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High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World

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BOOK REVIEWS

A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

Owens, William A., *High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 178pp. \$27.95

High Seas is part history, part memoir, and part discussion of strategy for the Navy and the nation in the post-Cold War world. The discussion of deterrence and how deterrence has changed after the demise of the Soviet Union is both thought provoking and worthy of further study and debate. The author proposes the following definition of deterrence in this new era: "Deterrence refers to how the United States can use its military forces—nuclear and non-nuclear—to dissuade potential opponents from developing or using their military forces in ways the United States finds objectionable." His treatment of this subject should be of value to students of national security and practitioners of the military profession.

The book describes the changes that took place in the Navy Staff in 1992 and 1993. Owens was the architect of many of those changes, and his discussion of the need for change should be of interest to those having concern for the Navy and its organizational history. It is my belief that the changes he describes were essential to permit the Navy to

plan for the reductions dictated by the new administration and the changes taking place in the defense establishment. The Navy could not continue to plan as it had in the Cold War years. The changes are, of course, controversial. Owens's discussion will be of great interest to career officers and historians. His views should be particularly useful in illustrating how change can take place in a large bureaucratic organization.

Admiral Owens's treatment of how the Navy's force structure may change over the next twenty to thirty years will undoubtedly cause many to question the path he would follow. The basic question of what should be the next generation naval hardware and technology is of paramount interest. Owens believes that tomorrow's naval forces will be much different and shaped significantly by advances in technology. This view leads to fewer forces, possessing higher technological capability, connected by advanced communications and data links. These forces will depend on much-improved sensors and precision-guided weapons.

The author also advocates much closer cooperation with the other services than took place in the Cold War

era. Of particular interest is his advocacy of closer integration of Navy and Marine aviation. He believes greater flexibility in the aircraft loading on our carrier decks is necessary and that tailoring for the specific mission will be the rule rather than the exception. These subjects should provoke much thought, and they will certainly stir emotions. It is my judgment that discussions of these issues are healthy and must take place to help shape the difficult decisions ahead for the Navy as the post-Cold War era unfolds. As always, the Navy will be hard pressed to maintain sufficient ready forces to meet its deployment requirements. The trade-off between technology and numbers will dictate some hard choices; indeed some very tough choices have already been necessary.

Owens is eminently qualified to lead the discussion in his book. He skillfully uses his experiences as Commander Sixth Fleet to show the reader that he has the real-world knowledge and hands-on experience needed to lend credibility to his words.

High Seas should be of great value to war colleges and other educational institutions involved in the business of national security. Owens has demonstrated in *High Seas* that he has the courage to take on the difficult problems facing the nation and the armed services in the evolving national security debate.

FRANK B. KELSO II
Admiral, U.S. Navy, Ret.
Springfield, Virginia

McNamara, Robert S. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Times Books, 1995. 414pp. \$27.50

*History to the defeated may say alas
but cannot help or pardon.*

W.H. Auden

In December 1980 I interviewed Robert McNamara, then president of the World Bank, while researching a book I was writing on Maxwell Taylor. When I attempted to raise questions concerning the Vietnam War, he told me that he had decided long before not to discuss that matter for publication. So now he has written a book on that subject. Why did he change his mind at this late hour? His answer as set forth in the preface of the book: "I have grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt with which so many people view our political institutions and leaders." Indeed! But was it McNamara's past actions that contributed to that cynicism? After reading this book, one might grow even more cynical.

The book follows the chronology of McNamara's Vietnam involvement from 1961 until his departure from the Pentagon in early 1968. It is not an impressive work, for many reasons. There are some significant omissions (probably deliberate), and it contains no new documentation. Stylistically, the writing is mechanical and somewhat shallow. But particularly disappointing is his lack of insight into the other major decision makers.

Since the book focuses on Vietnam, it does not cover in detail the author's