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Mayday: The Decline of American Naval Supremacy

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spread of Islamic hegemony across not just the land but also the sea.

In a world where information has not always been easy to come by, Konstam's small but highly esteemed book does justice to the world of competing Arab-Byzantine interests. It covers the specifics of the fierce at-sea dueling that went on within the larger competition that spread over a sea claimed by both Byzantine Greek and Arab powers, anticipating by half a millennium the Ottoman conflict that would include both the fall of Constantinople and the ensuing battle of Lepanto.

PATRICK HUNT



Mayday: The Decline of American Naval Supremacy, by Seth Cropsey. New York: Overlook, 2014. 348 pages. \$29.95 (paperback \$17.95).

Mayday is an extended argument for the expansion of the U.S. naval fleet to confront Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea, secure U.S. global interests, and ensure America's future as a great power. The author, Mr. Seth Cropsey, has considerable experience in defense and government, having served as a Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy in two administrations, in addition to other roles; he is associated with various think tanks. He demonstrates an in-depth and well-developed understanding of the strategic issues the Navy faces as he traces the development of U.S. sea power, assesses its current state, and examines a number of proposals before offering his own prescription for the Navy's future.

In many ways this book is a reapplication of pre-World War I naval theory espoused by the Naval War College's

own Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. The author uses Mahanian thought extensively in his analysis of the historical development of American sea power into its current incarnation, explaining that, because of the U.S. Navy's current build rates and mismatched strategies, it is on a downward trajectory that will result in the loss of U.S. sea power. This, in turn, will result in a loss of U.S. influence and global stability worldwide. This channeling of Mahan is generally well executed, with one exception: at several points within the text, Mahan's equation of naval strength with the size of the national shipping fleet is referenced, without a solid explanation of how that relates to the current U.S. reliance on foreign carriers. The proposed repeal of the Jones Act (which mandates the use of U.S.-produced, -flagged, and -crewed carriers for cargo moved between U.S. ports) appears almost out of nowhere, and while a repeal definitely would improve competition and lower shipping costs, Mr. Cropsey fails to explain how this would be beneficial to the Navy or assist in correcting the strategic issues it faces.

The chapters on China's naval expansion and the ongoing gap between the U.S. Navy's force requirements and the number of hulls that its shipbuilding plan and budget can deliver are very informative and well reasoned. When observed through the Mahanian lens that Mr. Cropsey provides, it is not difficult to see how the People's Liberation Army Navy has embraced the idea that naval power is key to China's ability to influence the region and secure its interests from the African littorals to the deep waters of the Pacific.

The book runs a bit thin in the delivery of economic arguments regarding

the American deficit, national debt, and entitlements, and the occasional departures into partisan rhetoric do not really serve the overall thrust of the book. Some of the arguments it contains are inconsistent or undeveloped. An example is the suggestion to build smaller, single-mission hulls, which is followed later by a diametrically opposite recommendation to build multimission frigates with anti-air, anti-submarine, and anti-surface warfare capabilities. Additionally, his proposal to relegate much of the Army to National Guard or Reserve status is probably politically infeasible because of the dire effects this would have on the communities around major Army bases. All that aside, it is difficult to disagree with the fundamental tenets of *Mayday*—that a sufficiently sized and equipped Navy is crucial for our continued national security and the maintenance of international order—and on these bases his arguments for a naval expansion are sound.

Mayday provides an excellent case for reversing the piecemeal downsizing of the Navy, a return to pragmatic platform design, and consistent funding of a shipbuilding program to deliver and maintain a fleet sized to secure our interests and achieve our international objectives. Although the quote is not mentioned specifically, this book recalls President George Washington's observation in his letter of 15 November 1781 to the Marquis de Lafayette: "[W]ithout a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it, everything honorable and glorious." Mr. Cropsey's recommendations are pragmatic and worth consideration by senior Navy leadership and policy makers alike.

JOSH HEIVLY



Realpolitik: A History, by John Bew. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015. 408 pages. \$27.95.

John Bew, a historian at King's College London, provides the first comprehensive intellectual history of the often-misunderstood term *Realpolitik*. Drawing on the experience gained from his acclaimed biography of Lord Castlereagh, the Napoleonic-era British foreign secretary, Bew traces *Realpolitik* from its obscure, nineteenth-century origins in revolutionary Germany to the term's use and misuse in contemporary Anglo-American foreign policy debates. Scholars and practitioners seeking to gain a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of Western foreign policy thinking over the last century, particularly before 1945, would be well advised to consider Bew's compelling narrative.

In the often-glib foreign policy discussions that characterize public understanding of the discipline's key terms and points of contention, *realism* is often supposed to be interchangeable with *Realpolitik*. Bew's greatest contribution is his voluminous research into the term's early history, beginning with the 1853 book *Foundations of Realpolitik* by the little-known German philosopher Ludwig von Rochau. This original formulation, distinct from later uses in both Germany and the Anglosphere, was a creature of its time and place: a disunited Germany torn between the liberal impulses of the 1848 revolutions and the conservatism of its traditional ruling class, as personified by Otto von Bismarck.

Rochau's *Realpolitik* was not an ideology at all; it was a lens for viewing the political circumstances of Germany's