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Maritime Strategies for the XXI Century: The Contribution of Admiral Castex

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Lars Wedin

The United States, after the American Civil War, took a different course, abandoning its maritime heritage and replacing it with a naval form of the militarism that was gaining ground in Germany, the other rising industrial power, by adopting the battle fleet theories of Mahan, Luce, Fiske, and others. It was a turn that served the Navy well for most of what remained of the twentieth century, as the service used its vastly superior material resources to overwhelm its symmetrical opponents. In the process, *freedom of the sea,* particularly after 1945—the period from which the authors draw most of their examples—ceased to be about trade, becoming rather about the freedom of naval forces to go where they needed to project power.

China presents a different challenge. Germany, Japan, and Soviet Russia were all economic autarkies; China is the opposite. It now has the world's second-largest economy and is the largest trading power; it uses its growing navy as just one of a set of political, diplomatic, industrial, technological, informational, and legal tools to advance its interests.

Kraska and Pedrozo have looked at the legal challenge with a gimlet eye. They have provided not only an invaluable description of the threat China presents to the U.S. Navy but a guide to legal ripostes to Chinese behavior that can be implemented now. They have written a handbook for action and a historical justification that all officials working on China must read.

Their analysis and the prescription it generates must, however, be read in context. Like Britain in Paris in 1856, we need the vision, flexibility, and guile to win all nations with maritime interests over to our side. We need to be their champion, as Woodrow Wilson purported to be in 1918, when he made freedom of the seas one of his Fourteen Points. More than that we need to begin thinking and acting like a maritime nation again. Maybe then we can stay one step ahead of China at sea.

MARTIN N. MURPHY

Maritime Strategies for the XXI Century: The Contribution of Admiral Castex, by Lars Wedin. Paris: Nuvis, 2016. 233 pages. $30.

It is a matter of interest when an author is willing to break out some of the older volumes on maritime strategy and reexamine them in the light of current concerns, attempting to determine whether some nugget of interest has been passed over inadvertently. Lars Wedin's *Maritime Strategies for the XXI Century: The Contribution of Admiral Castex* is such a work. Wedin examines the writings of French admiral Raoul Castex (1878–1968) for their applicability in creating maritime strategies for the present millennium. This is not an easy task. Castex was a voluminous writer throughout his naval career, authoring five books on strategic theory; two additional volumes of collected articles were compiled posthumously. As a naval officer serving on escort ships during the First World War, Castex had the practical experience of observing what actually worked—above and beyond what any academician might propose. Following that conflict, Castex appreciated the opportunities that technological advances in aircraft and submarines might provide to the future naval commander. Given his lengthy naval career, wartime experience, and attentiveness to technological

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improvements, Castex should have been a worthy successor to previous naval strategists such as Mahan and Corbett.

As Wedin points out, this was not always the case. The sheer immensity of Castex's work makes it daunting for even the dedicated reader to digest. His writing style was ponderous, considering both the perspective of a practitioner and that of a theorist, without privileging either. Finally, Castex modified some of his views over the decades of authoring his volumes. Within that discourse, though, there are numerous ideas in the rough that are of interest to the modern naval strategist and policy maker.

Wedin does a credible job of bringing Castex into the new millennium, showing where Castex was on-target, as well as where his commentary does not pass the test of time. Castex was accurate on many things regarding the current character of maritime competition and conflict. His concept of strategy was not limited exclusively to the use of military power to gain political objectives during time of war. Attention to the naval forces, as well as the industry that built the ships and the organizations that produced the sailors to operate them, required oversight and direction during peacetime as well. A strategy of morale was necessary to keep the population committed to the policies of the government—a highly Clausewitzian notion.

As a practitioner, Castex wrote about the notion of constraints that would prevent military commanders from taking extreme action in pursuit of mere military aims. There were always limits, both political and legal, that mitigated such excesses, particularly in peacetime. Failure of the national leadership to maintain an interest in the maritime environment in peacetime could lead to defeat in time of war. Instead, a maritime strategy that coordinated actions by industry, national military, and security forces was essential to build the wealth and power of the state. These were still primarily wartime concerns for Castex, for both the preparation for and conduct during hostilities, but he was prescient about the growing importance of the linkages.

Yet Castex was not infallible, as Wedin illustrates. The "infrastructuration" of the ocean with new facilities to gain wealth from the sea, such as oil platforms, wind turbine farms, or ocean floor mining, portends a greater economic interest in the ocean above and beyond that of shipping flows that support the globalization of commerce. This, of course, opens up different avenues for disruption of the enemy beyond the mere destruction of shipping that Castex had observed in World War I. Land attack from the sea, while possible, did not seem likely to succeed, perhaps owing to the poor Allied performance at Gallipoli. Subsequently, World War II showed that Castex was too pessimistic on this subject. Castex also underestimated the role of navies in operations below the threshold of armed conflict. The constraints of legal regimes, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, affect naval operations in both peace and conflict to greater degrees than Castex would have believed possible. The maritime component of strategy must now include consideration of new strategies (cyber and space) on the basis of technologies that were nascent in Castex's lifetime. This hardly can be considered serious criticism of Castex, as the world certainly has changed since he considered the foundations of naval strategy.

For a readership well versed in the views of British- and American-centric theorists and historical operations, this book is a welcome exposure to other nations' perspectives and conclusions regarding the exercise of maritime power in peace and war. Wedin is Swedish and Castex was French, resulting in a distinctly European view of sea power. Wedin's analysis of Swedish maritime policy in light of Castex's ideas is also valuable, but this is not always an easy path. The translation and organization of the book require the reader's concentration. These are surmountable obstacles in Wedin's efforts to bring Castex into the current era and evaluate his strategic insights for consideration by an already time-constrained officer corps. He has done the tough plowing of Castex's work so the main furrows have been established, allowing in-depth analysis of the particularly interesting spots in the field.

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