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## Reflections on Reading

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## REFLECTIONS ON READING

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I cannot live without books.” So wrote Thomas Jefferson to John Adams in 1815. Jefferson, one of the most learned founders of the Republic, amassed the largest personal collection of books in the United States. After the British burned the Library of Congress during the War of 1812, he sold 6,500 books from his collection to Congress to reestablish its library. Nearly two centuries later, the Navy’s leadership bought ten times that number of books, over sixty-five thousand, when it established the Navy Professional Reading Program (NPRP) in 2006. In both cases, the intent was to make great books more readily available to improve the lives of America’s citizens.

The sixty titles included in the initial rollout of the NPRP and the five new titles released in 2009 are excellent books that cover a wide range of topics. They do not, however, necessarily constitute the best or only books of value to professionals in the maritime services. In fact, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Gary Roughead, encourages sailors to “use these titles as a *starting point* to expand your intellectual horizons.” The NPRP website, [www.navyreading.navy.mil](http://www.navyreading.navy.mil), provides summaries of the sixty primary books and also information on several hundred other titles in the Supplemental Reading List. This list is designed to help readers who want to delve into greater detail on concepts they may have encountered while reading primary selections. Especially noteworthy books on the Supplemental Reading List include:

- *The Innovator’s Solution*, by Clayton M. Christensen and Michael E. Raynor, a follow-up to *The Innovator’s Dilemma* (a primary selection in the NPRP), offers suggestions on ways in which leaders and managers can deal with massive change and disruptive technologies. The authors note that while experience in dealing with change is important, equally important is that leaders “have wrestled with it and developed the skills and intuition to meet the challenges successfully the next time.” This book is written in a business context, but many of its lessons apply to leaders in military service.

- *China Goes to Sea*, edited by Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord. Throughout Asia today, China dominates the conversation. Within this dialogue, China's turn to the sea and its development of a blue-water capability have economic, diplomatic, and military implications. This valuable new book from the Naval Institute Press provides in one volume a comprehensive assessment of China's naval development, the principal historical precedents, and the complex thought processes that guide the Chinese navy's leadership.
- *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*, by P. W. Singer, is a truly remarkable and highly readable study of the impact that unmanned/robotic systems are having today and will no doubt have tomorrow on the conduct of warfare. Anthony Lake, former U.S. national security adviser and a professor of diplomacy in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, says of this book: "Singer's book is as important (very) as it is readable (highly), as much a fascinating account of new technology as it is a challenging appraisal of the strategic, political and ethical questions that we must now face. This book needs to be widely read—not just within the defense community but by anyone interested in the most fundamental questions of how our society and others will look at war itself." Another reviewer stated: "In no previous book have I gotten such an intrinsic sense of what the military future will be like. Lively, penetrating, and wise. . . . A warmly human (even humorous) account of robotics and other military technologies that focuses where it should: on us."

These are just three of the several hundred suggestions for additional reading found on the NPRP website. In early 2009, CNO noted in a Navy-wide message, "Reading, discussing, and understanding the ideas and concepts found in the NPRP will not only improve our critical thinking, it will also help us become better Sailors, better leaders, and better citizens. As President John Adams once warned, 'A fighting spirit without knowledge would be little better than a brutal rage.' I encourage all personnel to renew their fighting spirit through the power of professional reading."

We hope that the NPRP primary selections and the suggested additional readings will serve as roadmaps to books that contribute to the professional development of the service.

JOHN E. JACKSON