

1992

Cold Water Politics: The Maritime Strategy and Geopolitics of the Northern Front

Robert E. Bathurst

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Bathurst, Robert E. (1992) "Cold Water Politics: The Maritime Strategy and Geopolitics of the Northern Front," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 45 : No. 3 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol45/iss3/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

appears to be the exact equivalent of the old "Naval Science," except that formally it was "a division of Soviet Military Science."

In sum, this is an exceptionally well-written and researched reference work. Like its predecessors, it will be of great use for Western analysts in developing insights into the former Soviet navy and its successors. But unlike its predecessors, it is not particularly tendentious. If it were translated into English it would be a helpful reference for any U.S. naval officer.

WILLIAM C. GREEN
Boston University

Tunander, Ola. *Cold Water Politics: The Maritime Strategy and Geopolitics of the Northern Front*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989. (No price given)

Many studies in progress (including my own) about Soviet security problems have suffered miscarriage before delivery. For decades, we could write at a leisurely pace, confident that nothing would change soon enough to embarrass us. However, the incredible changes that have occurred in all of Eastern Europe have put out of business those of us who made a living with periodic Cassandraesque warnings of the threat to Europe. We cannot write fast enough nor can our publishing houses print fast enough to keep up with the new states and governments of the former Warsaw Pact and the former Soviet Union.

Ola Tunander has managed to avoid that fate. What he has given us contains something new: a method of analysis which strategic writers will understand can save their craft in these perilously peaceful times. It is the application of semiotics (the science of signs) to the strategic competition.

What Dr. Tunander has written is brilliant, and a welcome relief from the stale reprocessing of commonly held information characteristic of the genre writing about the Soviet navy. Using the Maritime Strategy—the U.S. Navy's apparently unilateral operational plan for how to defeat the Soviet Union of 1986—as a kind of metaphor, both a sign and a signal, Tunander demonstrates how the different Nordic nations interpreted it within their own contexts and how they tried to adapt it to their own needs and wants. The result is a fascinating study of cross-cultural interpretations.

This invaluable book will be of interest to Americans for the lesson offered in the subtleties of seapower, complete with illustrations. From across the Atlantic, Americans were inclined to assume that Western Europe perceived its threat in compatible ways. However, Tunander details how differently the Nordic countries established their defensive fronts to the East.

Although the text is filled with convincing insights and research, the reader should first check Appendix II, "Sea and Sign." Here is something new, brilliant, and daring. Tunander applies the method of semiotics to the

strategic debate. The results are stunning. For example, Machiavelli is made current in a study of the strategic process. Tunander writes: "For the nuclear prince, war and interest in war are concerned not with actual war but with possible war, with strategies and counterstrategies, moves and countermoves in the superpower game....The simulation of war has not only distanced the prince from brutal force; in the direct interaction between superpowers, simulated war has largely replaced real war and has even distanced military personnel from brutal force."

Tunander's argument is that the underlying assumption in the arms race was that war was no longer possible, and that therefore what we have been doing all these years is interpreting the credibility of the signals and defining the signs—playing a game like chess with elaborate and dangerous rules. We have spent our lives translating the ambiguities and talking in a code.

As we have clearly entered a period in which the game has shifted, with the European nations and Japan scrambling about looking for new combinations and creating new ambiguities, there will be little work for those who deny the importance of political cultures and their language of signs.

The nations which continue to be culturally self-centered in the new age will be given devastating semiotic lessons such as are being administered in the United States by the Japanese. This work, with its engrossing appendix,

splendidly demonstrates the new theory and practice of security studies. As a wonderful bonus, it is written with both clarity and professional scholarship, while avoiding the deadly jargon of the trade, and draws upon the resources of a literate mind for apt illustrations. Here is a man who not only knows his Hegel, but also his Derrida. It is increasingly seldom that we can recommend a book that says something new and useful for these revolutionary times.

ROBERT E. BATHURST
International Peace Research Institute
Oslo, Norway

Friedman, Norman. *Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 435pp. \$24.95

No doubt in the next few years publishers will offer numerous selections about Desert Storm, but Norman Friedman has produced the first comprehensive view of the Gulf War. Author of over twenty books on naval subjects, the internationally known military historian has in this work attempted to provide a balanced look into the air, ground, naval, joint, and coalition warfare aspects of the war. The success of his effort is debatable. It is apparent that Friedman is more conversant with naval concepts, and their contribution to the overall war effort, than with the other factors.

The author emphasizes the importance of maritime forces in deterring Saddam Hussein. In particular, Friedman highlights the effect that