

From the Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

The aircraft carrier remains the largest question mark surrounding the future fleet architecture of the U.S. Navy. If anything can be learned from the current conflict in Ukraine, it would seem to be that high-tech warfare in the future will be dominated by missiles and drones of various kinds, and that large platforms at sea will face perhaps unprecedented threats. Is the aircraft carrier's lot in the Pacific fated to parallel that of the battleship in World War II? In "The Final Countdown? Charting a New Course for Capital Ships in Pacific War Plans," Cameron M. Rountree revisits this contentious issue. While making clear that the carrier is not going away anytime soon, he makes the case that its days as the "capital ship" of the Navy very well may be numbered. Cameron M. Rountree is a captain in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

In "Strategy, Uncertainty, and the China Challenge," Jeffrey W. Meiser, Renny Babiarz, and David Mudd argue that underestimation of the China threat in the past should not give way to overestimation of that threat in the present. They caution that the Chinese military buildup of recent years and the aggressive edge to Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping exist against a backdrop of fundamental uncertainty about Chinese national goals and intentions, an uncertainty fostered to a significant degree by the complex crosscurrents of Chinese strategic culture. According to the authors, American strategic thinking needs to be more attuned to recognizing and adjusting to such uncertainty—in particular, they recommend a more systematic approach to "shaping" the strategic environment in Asia by strengthening existing alliance relationships. Jeffrey W. Meiser is a professor at the University of Portland (Oregon), of which David Mudd is a recent graduate; Renny Babiarz is a vice president of AllSource Analysis.

Joel Wuthnow and Margaret Baughman, in "Selective Engagements: Chinese Naval Diplomacy and U.S.-China Competition," show that the Chinese are engaged in active efforts to shape the international security environment, especially via the People's Liberation Army Navy. The PLAN, with its increasingly global reach, has emerged in recent years as an important arm of Chinese soft power. Senior-leader visits, port visits, and joint exercises with foreign navies are its principal tools. Through meticulous analysis of extensive databases on this topic now available, the authors show that the Chinese have prioritized engagements with advanced naval powers, including the United States and its NATO allies as well as the Russians.

While the pandemic has led to a marked decrease in these events, and although the United States has shown itself increasingly reluctant to participate in them, they nevertheless will continue to be an important factor in the global maritime environment, as well as to provide useful insights into Chinese foreign policy overall. Joel Wuthnow is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University; Margaret Baughman is an analyst at SOS International's Center for Intelligence Research and Analysis.

That small navies are something other than large navies with fewer ships may seem obvious, yet the peculiar challenges they face often are not analyzed carefully. In "Dilemmas Faced in Developing Small Navies," Andrzej Makowski does just that. Rather than a collection of case studies, what the author provides is something approaching a theory of small navies in the contemporary security environment. While acknowledging that there can be no single theory encompassing the varied circumstances in which small navies operate, he shows that there are remarkable commonalities. He especially emphasizes the importance of these navies' interoperability and integration with maritime allies and partners. Andrzej Makowski, a retired captain in the Polish navy, is on the faculty of Poland's naval academy in Gdynia.

Parallels between the rise of China and that of imperial Germany at the turn of the twentieth century are noted frequently, amid warnings that the world needs to avoid a repeat of the great-power dynamics that culminated in the First World War. In "Tirpitz's Trap," Jeremy Stocker revisits the series of strategic blunders that the Germans, under the influence of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, made in building a navy intended to challenge Britain's dominance of the seas. While the Chinese show awareness of these parallels, their ham-handed diplomacy, like that of the kaiser, only has reinvigorated their many potential foes, while the evident faltering of the Chinese "rise" itself arguably increases the pressure on Beijing to attempt a Bismarckian "roll of the iron dice." Jeremy Stocker, a retired captain in Britain's Royal Navy, is an associate fellow of the Royal United Services Institute in London.

Another look at this same era is provided by Kevin D. McCranie in "Mahan's Theory and the Realities of the First World War: His Final Considerations on Sea Power." It often is held that Mahan's conception of naval warfare was to prove obsolete in the face of new technologies such as submarines and aircraft. While Mahan died in December 1914, the author argues that he had a better appreciation of the character and likely course of the war than generally is thought. A complicating factor was the—in retrospect, astonishing—muzzling of American military officers from commenting on the war by President Woodrow Wilson. Kevin D. McCranie is the Philip A. Crowl Professor of Comparative Strategy at the Naval War College.

Naval War College Press Launches a Podcast

As a new part of the outreach mission of the Naval War College Press, the Center for Naval Warfare Studies, and the Naval War College, we are launching a podcast. Called *Sea Power*, it will showcase the College's research and education missions, bolstering our efforts to disseminate NWC research and communicate knowledge via published articles, books, reports, and other multimedia products to the wider public, in an unclassified, readily accessible format. The podcast episodes can stand alone as engaging summaries of research and analysis on critical national-security issues, or they can serve as introductions to the published material on which the conversations are based.

The *Sea Power* podcast allows NWC to use the free and readily accessible podcast medium to expand the development of ideas and the availability of information to all our partners. It will deliver cutting-edge knowledge from thought leaders to naval officers (and other national-security professionals) "from coast to coast and to all the ships at sea." Further, it will enhance our ability to engage in and foster relationships with naval, joint, interagency, and international alumni, partners, and other stakeholders.

The podcast's convenience and brevity will allow the busy midcareer officer in the fleet and other professionals to learn about the research under way in and around NWC on the broad subject of sea power. Each 40–45-minute episode will present a conversation with one or more leading experts (generally from NWC) about their research and educational activities. The first season's overarching theme is "Strategic Competition at Sea," with special emphasis on Chinese and Russian maritime strategy.

The files will be in MP3 format, accompanied by show notes that summarize each episode and link to author bios and publications. The podcast should be distributed on all major commercial platforms, but look first on the NWC servers and web domains at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/seapower/>.

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Robert Ayer, Managing Editor

