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BOOK REVIEW

China An Enigma

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Foreword by

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The rise of China has become a key feature of international politics in recent years. Its growing economic might, military modernisation, and expanding international reach have altered the strategic landscape for many states in the region, especially for India. In the book *CHINA: An Enigma*, Air Marshal Dhiraj Kukreja (Retd.) strives to identify the factors that have facilitated China's rise and the challenges it poses to the region. As its title suggests, the book is meant for people interested in the strategic perspective of China but unwilling to read highly specialistic academic literature, and in doing so, it succeeds in its task. The book is structured to cover the main pillars of Chinese power. It begins with an exploration of history, politics, economy, and culture, emphasizing how China's present day activities are shaped by its historical experience, including its encounters with foreign domination and national humiliation. The author illustrates the importance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China's development, with the discussion of President Xi Jinping demonstrating the increasing centralization of political power and the interdependence between domestic political stability and foreign policy.

The book also details how long term strategic planning in China is possible due to political control, economic growth, scientific research, and investments in defence. A key section is dedicated to the military transformation of China, explaining budget allocations, weapon systems, joint military operations, capability development, and innovation within the clear context of the Indo Pacific. Finally, the sections dedicated to India and China relations stand out by addressing the rivalry beyond territorial issues, enabling the reader to see the relationship from the angle of cooperation, competition, and strategic caution.

Perhaps the biggest achievement of the book is its simplicity of presentation combined with a balanced approach. Unlike many works dealing with China and its strategic posture, the book does not view it merely as a potential adversary. Rather, it discusses how history, politics, economy, and culture cohesively influence China's strategic behavior as a continuation of its national vision. Another major advantage is its analysis of military transformation unlike other books devoted to China, it considers not just its budget and weapon systems, but also military modernisation as part of its national strategy.

The importance of innovation, joint military operations, and capability development are explained in a clear way, which is helpful for understanding changes in the military balance in Asia. Furthermore, Air Marshal Kukreja does not exaggerate the danger posed by China but at the same time, he fully recognises the significance of the India -China rivalry. Such an approach is especially valuable in an area that often attracts emotion or rhetoric. The writing style of the author is remarkable the language is simple, the logic is clear, and the book is easy to read all the way through. It makes the book accessible to students, young officers, and people lacking a background in Chinese studies without oversimplifying any issue.

However the book Being relatively short, it lacks to discuss many issues in sufficient depth. Aspects of Chinese strategy such as advances in artificial intelligence, cyberspace, and space power, which have become especially important for China recently, are only briefly mentioned. Similarly, the increased competition between China and the US could have been discussed in more detail, since it heavily influences security developments in the Indo-Pacific.

The Book CHINA: An Enigma represents the Indian strategic view and serves as an interpretive assessment rather than dense academic research. Therefore, while people interested in detailed analysis of Chinese strategic thinking and policymaking should read other sources in addition, this book achieves its main goal. It presents a brief, concise, and informative review of China's rise and helps the reader understand the strategic perspective behind its policies. The author manages to combine history, governance, military modernization, and foreign policy in a coherent way without complicating it too much. To sum up, the book is a timely and relevant contribution to strategic literature that provides valuable insight into a major geopolitical threat to India and other states. Due to its simplicity, practicality, and balanced discussion, it gives an excellent foundation to students of international relations, defence professionals, and policymakers interested in China's rise and its strategic implications.

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