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A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy

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terrorist attacks that came to characterize the American presence in the region.

This historical analysis builds up to the political climax of the book. Echoing his previous work on American foreign policy in the Middle East, Vitalis gleefully dismantles the widely accepted assertion that the Roosevelt administration and the Saudi royal family agreed to a nebulous “oil for security” deal during World War II. According to folklore—which Vitalis skewers—the United States, ever since those bygone days, has protected the kingdom (including with deadly force) in an explicit exchange for petroleum access. Instead, Vitalis argues that oil markets would function just fine regardless of who holds the keys to Abqaiq, Ras Tanura, and the rest of the Saudi kingdom’s oil bounty. He asserts that energy-security concerns are employed misleadingly to justify the perpetuation of this polarizing alliance, about the merits of which he is deeply skeptical. The author writes with admiration for the similarly skeptical scholars of the 1920s and 1970s who challenged the conventional wisdom about energy security as the basis for foreign-policy decisions (particularly in terms of military intervention).

Robert Vitalis makes bold and clear claims. One wonders whether a mere 134 pages of text (before the acknowledgments and endnotes) are enough to marshal the necessary evidence and argumentation. He succeeds in building his case, but the reader is left wanting a bit more. The book also is peppered with an unfortunate and thoroughly unnecessary number of typographical errors that detract from the cutting prose and punchy critiques of the existing literature.

Although mentioned only in passing, the twenty-first-century growth in domestic U.S. oil production and America’s rise to prominence as a significant exporter of petroleum already are prompting a reevaluation of long-standing national-security policy. Whether this reevaluation necessarily entails a reduction in, realignment of, or reckoning with respect to the nation’s presence overseas is a contentious proposition. Even asking the question is enough to raise hackles in Washington, where bureaucratic inertia enables the circling of wagons with impressive speed. The case studies that Vitalis presents remind us that these debates are not new. Readers may not agree with all his conclusions—and certainly not with every sarcastic remark he directs toward other scholars—but the argument is challenging, brisk, and unwavering. It warrants close examination by regional specialists and global strategists alike, and, perhaps, a full-fledged rebuttal from the alleged sorcerers of oilcraft.

TRISTAN ABBEY



A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy, by James R. Holmes. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019. 200 pages. \$24.95.

Naval training, by necessity, is anchored in developing technical and tactical expertise quickly. All newly minted officers preparing to serve on, above, or below the surface of the ocean are assimilating how-to skills. Demands on their time do not diminish in their first operational command, where training continues and expectations increase. In this busy and technology-heavy environment, there often is little time

left for philosophical or historical discourse on big-picture topics. For this reason, Professor Holmes, who holds the J. C. Wylie Chair of Maritime Strategy at the Naval War College, has written *A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy* to expose young officers to the central characters, foundational principles, and key terms of maritime strategy.

Maritime Strategy is centered primarily on the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose theories have influenced American policy for more than a century. Holmes begins by introducing one of Mahan's bedrock principles: "The first law of states" is for a state's own "self-preservation" (p. 2). To accomplish this task, the nation must be equipped with the means of producing goods, have the ability to ship those goods, and then have access to foreign markets. These three elements—production, shipping, and markets—are the primary ingredients of sea power. The major content of the book is a primer on how a nation *generates, maintains, and enforces* sea power—the "saltwater global supply chain" (p. 51).

Generating sea power has as much to do with a nation's physical qualities as it does with human characteristics. Geographical features play a central role in whether a nation uses the sea to its advantage. Countries such as Great Britain and the United States are fortunate in this regard, having easy access to the sea and multiple ports for shipping and receiving goods. But other factors, such as national character, are equally important. Does the nation view itself as having a "saltwater culture" (p. 38)? Does it place value on ingenuity in producing and shipping goods? Furthermore, does the government promote maritime industry through adequate

laws and the financing needed to maintain the shipping enterprise?

Maintaining the virtuous cycle of sea power is the subject of the second part of the book. Here, Holmes extrapolates the need for commercial and naval ports in strategic places throughout the world. This chapter leads the reader on a fascinating historical journey of Mahan's quest for better access to markets in East Asia. Mahan's influence was critical in the development of the Panama Canal, which he envisioned as the "gateway to the Pacific" for American shipping (p. 68). He also foresaw the importance of the Hawaiian Islands as a "steppingstone" across the Pacific (p. 65).

The final chapter examines the particular role of a navy in the exercise of national power—*enforcement*. America strives to use the diplomatic process to "win without fighting" whenever possible (p. 116). However, the U.S. Navy's crucial role is to serve as a "backstop for diplomatic efforts" in the quest to "open, nourish, and safeguard commercial access to important trading theaters such as East Asia and Western Europe" (p. 2).

Maritime Strategy is excellently written. In an accessible and nonthreatening way, it introduces the reader to critical topics addressed by major theorists. Comprising only three chapters and a total of 150 pages, it easily can be read in a short time. Two items are especially noteworthy. First, Holmes's analogy of the sea as a *maritime commons*—a vast marketplace where goods are bought and sold—is memorable and apt. Unlike the commons of colonial New England, though, where the local town enforced the rules of trade, there is no sovereign over the sea. For this reason, nations must work together to enforce the law of the sea to ensure maritime freedom. A second item worth mentioning is

the sea's ability to link us back to our forebears. As Professor Holmes states, "Seafarers join something larger and older when they go down to the sea in ships" (p. 14). Not only does the sea connect us as a global community, but it also has the ability to connect us with our past and with our naval and military history and heritage.

Wardrooms and classrooms would do well to add *Maritime Strategy* to their list of books to discuss. Training commands should consider including this book in their curricula for new accessions, as it provides a big-picture view of the Navy's place on the national scene.

SCOTT CAUBLE



Coalition of the UnWilling and UnAble: European Realignment and the Future of American Geopolitics, by John R. Deni. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2021. 274 pages. \$75.

In this exceptional and contemporary analysis, John R. Deni provides a sobering view of the largest U.S. European military allies and their abilities to function as effective partners. In short, the current and future pictures are not pretty. As the book's title indicates, whether one considers the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, or Poland, these states suffer from considerable—arguably profound—military limitations that will circumscribe their ability to serve as military partners to the United States. Likewise, whether one focuses on demographics (declining birth rates), national economies that cannot support military ambitions, the absence of advanced military capabilities, or strategic directions that do not square well with those of

the United States, the applicability to these allies of all these factors, to varying degrees, helps to explain how significant the barriers in place are.

Certainly, previous scholarship has examined European military shortcomings. Many have written on American military preeminence in NATO's operation in Kosovo; others have demonstrated the different strategic perspectives and European military limitations apparent in NATO's bombings in Libya. Deni provides an updated analysis that looks closely at the historical "big four" European allies, plus Poland.

For the United Kingdom, Deni notes that over the last decade major reductions in defense expenditures have cut deeply into British military capabilities. He also devotes much analysis to the British economy, noting that Brexit similarly will cut deeply into Britain's tax base, effectively preventing the British from investing in their military forces, even if they had the political desire to do so.

The author's contrasting analysis of Germany is especially perceptive and revealing. He makes the case that the Germans' strong and robust economy, favorable labor market, and budget surpluses provide the *potential* for them to play a far more significant role in global security. The German public, however, remains generally opposed to the projection of German military force; opinion polls even indicate that Germans are among the least likely, compared with respondents from other European allies, to express a willingness to use force to defend another NATO ally if it got into a "serious military conflict" with Russia (p. 72). Political-elite and youth opinions differ on this point, yet the dominant norm remains