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Review Essay—The Swartz Festschrift: "Conceptualizing Maritime & Naval Strategy: Festschrift for Captain Peter M. Swartz, United States Navy (Ret.)"

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REVIEW ESSAYS

THE SWARTZ FESTSCHRIFT

Robert C. Rubel

Conceptualizing Maritime & Naval Strategy: Festschrift for Captain Peter M. Swartz, United States Navy (Ret.), ed. Sebastian Bruns and Sarandis Papadopoulos. Baden-Baden, Ger.: Nomos, 2020. 373 pages. €79.

Captain Peter M. Swartz, USN (Ret.), has been a prominent figure in the maritime-strategy world since the early 1980s, playing a key role in the development and articulation of the noted 1980s *Maritime Strategy*. After retirement from active duty, he joined the staff at the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), where he became a noted archivist and analyst of USN strategy documents, as well as an adviser to many naval officers and academics who dealt with strategy. On his retirement from CNA, two academics who had benefited from Swartz's mentorship put together a *Festschrift*—a volume of essays to honor him and his work—in this case, on maritime strategy. As the authors note, a *Festschrift* is a rather rare kind of document, whose purpose for publication is rather narrow.

Published by the German house Nomos as part of the University of Kiel Seapower Series, the volume is not likely to elicit wide readership; its hefty price tag (\$109 on Amazon) and its rather esoteric subject matter likely will deter even those otherwise interested in naval affairs. That said, for those who have a deeper interest in maritime strategy, especially the process of developing it, the volume rewards the money and time put into it. In the interest of full disclosure, I must

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state that I am a longtime colleague and admirer of Captain Swartz; but I also have participated in the development of maritime strategy (principally the 2007 *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* [CS21], but to some extent its 2015 follow-on),

and so am able to bring to my evaluation of the book a background of experience in the subject matter.

It is one thing for navies to develop war plans—perhaps the most notable of which was the U.S. Navy’s War Plan ORANGE that underpinned the service’s operations in the Pacific during World War II—but quite another to issue a document that broadly outlines the service’s strategic concept and utility argument: why the nation should invest in it. This idea for what Swartz calls a “capstone document” emanated from an article by the political scientist Samuel Huntington in the Naval Institute’s *Proceedings* magazine in 1954, in which the author wrote that a military service must have a strategic concept if it wishes to obtain public support for its claims on the resources of the society. Swartz cataloged the series of capstone documents the U.S. Navy has issued from the 1960s forward, providing a valuable resource for historians and writers.

Perhaps as important as analyzing what such documents say is understanding the process that created them. More often than not complex and bureaucratic, the developmental effort reveals much about the character of the organization that produced such a document, and indeed its relationship to its parent society, and helps one to read between the lines of such documents. The title of the book indicates, albeit a bit vaguely, that the work focuses on the process of developing maritime strategy, which is appropriate, given its nature as a Festschrift honoring an officer whose career was defined principally by working in the trenches of strategy development. And in fact, the first seven essays (out of sixteen total) focus on just that. They offer a fascinating insight not only into the various aspects of making U.S. maritime strategy but also, in a similar vein, into the logic and process behind German and Polish attempts to create national maritime strategies. The book is worth obtaining simply for those first seven essays.

But then the focus of the book starts to diffuse, process being replaced as a subject by substantive issues, such as a historical analysis of national commitment to sea power, Indian strategic naval issues, the utility of hospital ships in humanitarian operations, and the role of hydrocarbons in great-power competition. There exist a couple of thin connecting threads that weave through these latter essays—the influence Peter Swartz had on the essays’ authors and the elements with which naval strategy must deal—but it appears that the editors either ran out of more-focused essays or decided that the aperture of the volume needed to be widened a bit. This is not to say that the latter essays are not well written, interesting, and useful; they are. It is perhaps simply that my experience with strategy development makes me hypersensitive to such shifts in focus.

There is little point in this review delving into the specifics of each essay; suffice it to say that all are authored by people well qualified to engage their subjects. However, several stand out to me in terms of interest. The first to be teed

up—"The Accidental Dialectic: The Real World and the Making of Maritime Strategy since 1945"—is by Geoffrey Till, who adopts the metaphor of a pinball machine to describe the somewhat zigzagging and unpredictable path a nascent strategy takes from original conception to eventual execution. Maritime strategy clearly is not an engineered concept emanating from a locked room in the Pentagon (although Captain Swartz did spend time in such a room putting pen to paper for the '80s *Maritime Strategy*); it is instead an iterative, consensus-driven product that may or may not receive full acceptance from those tasked to execute it. Till strengthens his metaphor by examining both the '80s strategy and the 2007 CS21. Steve Wills's essay, "OPNAV between Strategy, Assessment, and Budget, 1982–2016," offers a revealing window into the organizational dynamics within the Navy Staff that influenced strategy making—or the lack thereof—in the period he covers. The tug-of-war between programmers and strategists is opaque to outsiders, but it has defined the Navy's policies and approach to strategy since at least the early '80s. Anyone who wishes to parse, analyze, or judge any new Navy capstone document, such as the recently released *Tri-Service Maritime Strategy*, should read this essay.

I also found both Andrzej Makowski's and Sebastian Bruns's essays on Polish and German (respectively) maritime strategy development to be enlightening. Seeing how geopolitical logic and organizational dynamics collide in the formation of the maritime strategies of other nations provides useful perspective for U.S. planners. U.S. overall policy and strategy (support for the global liberal trading order) and the maritime component (ringing Eurasia with sea power) have been in place for so long that they have become like aquarium water in which U.S. strategists have been swimming; invisible, or at least forming an unchallenged assumption. These essays give us an overall view of the Polish and German maritime aquariums, thus helping us to get outside our own aquarium and actually see the water.

For the rest, the essay by Larissa Forster, "The Theoretical Soft Power Currencies of U.S. Navy Hospital Ship Missions," stands out for its objective parsing of soft power. The 2007 CS21 came under significant criticism for elevating the prominence of humanitarian and disaster-relief missions to the same level as traditional war-fighting functions. Forster does not take a position on that balance but does go into the benefits and pitfalls of conducting such missions. Repeated studies since at least the '70s have failed to produce hard data on the benefits of peacetime naval presence, but Forster at least pulls some threads that reveal qualitative factors that should be considered when developing a strategy for conducting such missions.

Another attractive aspect of the volume is the diversity of the authors. There are several "old hands," such as John Hattendorf (preface), Geoffrey Till, Eric

Thompson, Seth Cropsey, and Martin Murphy, but there also are a number of newer voices, such as Larissa Forster and Amund Lundesgaard. There also is diversity in authorial nationality, with contributors from Switzerland, Poland, and Germany to Australia and Japan, all of which adds richness to the overall perspective of the book.

The high price of the volume no doubt will be a deterrent to most potential readers; Swartz's friends likely will be the principal audience. That would be too bad, because the essays, especially the first seven, despite their relatively esoteric subject matter, constitute useful information for officers who might become engaged in the development of maritime strategy, whether in the United States or elsewhere. Libraries should stock this book, not letting its purpose as an edited Festschrift hide its utility as an educational reference.