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## Congress Buys a Navy: Politics, Economics, and the Rise of American Naval Power, 1881–1921

Blake I. Campbell

Paul E. Pedisich

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hopes that Taiwan's counterintelligence efforts are indeed that good, but readers probably recall that the John Walker spy ring operated for over fifteen years in the United States during the Cold War, causing enormous harm. Doubtless, Taiwan works hard to catch spies—as did the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the Cold War—but it just does not seem credible that Taiwan is immune to effective Chinese espionage efforts. Readers also might be forgiven for doubting the author's claim of Chinese counterintelligence ineptitude if recent reports in the press describing Beijing's destruction of Central Intelligence Agency networks in China are accurate. The perils inherent in the book's analytical tilt in favor of Taiwan extend to other areas, perhaps most critically to the author's assessment (which relies on some of his previous, similar work) that the threat that China's conventional missile force and counterair systems pose to Taiwan's air force and navy is manageable. This is important because if this conclusion is wrong Taiwan's exposure to Chinese bombardment and blockade, and even invasion, is far higher than the author asserts. This vulnerability—which depends on whether Chinese long-range precision strikes can be effective against Taiwan's defenses—will remain a critical factor in Taiwan's ability to deter or withstand Chinese uses of force. The implications of this competition extend far beyond Taiwan. This work would be better if it had addressed this issue more thoroughly. Another subject that falls in this category of insufficient treatment is China's ability to use its maritime militia during an invasion of Taiwan. Nonetheless, there is value in this book. Its sources, and the author's background and experiences, provide a

basis for optimism regarding Taiwan's ability to resist an invasion, which the author relates enthusiastically.

WILLIAM S. MURRAY



*Congress Buys a Navy: Politics, Economics, and the Rise of American Naval Power, 1881–1921*, by Paul E. Pedisich. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016. 304 pages. \$39.95.

The subject of Paul E. Pedisich's newest work, *Congress Buys a Navy: Politics, Economics, and the Rise of American Naval Power, 1881–1921*, is apparent from its title. Pedisich proposes that it was Congress—rather than the executive branch—that was most directly responsible for funding and building the U.S. Navy during this pivotal period. This well-researched work considers four decades of presidential actions, congressional legislation, and USN policy and their role in the buildup of U.S. naval power and capabilities.

These four decades (1881–1921) are in many ways the most important in U.S. naval history and development, spanning the aftermath of the Civil War through the end of the First World War. At the beginning of this period, Pedisich demonstrates the relative feebleness of the U.S. Navy in comparison with European naval powers, most notably Great Britain. However, this study demonstrates how the efforts of nine presidents and their cabinets, sixteen Secretaries of the Navy, and innumerable members of Congress were able to transform the U.S. Navy from a neglected, presteel, and defensively focused organization into—in the aftermath of World War I—the world's premier naval power.

Pedisich's study is notable for its focus on the legislative branch's central place

in developing the nation's maritime power and naval war-fighting capabilities. Consequently, it should be noted that this work is not a study of naval warfare, tactics, or strategy. Rather, Pedisich's extensive research of the congressional sources explores the personal and political negotiations and decisions, and the attendant legislation and congressional appropriations, that in essence "built" this new Navy over the course of four decades.

Perhaps this book's greatest strength is as a catalog of the wealth of primary-source material from which Pedisich drew: personal and private correspondence, political speeches, and military and congressional records. The book is also rich in a level of detail that constitutes a microhistory of the period's naval and congressional politics. One thing readers will not be lacking after reading this book is information.

Yet *Congress Buys a Navy* has numerous weaknesses. Perhaps the most obvious is a lack of clear purpose. While this work extensively chronicles naval politics in Washington—including congressional appropriations, arguments, voting records, and political maneuvers—as well as decisions from the various Navy Secretaries and the rest of the executive branch, it falls short in providing the larger historical contextualization for making sense of this plethora of specific information. Furthermore, Pedisich does not explain the meaning of this massive data dump in any conclusive manner. Most significantly, Pedisich's overall assessment of this period is uncertain: Did the Navy (and the United States) need more funding? Less? The reader is left uncertain. Despite Pedisich's richness of detail, his assessment of the specific processes that transformed the Navy from

a weak, presteel force into a premier fighting force remains ambiguous.

Despite Pedisich's attention to consecutive legislatures, congressional appropriations, funding, and various Secretaries of the Navy and politicians, he does not give the reader regular, intermediate updates regarding the exact strength and capability of the Navy for this period. Occasionally, Pedisich does draw attention to numerical values of naval forces, but when he does he offers little in the way of explanation of the lethality and functionality of the Navy. As a result, the reader may be disappointed at the lack of details on the status of naval forces, such as ships in use and those under construction.

Absent a consistent and overarching metanarrative, the book ultimately reads more as a collection of case studies on congressional processes and as an encyclopedic compilation of attendant economic and political facts and statistics—all perhaps of lesser interest to armchair naval historians. However, *Congress Buys a Navy* is a thoroughly researched work that warrants accolades for highlighting the key role that Congress played in creating a modern U.S. Navy.

BLAKE I. CAMPBELL



*Everything under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power*, by Howard W. French. New York: Knopf, 2017. 352 pages. \$27.95.

As a journalist who has done his historical research, Howard W. French has produced a highly readable book that probes the Chinese concept of *tian xia*, roughly meaning China's "natural dominion over everything under