From the Editors

Robert Ayer

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This issue begins with a four-essay commemoration of the passing of Colin S. Gray (1943–2020), who has a strong claim to being considered the greatest strategic theorist of his generation. Although an Englishman who was educated at Oxford and concluded his career as director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Reading, Gray lived and worked for decades in the United States and was a major contributor to the debates on nuclear strategy and arms control that roiled the American security community during the endgame of the Cold War. He was thoroughly at home in this country and extraordinarily well connected in the senior leadership ranks of the American armed forces. Gray’s views always were somewhat out of step with the academic and policy establishment of the day, but he was respected and liked universally as a gentleman as well as a scholar.

Gray’s many books covered virtually every aspect of military power, but at the core of his thought was the idea of strategy; Clausewitz was his lodestar. He was, as Lawrence Freedman puts it, truly an “evangelist” of strategy, and he returned repeatedly to this subject in a number of his books over the years in an effort to deepen and refine his thoughts and to meditate especially on what he conceived as the (deeply problematic) issue of the relationship between strategic theory and practice. Among navalists, Gray is best known for his Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War (1992). Geoffrey Till offers a brief appreciation of this work, arguably the best single study of the subject in the twentieth century. Gray’s former colleague Keith Payne then reviews Gray’s profoundly considered views of nuclear strategy and arms control, and in particular his virtually single-handed effort to make the (moral as well as the military) case for defense against nuclear weapons. Finally, John Klein assesses Gray’s contribution to space as an emerging arena of strategic interest. Klein, a former student of Gray’s at Reading (as well as a graduate of this College), also testifies to Gray’s talents as a teacher and his commitment to the development of strategy as a full-fledged academic discipline. RIP.

The world’s oceans always have been places where it is very easy to disappear. The rapid development of remote-sensing technologies in recent years promises to alter this situation fundamentally. In “From Orbit to Ocean: Fixing Southeast Asia’s Remote-Sensing Blind Spots,” Gregory B. Poling offers a
detailed survey of the array of (primarily space-based) remote-sensing systems currently in existence or under development in the private sector, and argues that the availability as well as the increasing affordability of these systems soon will make it possible for smaller states radically to improve their ability to monitor their own territorial waters and to counter more effectively criminal activities that range from illegal fishing to piracy, human trafficking, and terrorism. Focusing on Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, he argues that these nations to varying degrees are beginning to cope with the gross deficiencies in their current maritime monitoring capabilities, and that the United States has a key role to play in facilitating access to appropriate private-sector resources. Gregory Poling is a senior fellow for Southeast Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Naval blockades have been an important if somewhat neglected aspect of maritime warfare since at least the eighteenth century, when advances in ship construction provided the station-keeping features critical for successful blockading operations in the age of sail. Close blockades of French naval bases by the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars represented a major and expensive commitment of Britain’s ships of the line. The Union naval blockade of the Confederacy in the American Civil War was a key strategic contributor to the eventual triumph of the North. In “Theories of Naval Blockades and Their Application in the Twenty-First Century,” Adam Biggs, Dan Xu, Joshua Roaf, and Tatana Olson revisit the issue of naval blockades today, with special attention to the international legal context of blockading operations and the extent to which recent developments in weaponry and technology have affected the way blockading is or should be conceived and applied. They conclude by focusing briefly on case studies of potential blockades of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and of North Korea. The authors are officers on active duty in the United States Navy.

Bureaucratic ossification is a challenge for any large organization but particularly for military organizations, owing to their innately hierarchical command structures. In “Transformational Leadership in the Navy: Cultivating a Learning-Organization Culture,” Brenda Oppermann and William Nault provide a case study of the multiyear project of transforming Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard from a problem-plagued and underperforming organization into a high-performing one, using the “learning organization” model originally developed by Peter Senge. Brenda Oppermann is a professor in the College of Leadership and Ethics at the Naval War College, of which Captain William Nault, USN (Ret.), is the deputy dean.
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Robert Ayer, Managing Editor