Pakistani journalist and political analyst Ahmed Rashid has come out with the last book in his trilogy on the tragedies and travesties of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-US triangle that has shaped so much of post-Cold War dynamics. \textit{The Taliban} told the rise of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan, while \textit{Descent into Chaos} chronicled the US invasion after 9/11 and neglect of the deteriorating Afghan situation from the perspective of Kabul and Islamabad. Now, \textit{Pakistan on the Brink} turns a critical eye on Barack Obama’s South-Central Asia strategy and what the US military withdrawal in 2014 portends not just for Afghanistan, but even more for neighboring Pakistan.

Rashid’s narrative is gripping, from the bracing account of the Navy Seals’ killing of Osama Bin Laden, to private conversations with a fascinating cast of principal characters. Rashid was initially a believer, but has become “deeply disappointed” by Obama and his team.

Reviewed by John Delury

\textbf{Pakistan, a State Poised for Disaster}

Pakistan, a State Poised for Disaster

Rashid was initially a believer, but has become “deeply disappointed” by Obama and his team, who have left a legacy of “contradictory policies, intense political infighting, and uncertainty about US aims and objectives in the region.” The greatest danger of this strategic vacuum is not Afghanistan but Pakistan, which Rashid characterizes as “sliding down the path” of becoming a failed state. The final chapter is a laundry list of what must be done to bring things back from the brink, or else “prepare for the worst.”

Reviewed by John Delury

\textbf{Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan}

By Ahmed Rashid

Viking, 2012, 234 pages, $26.95 (Hardcover)
Among “prophecy books” describing the 21st century’s likely political landscape, there are broadly two rival camps. One group of authors holds that Asia, led by China, is displacing the US-led West as global hegemon, and we are entering a unipolar “Asian Century” or bipolar US-China century. Another argues that US dominance is secure, China is growing but not catching up, and the international order, based on Western values, will absorb — even Westernize — rising challengers from the developing world.

Georgetown professor Charles Kupchan marches into the no man’s land between these warring trenches, arguing that both are right (and wrong). China and East Asia, Brazil, Russia, India and the Global South are rising fast, but the US and the West are not fading away. Instead, we are in a century of “no one’s world,” when power, norms and institutions will have to be renegotiated on the basis of multiple “centers of power” and “versions of modernity.”

The book unfolds in three equally ambitious parts. Kupchan rehearses the rise of the West from 1500-1800, establishes the “cold hard facts” of the rise of the rest in recent decades, and finally advises the West on how to manage the inevitable loss of hegemony in the century to come. Non-Western countries will continue to amass wealth and power without necessarily embracing “liberal democracy, secular nationalism and industrial capitalism.” The West’s next great test, Kupchan argues, is learning how to share hegemony in non-Western ways.

Reviewed by John Delury, Assistant Professor of International Studies at Yonsei University, Seoul, and a book review editor for Global Asia.
Steve Chan here persuasively refutes balance of power theory, the dominant paradigm in the study of international relations, by presenting solid empirical and historical evidence that, contrary to its expectations, balancing has not occurred in the East Asian context. Asian states have not shown any efforts to balance against the US, the hegemonic power, nor have China’s neighbors formed a countervailing coalition to deal with its rise.

Chan attributes the failed prediction to several factors. First, contrary to the contention of realists, hierarchical order prevails over anarchy in East Asia. Second, policymakers are smart enough to see the opportunity costs of balancing policies because they can wipe out gains from economic interdependence and co-operation. Third, elites in East Asian countries, including China, are much more concerned about regime survival and economic performance — so vital to legitimacy — than nationalism, military expansion, or ideological propaganda. Finally, the regional pattern of engagement, enmeshment, co-operation and integration has made regional actors more self-restrained through mutually credible and binding commitment, trust, and reassurance as evidenced by burgeoning commercial and financial ties as well as dense networks of shared interests and norms.

Chan’s book is analytically provocative, empirically rigorous and rich in policy implications. Students of China-US relations, East Asian regional dynamics and international relations theory will benefit from it.

Reviewed by Chung-in Moon, Professor of Political Science at Yonsei University, Seoul, and Editor-in-Chief of Global Asia.