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Fighting the Fleet: Operational Art and Modern Fleet Combat

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of my adult life I have dealt with the unintended consequences of these wars and the life-and-death impacts they have generated. I have invested years of my life, led infantry units on the front lines, conducted countless patrols and combat operations, been in multiple convoys hit by roadside bombs, and lost valorous young soldiers under my command. I feel driven to explore this compelling topic and to pursue the answers that have eluded us for too long” (p. 8).

Rather than detracting from his analysis, Gallagher’s passion to find answers and get them right improves the product.

Gallagher argues that when it comes to winning the peace, the United States suffers from inherent tensions. The American culture wants to win quickly and decisively, and U.S. leaders attempt to deliver. Then we all want to go home and allow those who survived to live happily ever after. Planning for postcombat operations is weak and overly optimistic. This flies in the face of both common sense and experience.

The Day After examines four major case studies: Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. From these studies Gallagher identifies three pathologies that contribute to U.S. failure (although he deems Kosovo a partial success): wishful thinking, deficient learning, and the underuse of the National Security Council (NSC). Wishful thinking is present in all the cases, from an assumption that the Kosovo conflict would be over in a matter of days to the belief that, having defeated Saddam Hussein, it would be a simple matter for the victors to hand over postwar matters to a new Iraqi government and the United Nations. As the cases accumulate, it becomes ever more clear that rather than recognizing the mistakes and errors committed in

past efforts and truly learning from them, even when those efforts were successes, it became easier for American leaders to assume they knew better than their predecessors and therefore would perform better. This led to repeated mistakes, such as failing to take full advantage of State Department expertise.

Gallagher’s concluding chapter is excellent. Some of his recommendations relate directly to his identified pathologies. The NSC should be used as an arena for refining ideas, and sharp-edged disagreements may be required to identify realistic goals and objectives. The commonly experienced high levels of initial optimism should be guarded against, if not mistrusted. More than lip service must be given to the concept of the “whole of government.” Above all, the question of “What happens next?” when military victory has been won or regimes are being changed must be answered fully. To fail to do so is all too likely to result in all-too-familiar patterns of failure.

RICHARD NORTON



Fighting the Fleet: Operational Art and Modern Fleet Combat, by Jeffrey R. Cares and Anthony Cowden. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2021. 184 pages. \$24.95.

Sun-tzu often is credited with the following: “Victorious warriors win first and then go to war.” In *Fighting the Fleet*, the authors Jeffrey Cares and Anthony Cowden—retired Navy captains and defense-industry thought leaders—make a compelling case for reenergizing and refocusing the development of naval war-fighting strategy and reinvigorating naval combat training

to ensure that the United States wins first—before ever having to go to war.

Caution: Do not think that *Fighting the Fleet* is a treatise lamenting the decline of naval theory; instead, *Fighting the Fleet* is a concise summary of the key and essential elements of naval-combat theory. Every current and aspiring naval leader must be well versed in the fundamental operational concepts the authors present. In addition to reviewing the foundational naval-warfare operational strategies, however, the authors ask readers to dig deeper, look harder, and think bigger. Is the U.S. Navy keeping up? And what will it take for the U.S. Navy to move, and stay, ahead of potential peer competitors?

Admiral Scott Swift, USN (Ret.), explains in the foreword that “this book focuses on the intellectual space of the operational art of war,” which is “defined by risk and uncertainty” (pp. xiii–xiv). Through chapters such as “Naval Power,” “Search and Surveillance,” “Logistics and Maneuver,” “Control,” and “Fighting Fleets in the Robotics Age,” Cares and Cowden argue that to secure the operational high ground (please excuse an infantryman’s metaphor) and a strategic advantage in modern fleet warfare, it is best to combine sound theory and the current emphasis on subjective analysis with objective analytics (and they do include the math).

