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From the Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

The geostrategic picture in the Middle East has been transformed fundamentally over the last several years by the rapprochement between Israel and the Arab world, midwifed by the Trump administration in a series of unexpected diplomatic coups. The ramifications of these developments have only begun to play themselves out and to be assessed adequately by observers. Surprisingly little attention seems to have been paid to their impact on the Israeli military. In “The Transformation of the Israel Defense Forces,” Avi Jager provides a concise but comprehensive account of the significant changes that have occurred throughout the IDF in recent years, one informed by authoritative, high-level sources within Israel. These changes include major reductions in the conventional arms, particularly infantry and armor, and increased emphasis on unconventional forces and cyber; they reflect a conviction that in the future the threat the nation likely will face no longer will come from states but rather from irregular organizations such as Hamas. And, perhaps most importantly, they signal a shift from the long-standing Israeli preference for offense and preemption toward a more defensive orientation. Jager makes clear, however, that there are voices in Israel that question the wisdom of such a shift. Avi Jager is a reserve officer in the IDF special forces.

The eastern Mediterranean as an arena of sea-power competition has been lost from view since the end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of the U.S. Sixth Fleet in its aftermath. Times are changing. It recently was announced that, for the first time in forty years, an American naval vessel will be based at Souda Bay in Crete. Greece and Turkey are at odds over territorial maritime claims, and the discovery of enormous natural gas deposits in the waters off Cyprus in recent years has opened up a complex face-off among Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. In this context, the question of Israel’s relation to the sea takes on major strategic significance. In “Cultural Challenges for Israeli Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean,” Samuel Helfont provides a fascinating overview of the State of Israel’s cultural attitudes toward the sea, as limited by its deeply felt connection with the “Land of Israel.” He argues that Israel has yet to make the fundamental cultural turn toward its clearly ordained strategic maritime future. Samuel Helfont is a Naval War College professor teaching at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

The centrality of culture in developing a state's maritime orientation is also the theme of Andrew Rhodes's "The 1988 Blues: Admirals, Activists, and the Development of the Chinese Maritime Identity." Rhodes points to 1988 as a decisive year in the turn to the sea of the People's Republic of China, witnessing as it did two unrelated but important developments: the airing on Chinese television of the six-part documentary *River Elegy*, which became wildly popular, and the beginning of the PRC's commercial and military expansion into the South China Sea. Strikingly, the young filmmakers who produced the series were prodemocracy activists who fled the country after the Tiananmen massacre of the following year, while not all members of the Chinese leadership at the time were happy with the criticisms the documentary had expressed over the country's past neglect of its maritime frontier. Andrew Rhodes is a professor in the China Maritime Studies Institute at the Naval War College.

To grasp the full magnitude of the maritime challenge posed by the People's Republic of China to the United States and its allies, it is essential to look beyond the purely naval dimension. In "The Middle Kingdom Returns to the Sea, While America Turns Its Back: How China Came to Dominate the Global Maritime Industry, and the Implications for the World," Christopher J. McMahon issues a stark warning about the consequences of the U.S. government's continuing virtual abandonment of the commercial maritime industry. The Chinese have made no secret of their ambition to dominate this industry with regard to commercial shipbuilding as well as infrastructure construction around the world (the so-called Belt and Road Initiative), and they are well on their way to doing so—the number of large private corporations in this business continues to shrink at an alarming rate. The consequences are not merely economic but also political and strategic. Christopher J. McMahon holds the Maritime Administration Emory S. Land Chair of Merchant Marine Affairs at the Naval War College.

How military organizations adapt to the (real or supposed) lessons of battle remains a matter of great interest to military historians and practitioners alike. Ethan Rafuse, in "One Approach, Two Results: The French Army, the U.S. Marines, and the Frontal Assault during the World Wars," lays out what at first seems an improbable comparison between French battle tactics in the two world wars and the Marine Corps's approach to amphibious warfare during the Pacific War. In neither case, he argues, was maneuver warfare an option; the challenge was rather that of finding the proper balance of artillery and infantry assets employed in frontal assaults. While not denying that French performance suffered in both wars from doctrinal rigidity, he suggests that the conventional wisdom fails to account for France's eventual success in World War I. As for the Marines, he argues that their well-deserved reputation for doctrinal innovation enabled them to learn from initial mistakes in ways not altogether dissimilar to what the French

army did in that conflict. Ethan Rafuse is a professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

Finally, in “London and Washington: Maintaining Naval Cooperation despite Strategic Differences during Operation EARNEST WILL,” Richard A. Mobley offers a fine-grained case study of coalition operations—specifically, the uniquely intimate U.S.-U.K. alliance relationship in the Persian Gulf during the reflagging and protection of Kuwaiti oil tankers in 1987, toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War. This analysis, based primarily on recently declassified material from British archives, shows the extent to which differing perceptions and interests can complicate alliance relationships and should require a more sophisticated approach to such relationships than has been the norm, at least on the U.S. side. Richard A. Mobley is a former intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy.