

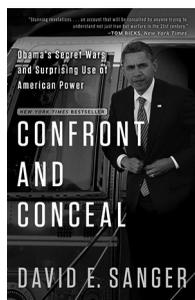
narrative leading to today's issues as well as illustrating them with examples from his own travels around the world, his solutions are easier said than done. Many American presidents have come into office focused on improving the economic standing of the country and reducing our commitments overseas. Both the complexity of the task and the complexity of the contemporary world make this a more difficult task than it seems.

Overall, *War, Welfare, & Democracy* is a well-researched and authoritative look at what drives us as a nation and how we arrived at where we are today. Munson's fluency with international relations theory, contemporary history, and economic theory provides the reader with a clear picture of global trends and provides a useful framework that points the way into the future. While his solutions lack specificity, Munson's framework is valuable for national security professionals to understand. This book is highly recommended.

Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power

By David E. Sanger

Reviewed by Dr. W. Andrew Terrill, Research Professor, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College



New York: Random House,
2012
496 pages
\$28.00

In *Confront and Conceal*, David Sanger, the chief Washington correspondent of *The New York Times*, examines President Obama's approach to US national security. He considers the president's actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Middle East, China, and North Korea, and argues an "Obama Doctrine" of sorts has emerged. It calls for the United States to confront the actions of its adversaries through a variety of ways including engagement, sanctions, covert actions, propaganda war, cyberwar, working closely with allies, and employing drones and Special Operations Forces. Conversely, the use of massive conventional military force is something the Obama Doctrine seeks to avoid except in cases involving US national survival. This reluctance is motivated by the president's concern about developing open-ended commitments and long occupations "that we can no longer afford" (page 421). Throughout the work, Obama is portrayed as deeply engaged in foreign policy, which he views through a realist lens (an approach that James Mann has without irony called that of a "Scowcroft Democrat"). He is also presented as seeking to manage other world powers and friendly states through intensive diplomacy and a keen understanding of their interests and goals.

Sanger maintains that Obama's approach to national security is reflected in his willingness to accept what the administration was reported to have called "Afghan Good Enough" as the basis for a US withdrawal from that country. This policy seeks a decent outcome in Afghanistan but is primarily concerned with ensuring the country never becomes a sanctuary for al Qaeda or other international terrorist organizations. Sanger maintains that Obama considers Pakistan and Iran to be more difficult problems than Afghanistan, and the president is described as viewing a loose Pakistani nuclear weapon as his most frightening foreign policy contingency. The Obama administration has struggled a great deal with this question but never reached a satisfactory solution

largely due to the Pakistani's claim that their weapons are 100 percent safe and the obvious fact that even a safe arsenal can become unsafe if Pakistan implodes.

Some of the most interesting analysis of this work involves US policies to prevent or at least delay Iranian development of a nuclear weapon. Here much of what Sanger presents is an account of US-Israeli covert war against the Iranian nuclear weapons program based on investigative reporting and not confirmed by official United States government statements. Sanger describes aspects of the covert war in some detail considering issues such as cyberattacks and sabotage against Iranian nuclear infrastructure. In one of the more amusing aspects of the book, Sanger also discusses a US-sponsored propaganda effort against Iran that appears modeled on "The Daily Show," whereby two US-based Iranian comedians highlight some of the most absurd aspects of their leadership's statements and actions. Moreover, while the covert and propaganda wars have been occurring, Obama has been steadily tightening economic sanctions on the Tehran regime by convincing foreign leaders that Iran has refused a reasonable diplomatic solution. This tightening has been a slow process since China and Russia initially showed almost no interest in confronting Tehran over this issue, but were eventually brought along.

Sanger comments extensively on the Obama administration's use of drones, which he maintains is substantial. Again, his accounts are detailed but often unsubstantiated by official US statements or documents. He maintains that drones are highly effective and over time have become much more accurate thereby reducing collateral damage in countries where they have been used in recent years. Nevertheless, Sanger strongly objects to one aspect of Obama's drone policy, which is the secrecy surrounding many aspects of the program. Sanger states that the Obama administration's decision to keep many details of its drone program secret has allowed US enemies to dominate the discussion of these systems with wildly exaggerated claims of the suffering of innocent victims. Sanger maintains the United States could win the argument on the morality of the drone program if it had not forfeited the option of doing so through excessive secrecy. This criticism may have value, but such decisions almost always involve the host government and not just the US administration. Recently, the much greater openness of Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Hadi (elected 2012) about drones has allowed the Obama administration to lift at least some of the secrecy about such activities in Yemen, although clearly not nearly to the extent Sanger is advocating.

In his discussions of the Arab Spring, Sanger states that Obama was viewed throughout the Arab World in an extremely positive light upon taking office. His landmark 2009 speech in Cairo was given to a widely approving audience, whose members occasionally shouted, "I love you." This approval was not to last, however, and the US president lost much of the luster with young Egyptians when he was perceived as dragging his feet on renouncing the Mubarak regime. He later showed another side of his cautious approach with Libya by refusing to send US ground troops into the conflict. Sanger quotes Obama National Security Advisor Tom Donilon as stating, "When you are on the ground, you own the result—and it is not long before you are resented by the local

population” (page 346). Additionally, while the United States did commit air units to the early phase of the NATO intervention in Libya, it was unwilling to accept even this level of involvement in the much more complex and difficult situation in Syria.

Sanger spends less time discussing China and North Korea, but he does consider potential problems between China and the United States. He states that Chinese leaders were delighted with the Bush-era wars, which they saw as weakening the United States and causing Washington’s attention to be diverted from Asia. This situation has now changed with the US pivot towards Asia, which the Chinese view with suspicion. Sanger suggests that an important part of the new US focus on Asia involves concern over the erratic and aggressive behavior by North Korea, but he correspondingly notes that China has shown little inclination to restrain that country in ways that would assuage US concern. He further states that China has alienated many of its neighbors over the past few years with efforts to advance its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Unsurprisingly, many of the countries most concerned about these Chinese actions are currently seeking to strengthen their ties to the United States. Sanger also discusses some of the divisions reflected in Chinese government publications on whether that country is better served by an assertive or a restrained foreign policy. The uptick of US tension with China came at a particularly bad time as the Chinese were terrified that the Arab Spring would leap the Pacific. Hence, they became especially sensitive to any US actions they perceived as meddling in Chinese domestic politics. Reflecting this concern, there were countless government-sponsored news stories about the end of “normal life” in Arab Spring countries.

In sum, Sanger presents an administration that jumps enthusiastically into the world of technological and other covert actions to fight America’s enemies but shows tremendous restraint about major commitments of military forces. He describes the president’s diplomacy and other foreign policy actions as meeting a number of important challenges with “patience and ingenuity” in ways that have led to favorable outcomes without incurring huge costs. The central foreign policy criticism that Sanger presents is his belief that Obama has been too tactical and reactive in his approach to national security. He maintains the president has come up short in developing and explaining “an overarching strategy to maintain and enhance American leadership and power in the world” (page 426). There may be some truth in this criticism although Sanger also seems to answer his own critique by suggesting the American public is not interested in such a strategy, and both the US public and Congress are more attentive to the “can we afford it questions” and the need for “nation-building at home.” This book is strongly recommended for those interested in the formulation and implementation of President Obama’s foreign policy and how his administration views national security issues.