowledges the need for large-force employment options due to their deterring and reassuring qualities, O'Hanlon argues that technological diffusion will erode advantages in military capabilities and that a strategy pairing military denial with economic punishment, in proportionate terms, is a more effective tool for countering small-scale attacks by China or Russia. According to the author, such a strategy gives policymakers more flexible options and seeks to strengthen credibility of deterrent and warfighting capabilities.

In chapter 2, O'Hanlon revisits the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Taiwan, and Baltic scenarios to articulate how great power conflict in those regions might evolve. He describes a hypothetical attack on the Senkaku islands as a disguised Chinese military rescue of fishermen near the islands and sets the scenario for US defense of Taiwan with Chinese initiation of a blockade. O'Hanlon characterizes the Russian invasion into a small slice of the Baltic states as a way to protect fellow Russian-speakers. In the three scenarios, Chinese and Russian actions are seemingly designed to gauge the level of US response. In all cases, O'Hanlon projects a large-scale US and allied response as part of his plausible scenarios and provides great detail regarding air, land, naval, and support requirements to satisfy the military commitment. He brings into

focus strategic consequences of this type of response. O'Hanlon presents an escalatory progression stimulated by introduction of large force numbers into these regions and shows how a limited conflict could translate into anti-satellite or anti-infrastructure attacks with nuclear weapons.

In chapter 3, O'Hanlon replays all three scenarios as they might take place in the year 2040. O'Hanlon analyzes differences in relative gross domestic product and defense spending among the United States, China, and Russia and forecasts parity in technology among the three great powers. Applying current US defense policy and force structure to 2040, he asserts that the scenario outcomes might be even more dangerous. While some technologies, such as maritime propulsion and ground vehicles, will not greatly improve, the author projects that leaps in computing and robotics will significantly alter the sensor-shooter paradigm and place less revolutionary technology at a greater disadvantage. O'Hanlon captures evidence of this evolution in military technology in two appendices. In appendix 1, he shows results of his research on the evolution of military technology from 2000 to 2020 to illustrate developmental differences in various technologies. Appendix 2 applies lessons learned from his previous research to forecast a projection in military technological evolution from 2020 to 2040. O'Hanlon uses this evidence to support a strategy applying proportionate levels of military denial and economic punishment.

O'Hanlon develops his recommended approach of military denial and economic punishment in chapters 4 and 5. To avoid escalation, he proposes rapid deployment of proportionately sized forces to the region of interest supported by a narrative of nonaggression and defense. This approach does not rule out offensive kinetic force. He also emphasizes directing attacks on interests located outside the region. For example, the author suggests that attacking Chinese oil transport vessels in the Persian Gulf applies asymmetric pres-

sure without presenting an existential threat resulting in nuclear escalation. This military strategy is combined with economic sanctions that occur more gradually and afford a wider range of pressure. O'Hanlon takes an in-depth look at various types of sanctions and discusses potential actions specifically suited to China and Russia. He also emphasizes global economic interdependencies that would force careful US consideration of options. For example, denying Chinese bank access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) system might be a disproportionate response in terms of cutting off an adversary from the entire global economic system as a result of limited action.

The author concludes with fourteen specific recommendations that support a strategy of proportionate military response and economic punishment in response to limited military aggression. Arguably the most important, the first recommendation requires revisiting conventional thought of direct US large-scale response to support allied defense agreements. Of nearly equal importance is a recommendation to formally integrate economic and military war plans. Other recommendations essentially support the first two with relevant technological development or policy changes.

O'Hanlon provides an interesting perspective on small-stakes conflict and the potential consequences through military, economic, and technological lenses. He has done a compelling job of presenting historical and data-driven evidence while humbly acknowledging many assumptions to support a new strategy addressing limited conflict. This is an excellent read for anyone interested in a comprehensive perspective on limited conflict and potential escalatory consequences.

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