As Cares and Cowden point out early in their work, Rear Admiral J. C. Wylie, USN, a highly regarded military strategist writing during the Vietnam era, “concluded that control was the aim of all warfare. . . . [D]etermining what to control was the hard part” (p. 7). Understanding that resources are limited even as the lethal-technologies arms race continues unabated—and in

fact is accelerating—USN leaders must maintain a pace well ahead of that of potential adversaries if they are to be able to identify and then act to control those vital assets needed to advance the objectives of the United States and its allies.

Staying on point, *Fighting the Fleet* focuses on the four core functions of fleets: striking, screening, scouting, and basing. Applying the wisdom of still-relevant historical theory and combining it with current operational analytics, Cares and Cowden briefly outline the combat fundamentals that contemporary naval warfighters are likely to overlook. Focusing on fundamentals is necessary both to survive and to win in the fast-evolving domain of naval combat.

Cares and Cowden criticize the recent (relative to naval history as a whole, but particularly since the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act) and still-fashionable emphasis on “jointness” as having detracted from the advancement of the operational art of naval warfare. Recognizing the unique aspects of projecting and employing naval power is critical to ensuring operational and strategic success. The distinctive attributes of seaborne vessels, the fast-evolving suite of assets those vessels can employ, and the peculiarities of both deep-sea and littoral environments require specialized insight and expert training to produce the exceptional leaders and warfighters that circumstances now demand.

The meat of *Fighting the Fleet* is a succinct 101 pages that include the introduction and conclusion. Additional materials include four appendices expounding on salvo theory in some detail and deconstructing the oft-used and misused acronym C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance,

and reconnaissance). The authors make a case that throwing everything, including the kitchen sink, into the rubric of network-centric-warfare systems has failed to deliver the payoffs promised. Instead, it is time to simplify the complexity; Cares and Cowden stress that only two core detection functions—search and surveillance—matter for operational-level naval warfare, and they explain why.

In their conclusion, the authors offer three salient recommendations to advance the operational art applicable to modern fleet combat:

1. *Inaugurate a new golden age.* Invest directly in elevating modern naval thought. Ultimately, the management of power and the fighting of wars are contests of ideas, and to stay ahead you need the best ideas.
2. *Play to learn how to win.* Subject new ideas to vigorous wargaming efforts through competitive, stressful play. Test, test, and retest to figure out which ideas work best.
3. *Take the new golden age to sea.* Even detailed plans fall apart once you make contact with the enemy. Practice how you expect to fight: out on the water, in the open sea.

Fighting the Fleet is a call to reinvigorate the study of combat theory. It applies not so much from the perspective of grand strategy as from the practical realization that to dominate the sea, leaders of a modern navy *must* master the operational art.

While the authors infuse a healthy dose of systems theory and warfighter calculations (salvo theory and the like) into this brief work, do not let that dissuade you from absorbing the book's

valuable lessons. Even a ground pounder like me understands that victory at sea is still a product of experienced, effective leadership. All naval leaders need to understand the fundamentals presented in *Fighting the Fleet*.

SCOTT F. PARADIS



Anson's Navy: Building a Fleet for Empire, 1744 to 1763, by Brian Lavery. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2022. 288 pages. \$70.

When thinking of Britain's Royal Navy (RN) during the age of sail, one usually is drawn to events of the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century: great victories such as those of the Glorious First of June (1794), Camperdown (1797), the Nile (1798), and Trafalgar (1805), with Horatio Nelson reigning supreme.

However, the Royal Navy of the earlier eighteenth century was far less capable and organized than it would be by the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Despite the laurels won during the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 1600s and the War of the Spanish Succession from 1701 to 1714, the Royal Navy was woefully ill prepared to fight the new conflicts that sprang up starting at the end of the 1730s. Not only did its naval tactics and leadership require reform, but several new warship types were needed to fight and win actions conducted in waters increasingly distant from Europe. Crucially, the Royal Navy rose to the myriad challenges facing it from 1744 to 1763—years in which the service, according to author Brian Lavery, “was reformed and made fit for purpose to fight even more intense conflicts at the end of the century and the beginning of the next” (p. 6).