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## The Mayaguez Crisis, Mission Command, and Civil-Military Relations

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ideas. One key influencer, Colonel Michael Wyly, came to occupy key positions in the Marine Corps educational establishment, where Boyd's ideas crystallized into maneuver warfare doctrine.

The Corps's internal advocates eventually found senior leadership willing to push the service in a new direction, most importantly General Al Gray. In 1989, Commandant Gray issued Fleet Marine Force Manual 1. Entitled simply *Warfighting*, FMFM-1 made maneuver warfare the key defining characteristic of the Corps's operational approach; it has remained so for thirty years. It is significant to note, however, that the senior leaders who adopted maneuver warfare did not become converts as senior officers; rather, they had become interested in these ideas years before, ascended the ranks, then moved to implement their vision—an observation consistent with other studies of institutional reform.

The story of how a rogue Air Force fighter pilot shaped the core ideas of the Marine Corps is a case study in how militaries learn and change. Many similar case studies oversimplify this messy and imperfect process, creating a clean narrative of progressive heroes and resistant villains. Brown avoids this trap—a success all the more impressive given the strong opinions that still surround Boyd. In so doing, Brown has produced a book that will take its place alongside Rosen's *Winning the Next War* and Bergerson's *The Army Gets an Air Force* as a foundational study of military institutional change.

*A New Conception of War* skillfully brings an extraordinary, historic episode to a new generation of Marine Corps leaders and, in a larger context, to any leader who is contemplating leading change.

DALE C. RIELAGE



*The Mayaguez Crisis, Mission Command, and Civil-Military Relations*, by Christopher J. Lamb. Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018. 330 pages. Available for download at [jcs.mil/](https://jcs.mil/). Free.

Khmer Rouge forces boarded and took control of the U.S.-registered merchant vessel *Mayaguez* on 12 May 1975, then released the crew three days later. Coming just two weeks after the fall of Saigon, the move was considered a brazen challenge to the U.S. commitment in the region. Ultimately the American response resulted in the release of the crew and their ship, at the cost of forty-one American servicemen killed and dozens wounded. Christopher J. Lamb, a distinguished research fellow at National Defense University, has written a thorough and evenhanded history of the crisis, demonstrating a command of existing literature and original sources.

In the immediate wake of the invasion and collapse of South Vietnam, the overwhelming motivation among decision makers was to demonstrate American resolve. President Ford and Henry Kissinger—the latter wearing both the national security advisor (NSA) and Secretary of State hats—were fully in charge, but Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, Deputy NSA Brent Scowcroft, White House chief of staff Donald Rumsfeld, and other key actors all agreed with Ford and Kissinger that forceful action was necessary to reassure allies, to show Beijing that Washington would remain engaged in the region, and above all to deter Pyongyang. North Korean aggression was a real concern, as was a repeat of the 1968 *Pueblo* incident or the lesser-known EC-121

incident of 1969, in which North Korea shot down a USN surveillance plane, killing all thirty-one servicemen aboard. Kissinger in particular saw the U.S. response to that outrage as weak-kneed.

This desire to demonstrate resolve led to three waves of bombings of the mainland, a Marine assault on an island where it was thought the crew might have been taken, and a blockade in which Cambodian craft were plinked whenever possible. On these courses of action there was general agreement early on; however, as the crisis rolled into its third and then fourth and final day, fissures emerged.

One issue was how long to continue bombing once Phnom Penh signaled an interest in dealing, and then fairly rapidly released the crew. After two successful bombing runs against the mainland, Schlesinger, his military assistant, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the chairman's military assistant wanted to divert planned third and fourth attacks to Tang Island, where a too-small number of Marines were in a desperate battle to regroup, gather fallen comrades, and evacuate. The military also argued that the bombing's objectives had been attained without loss of life up to that point. Against Kissinger and Ford, Schlesinger lost the argument for diverting the third wave, but then won the argument on the fourth, which was in fact diverted. As Lamb points out, since the president and Secretary of State / NSA were still intent on demonstrating toughness, this probably cost Schlesinger his job. Ford would believe, with Kissinger's encouragement, that Schlesinger had dragged his feet on bombing the mainland, which was not exactly the case; the Secretary of Defense was all in favor of bombing the mainland

until he learned that the crew was on its way to safety. After that, he was more concerned about the undermanned Marine contingent fighting on Tang.

