

A Q&A with Jarrod Hayes on his book

Constructing National Security: Relations with India and China

By Jeremiah Granden and Chris McDermott

Q: So you have a new book, *Constructing National Security: Relations with India and China*, which is now out in paperback. Can you provide an explanation of your thesis and what the book is about?

A: It starts from the premise that security, or the condition of threat or the belief about threat is the product of politics, of political interaction, of political claims. The idea that something out there does represent a threat and this is what we have to do about that threat in order to maintain our safety or deal with it to maintain our future, or continue to act in ways that we deem appropriate.

That has a very particular set of ramifications for understanding security in the international system because then you can't say, 'Alright, Iran with a nuclear weapon is a threat' – you have to understand why Iran might be wanting to build a nuclear weapon. What is it about that nuclear weapon that gives something to Iran that addresses a threat as Iranian policy makers or Iranian politicians have constructed it. You then have to go to the United States and understand how policy makers, politicians, and political actors are constructing Iran and that threat. Because Iran may have a nuclear weapon, but the United Kingdom has a nuclear weapon, and we don't consider British possession of nuclear weapon to be an existential threat to the United States.

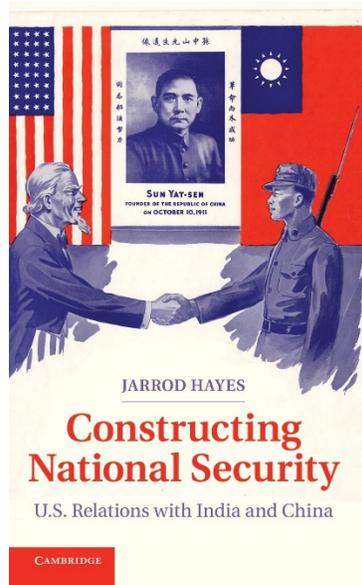
So, it's not the materiality of the nuclear weapon, it's the intentionality behind the nuclear weapon, but the intentionality is all about interpretation because we can't in the end know what intentionality is until something is actually done.

So the book is making the argument with respect to a specific social system, which is democratic identities. This idea that democratic governance is actually underpinned by a shared conception of the self because when they engage with each other they have certain expectations about what each of them, in a democratic society, is going to do. So what is important is 'I know you are a democrat, and you know I'm a democrat' and that means there are certain behaviors that are socially unacceptable.

We have to interpret, and that interpretive move, that assessment, that assignment of intentionality, which is the core of threat – that somebody seeks to do harm to you – is what the book is trying the wrestle with. So the argument is that this construction of threat is deeply, politically, and socially imbedded.

Q: And how do India and China fit within this argument?

A: When we look at India, we rely on the fact that India is also a democracy and that shapes how we interpret the intentionality of the



behaviors that are undertaken by India. So India detonates a nuclear device in 1974. We don't see that as a threat because India is not going to threaten us with a nuclear weapon. Why would they? It doesn't make sense to us in a way that it makes sense that Iran would threaten us with a nuclear weapon. Because Iran is not like us; they don't play by the same rules.

So that's the argument. I look at US relations with India and China and try to parse out how this dynamic of democratic identity playing out in the discourse in the United States. How are politicians constructing India, or not constructing India? How are they constructing China, or not constructing China? How are they trying to activate particular identities, particular systems of social meaning that then allow them to execute their preferred policies.

Q: You began your academic career studying astrophysics. Can you touch on your journey from an aspiring astrophysicist to a professor of international relations?

A: When I started as an astrophysicist my career dream was to be somebody like Carl Sagan, a popularizer of science - a fantastic scientist - but also a popularizer of science. So I had always

had this idea of being engaged in the public space, not just the science space.

Sagan concluded that advanced civilizations reach a tipping point: they either figure out how to reconcile themselves with the advanced technology they have produced and their ability to destroy, not only themselves, but the environments that they emerged from. Or they don't, and that question is what really fascinated me - this existential question of civilizations: either they learn how, or they don't. And so, if you want to think about those questions, there aren't many places you can go outside international relations because we are talking about globe spanning; relationships between the most organized collectives that human society has been able to put together to date.

So if we want to understand and access that question, if we want to get at 'will humanity be able to survive itself,' then international relations is one of the only fields you can go into to think about that question in a consistent and profound way. So that's how I went from a kid who wanted to emulate Carl Sagan, to going to a PhD program in International Affairs.



Jarrod Hayes is an Assistant Professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He received his PhD in Politics and International Relations from the University of Southern California.