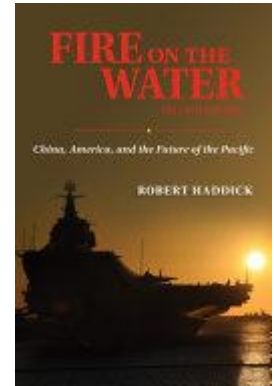


Robert Haddick. *Fire on the Water: China, America, and the Future of the Pacific, Second Edition.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2022. 320 pp. \$3p.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-68247-676-5.



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Robert Haddick's second edition of *Fire on the Water* focuses on how the United States and its allies can sustain conventional military deterrence in the Indo-Pacific against the People's Republic of China (PRC) amid enduring strategic competition. The second edition builds on the first edition, published in 2014, which used the pre-World War I era as a metaphor to describe the emerging security competition between the PRC and the United States. In the second edition, the first five chapters describe the sources of conflict between the United States and the PRC as the strategic environment in the contemporary Indo-Pacific evolves. The final four chapters lay out a strategy process and a set of prescriptions for addressing the military challenges presented by the PRC's military modernization and increased assertiveness.

Chapter 1 traces four decades of the PRC's military modernization and pursuit of maritime breathing space to establish a stronger presence in the region, resulting in a conflict of interests with

the United States. Chapter 2 examines four possible futures for East Asia and concludes that the most dangerous future is one in which the United States retreats from the region, with the result of a Hobbesian scramble for security. Chapter 3 argues that the current US military posture in the Indo-Pacific, descending from the Cold War era, is no longer a suitable posture with which to confront the PRC. Chapter 4 details the PRC's strategy to achieve dominance in its Near Seas, namely the South China Sea and the East China Sea, and posits that the PRC will increasingly use hard power to pursue its objectives. Chapter 5 highlights the shortcomings of current US military strategy, noting that US defense strategy has focused on the PRC's strengths rather than its vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

The first half of the book demonstrates that China's growing confidence on the basis of increasing economic prosperity and military capacity has eroded the effectiveness of conventional

military deterrence. Defining the breakdown of conventional military deterrence as *the* military problem, Haddick asserts that the United States does not have a long-term strategy to address it. In the second half of the book Haddick offers a set of solutions. He suggests that the US strategy has been unwisely defensive and recommends that the United States elaborate an offensive, cost-imposing strategy directed at China's centers of gravity. Haddick goes on to set out a four-step process for developing such a strategy. Confident that the United States and its allies can sustain conventional military deterrence against the PRC over an indefinite period at a reasonable cost if it adopts a new plan of action, in the final three chapters Haddick provides an approach to achieve sustained deterrence.

For Haddick, the key to successful deterrence in the Indo-Pacific lies in enhancing the US long-range strike capacity. Short-range missiles and tactical land-based and carrier-based aircraft are ill-suited to penetrating the missile-engagement zones provided by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces. As the continental power, China has a "home team" advantage to operate a significant fleet of land-based combat aircraft, the world's largest navy, and the world's most active land-based missile arsenal to deny access to its Near Seas. The B-2 Spirit stealth bomber provides a long-range strike capacity, but, unfortunately, the US Department of Defense significantly curtailed the number of aircraft fielded. The B-21 Raider, the replacement stealth bomber for the B-2, will be able to provide long-range strikes over China's Near Seas necessary for the counter-maritime mission to deny the PLA Navy sea control. Unfortunately, the years-long gap before the B-21 begins fielding presents higher risks than should be acceptable to US leaders.

In addition to changing the US military posture from one focused on short-range tactical aircraft to one focused on long-range strike capacity, Haddick also recommends a new fleet design,

from vulnerable aircraft-carrier strike groups to a frigate-dominated missile force. According to Haddick, the carrier strike group's missile configuration is primarily defensive. Put simply, more missiles are allocated to the defense of the carrier than for offensive strike capability. Even with this missile shield, however, the carrier strike group would be too vulnerable to PLA missile forces and therefore need to operate far east of China's shores, rendering its short-range, carrier-based aircraft impotent. For this reason, the carrier amounts to more of a liability than an asset. By contrast, a frigate-led force composed of missile ships would transform the fleet's missile composition from a defensive to an offensive capability and thus impose costs on the PLA, rather than the reverse, as is currently the case.

Haddick is a former US Marine, but he does not believe that maritime forces (not including subsurface forces) will be decisive in a conflict with the PRC over Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands, or a similar conflict in the region. The United States must first establish dominance over the space, cyber, and air domains before maritime operations, much less land operations, should proceed. For this reason, Haddick believes the main role of maritime forces will simply be to constitute a "force in being." That is to say, US Marine missile forces deployed to first island chain locations and naval surface forces in the region will serve as "trip wires." These forces would contribute to deterrence-by-denial, and any PLA attack on these forces would result in the United States switching to a deterrence-by-punishment course of action. By accepting that Indo-Pacific operations will be dominated by air and space—not maritime—power, Haddick recommends that the US forces under Indo-Pacific Command, nominally commanded by a Navy four-star admiral, should instead be commanded by an Air Force four-star general. Needless to say, this relegated role for maritime forces is not likely to be embraced by the naval services.

The Defense Department's 2022 National Defense Strategy stresses the urgency to sustain and strengthen deterrence against the PRC. With the demographic problems facing China, Haddick believes China's economic productivity vis-à-vis the United States has peaked and is on the decline. With the end of China's rapid economic growth, time is on the US side in the medium term and beyond. That is when the United States will field a significant number of B-21 strategic bombers that would enable a strategy akin to that which Haddick proposes. The most dangerous time for conflict is during the near term, before US defense capability improvements in the Indo-Pacific take effect and China's demographic decline compounds. Overall, Haddick provides a keen diagnosis of the military problem and offers prudent recommendations for policymakers to consider regarding a strategic approach to employ deterrence against the PRC. The future will tell, however, if China determines that time is indeed on its side or if it shares Haddick's forecasts and, for example, accelerates its timetable to force reunification with Taiwan.

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