A more serious disagreement occurred on the issue of whether to continue plinking Cambodian ships once *Mayaguez's* crew was safe. Schlesinger agreed with his senior military advice that this would endanger U.S. military personnel unnecessarily and also risk hitting the ship carrying the *Mayaguez* crew. He therefore stonewalled the White House for several hours, then defended orders given by senior officers not to sink the ships. This probably sealed his fate as a soon-to-be-retired Secretary of Defense.

Lamb's approach is to address the chronology first and then deal with theory, an approach that works well. As someone who has written on the subject in the past, he points out where interpretations should be adjusted on the basis of new evidence. He finds that his earlier work, which argued the existence of a belief system that created a focus on demonstrating U.S. resolve, generally holds up, but that there should be increased appreciation for several important issues: insubordination regarding the sinking of Cambodian ships; the willingness of Ford and Kissinger to risk the lives of the crew by pursuing mainland bombing even after they knew the crew was being transported to safety; and Kissinger's dominant role, including such actions as withholding a message from Tehran indicating Phnom Penh's willingness to release the crew. Elsewhere Lamb points out the willingness of senior military officers to accept Pacific Command's optimistic interpretation of the degree of resistance on Koh Tang rather than the Defense Intelligence Agency's more realistic estimate, as

well as the Marines' failure to ask for an additional twenty-four hours and more troops to prepare for the assault.

This is an enjoyable history and analysis of an interesting interlude in America's engagement with East Asia. One could argue that in the end Phnom Penh's rapid move toward releasing the crew ran up against Washington's perceived need to demonstrate resolve. Were that mind-set not so entrenched, it is possible that the attack on Koh Tang could have been either avoided or executed with appropriate force.

The ultimate measures of effectiveness of the U.S. response are whether Pyongyang was deterred from action it would have taken otherwise and whether our allies were meaningfully reassured. On these matters the evidence is mixed.

JOHN GAROFANO



*The Modernisation of the Republic of Korea Navy: Seapower, Strategy and Politics*, by Ian Bowers. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 239 pages. \$79.99.

For a state frequently described as a "geostrategic island," South Korea's maritime security remains a chronically understudied aspect of order in the Asia-Pacific. Ian Bowers's *The Modernisation of the Republic of Korea Navy* goes some way toward filling this gap, with a persuasive account of the forces that have facilitated and shaped the last three decades of expansion of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Navy (ROKN) into an actor of regional significance.

Bowers argues that a combination of material and ideational changes were pursued in the development of the modern

ROKN. In physical terms, the addition of around twenty new classes of naval vessels in the last thirty years—combined with construction of a new base on Jeju Island and changes to hardware, training, and operational structure—has reflected the desire for a comparatively small but potent force that can be wielded effectively in pursuit of the South's growing set of peninsular and regional maritime interests. Ideationally, Bowers sees post-1988 democratization in the South as a crucial underlying factor behind increased emphasis on the ROKN's role. As the South Korean army's political and cultural power waned during this period, the ROKN tapped into the peninsula's maritime history to foster a burgeoning naval identity among South Korean foreign policy elites and the public at large.

Bowers also describes a changing international context for ROKN development, highlighting the shifting role of the United States and China's own emerging status as a dominant naval power in the region. A particularly persuasive chapter of the book is devoted to an assessment of the strategic and financial logic behind Washington's shift from restricting ROKN development in favor of the South's land forces to its new role as a facilitator of an expanding ROKN.

Notably, *The Modernisation of the Republic of Korea Navy* challenges key aspects of a common narrative of ROKN naval development that pits blue-water ambitions against an obligation to defend peninsular waters from the existential North Korea threat. For Bowers, these tasks are not as contradictory as they may appear, given the multifunctionality of naval platforms that can be used in both local and regional contexts. Bowers cites the example of the ROKN's KDX-III destroyers having been fitted with the Aegis