

Red Flag Warning

REVIEW: 'Seven Things You Can't Say About China' by Tom Cotton

BY David J. Garrow

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Arkansas Republican senator Tom Cotton, now chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has authored a slender book that punches so much above its modest weight as to make a reader envision some skinny teenager—and Cotton is reportedly 6'5"—taking down Muhammad Ali or, in this case, obese Chinese dictator Xi Jinping.

His multigenerational Arkansas roots aside, Cotton is no rube. A magna cum laude graduate of Harvard College and then, in 2002, of Harvard Law School, Cotton left a remunerative law practice in 2005 to enlist in the U.S. Army before going on to serve two combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan with the 101st Airborne, earning a Bronze Star. 'Nuf said.

Cotton's been a U.S. senator for almost a decade now and has most distinguished himself as an outspoken opponent of the Chinese Communist Party. This book distills his powerful and insistent indictment of the CCP's looming danger to the United States, and in so doing he rings a prescient warning bell as to what America's future likely will hold.

Cotton's title encapsulates the seven threats he believes the CCP poses: above all military—"China is preparing for war"—but also economic, political, and cultural. Cotton has read *very* widely in the scholarly and journalistic literature on China, and this energetically written, richly documented book is a political tour de force that should be read by all of his congressional colleagues and by every Trump administration policymaker.

"China is an evil empire" that "can't be appeased, and it threatens freedom everywhere," Cotton writes. He relates how the CCP, once it took control of China in 1949, moved to erase Tibetan culture in that distinctive homeland before killing millions of its own people during a widespread 1959-1962 famine created by the disastrous policies of then dictator Mao Zedong. More recently, the CCP has undertaken "the systematic genocide of Uyghur culture" in China's far west and erased all the freedoms previously enjoyed by the people of Hong Kong.

The CCP has also undertaken "the largest peacetime military buildup in history," generating not only "the largest military on earth" but also "the world's largest submarine fleet" and "the world's largest ballistic-missile stockpile." In stark contrast, "the U.S. Army has shrunk to its smallest size since the start of World War

II,” the Navy “to its smallest size since World War I,” and the Air Force “has never been smaller, older, or less ready for combat.”

What’s worse, “the day is fast approaching when China’s nuclear forces will overmatch ours,” and China’s and Russia’s combined—don’t forget their “no limits partnership”—“already overmatch America’s nuclear forces today.” China’s nuclear weapons are “much newer and more advanced” than America’s, and “our senior military leaders believe that China is abandoning its long-standing no-first-use policy,” Cotton reports. In short, China’s nuclear forces “threaten our national survival and way of life.”

What comes next depends on Xi Jinping’s intent to seize control of Taiwan, the independent, democratically governed island just off of China’s east coast that the CCP claims as part of the country. “Taiwan is the most dangerous flashpoint in the world,” Cotton warns, and “China’s breakneck military buildup aims above all at the rapid invasion and occupation of Taiwan.” Not only do we and Taiwan “remain unprepared for the coming storm,” but “the military balance of power is shifting rapidly in China’s favor.” While “the stakes couldn’t be higher,” Cotton writes, “our military has only enough munitions to last a week or two in a war with China over Taiwan.”

Nowadays some [ostensibly respectable foreign policy voices](#) are [advocating U.S. abandonment of Taiwan](#) without a fight, which could conceivably appeal to President Trump if not to some of his top advisers. Cotton most certainly disagrees, rightly contending that “control of Taiwan would put China on the path to global dominance over the United States.” Should that indeed happen, in the long term “America would become little more than an economic colony to a dominant China.”

There’s much more in this tightly argued book, from acknowledging how with the COVID epidemic, “all the evidence from the beginning pointed to a lab leak” from China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology to how “no social-media app has harmed our kids more than TikTok.” Yet three nonmilitary topics merit brief mention. It may seem arcane to all of us who don’t focus on international trade policy, but Cotton persuasively suggests that “the worst geopolitical mistake in American history may have been granting China permanent most-favored-nation status and allowing it to enter the World Trade Organization,” in 2000 and 2001 respectively. By doing so, “we built up our most formidable enemy and empowered it to devastate our economy and threaten our national security” as China gained dominance both in manufacturing and in technologically essential rare metals.

On an unfortunately far-better-known subject, thanks to its endless trafficking in fentanyl, “China has manufactured the deadliest drug crisis in American history,” one that “is now the leading cause of death for Americans aged eighteen to forty-

five.” And, lastly, Cotton highlights how American movie studios’ desire to distribute their films to China’s billion-plus potential viewers may result in the broadcast news channels also owned by those studios’ parent companies soft-pedaling their coverage of the CCP. “Fox News is the only major network not owned by a parent company susceptible to Chinese pressure, and its coverage is by far the most critical of China.” Media conglomerates are far from unique, Cotton adds, for “too many of our largest companies have too often aided and abetted our deadliest enemy.”

All in all, Cotton forcefully emphasizes that “China could defeat America in the global struggle for mastery; it all starts and really ends in Taiwan.” Given the increasingly unfavorable military match-ups he powerfully highlights, Cotton unsurprisingly adds that “the only winning strategy to preserve American primacy is to deter aggression in the first place.”

To do so, however, will require two essential things. First would be an ASAP upgrade in U.S. military procurement and cutting-edge weapons development; instead both President Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth trumpet their desires to make massive *cuts* in defense spending. Second, with Taiwan as with South Korea and Japan, Xi Jinping has to be convinced that the United States will firmly stand behind our Asian allies should they face unprovoked aggression from China and/or North Korea. But of course nothing will more convince China’s ruler of American fecklessness than an abandonment of Ukraine’s courageous struggle for sovereign independence in the face of Vladimir Putin’s genocidal desire to eliminate Ukraine both as a free country and as a deeply rooted historical culture. As an overwhelming majority of informed commentators appreciate, any perception of a Putin triumph in Ukraine will embolden Xi Jinping more than any other possible world event.

Cotton brightly concludes this bracing and indeed often disheartening volume by declaring, “I’m confident America will win.” Sadly, I disagree—America is on track to *lose*, not only in Taiwan but also perhaps South Korea and the Baltic democracies should Russia’s war of aggression prevail in eastern Ukraine. I don’t for a second doubt that Tom Cotton is far and away smart enough to understand that, so how about speaking up, Senator, rather than remaining silent before America’s future slips away?

Seven Things You Can’t Say About China

by Tom Cotton

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David J. Garrow’s books include the Pulitzer Prize-winning Martin Luther King Jr. biography Bearing the Cross and Rising Star: The Making of Barack Obama.