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The U.S. Navy and the National Security Establishment: A Critical Assessment

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BOOK REVIEWS

UNDERSTANDING WARFARE—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The US Navy and the National Security Establishment: A Critical Assessment, by John T. Hanley Jr.
Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2023. 341 pages. \$102.

The Navy faces many complicated challenges today: emerging threats; great-power competition; underperforming ship and aircraft industrial bases; and inadequate, unpredictable, and late budgets are but a few. Their confluence at the seemingly worst time breeds wonderment, confusion, frustration, and questions, such as, Why can't the Navy keep the fleet ready, manned, and equipped? Why does the Chief of Naval Operations allow excessive ship and aircraft operational tempo? Why does the Navy build expensive platforms that deliver late and in inadequate numbers? Is the Navy a learning institution? As Coach Vince Lombardi famously shouted to his Green Bay Packers team: "What the hell is going on out there?"

The answer to all these questions is that it's really complicated. Unless one has served (frequently) at the highest levels of the Navy Staff, it is nearly impossible to grasp all the dynamics associated with generating a POM (program objective memorandum—a service's budget, essentially), a strategy, and the policies associated with organizing, training, manning, and equipping a military

service. And then those initiatives must survive contact with the "enemy"—that is, those in the federal bureaucracy who see things differently than the secretary or service chief. Why has this been so hard for so long? John Hanley's book, *The US Navy and the National Security Establishment*, is a Rosetta stone for deciphering this bureaucracy's historical hieroglyphs—the legacy of decisions, policies, and events describing the Navy's evolving place within the national-security establishment.

Wise counsel holds that if we want to set a new direction for an organization, we first should make the time to see where we have been, and how we got here. A cardinal rule of ship handling, taught in basic Navy officer training, is to turn around and look at the ship's wake after ordering a new course to check what direction the ship is turning and ask: "Is this what I intended?" or, "Does our wake show we are off track?" and if so, "How did we get off track?"

Hanley's book is a terrific compendium of Navy and Defense Department leadership decisions, strategies, and intentions delivered with a coherent

explanation of the realities of what he labels the “agents” within the “national security ecosystem” (p. 1). The U.S. Navy and its leaders are, collectively, one agent among several in the “military, industrial, congressional enterprise (MICE)” (p. 13) and each agent has, or believes it has, a hand on the rudder. In an era where we collectively never seem to have enough time to stop and understand the history or perspective behind major changes and decisions in the Navy’s strategy and direction—geopolitical, fiscal, operational, and educational—Hanley takes us through the evolution of an evolving and learning institution.

To see where the Navy and the broader national-security establishment may have started drifting off track owing to a “current” imposed by external agents, go to his “Outline of the Book” (pp. 12–14). Here Hanley describes the loss of a coherent evolution in the national-security establishment ecosystem at the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. What happened? Hubris. Chapters 2 and 4 describe a national leadership oversight that became diluted and divested from the national-security establishment’s performance. As a result, military services became focused on competing for resources (both people and money) for equipping, manning, and maintaining forces with a zero-sum mentality. Military concepts and capability were capped by the budget and their evolution became zero-sum. The Cold War (chapter 4) begot a hubris brought about by victory in World War II; the national-security ecosystem was less inclined to change, and its approach to evolving—that is, assessing, learning, and changing—was (and remains) entrenched. The dawn of the information age (chapter 5)

provided an opportunity to use systems analysis to assess our strategies, capabilities, and concepts objectively. Unfortunately, the Navy Staff was more inclined to seek data and systems analysis to support preexisting beliefs and its own interpretation. The Defense Department became further entrenched in the status quo surrounded by (or buried in) data. Chapters 6 and 7 help the reader understand how the MICE acts and interacts. They describe how good intentions by Navy leaders got off track, and whose hands (i.e., which agents) were on the rudder steering the Navy’s course (the Navy Department, secretariat, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of Management and Budget, Congress, and the defense industry).

Hanley lays down a sensible corrective path forward, informed by the realities of divergent agents acting in an ecosystem. Incorporating experience and knowledge honed throughout a career working at and with the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, the Navy Staff (OPNAV), and the defense industry, Hanley provides pragmatic recommendations that are within the purview of Navy Department leaders to enact. Perhaps the book’s best topic is a discussion on how to evolve the Navy into a learning institution, shaping traditionally conflicting elements of our education enterprise (e.g., the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, and OPNAV) to synergize their respective strengths—from theory (classroom) to practice (war gaming)—to organize, train, and equip the Navy in support thereof with the following recommendations:

- Learning is fundamental to adapting.
- More practice, with less theoretical training, is a proven imperative.

- Focus on schemes and changes that are within the purview of the Secretary of the Navy and Chief of Naval Operations.
- Reinvigorate Navy campaigns of learning; nurture a learning culture (the Navy's current Get Real, Get Better initiative aligns with this point).
- Remove paradigms that do not serve well; retain paradigms that hold.

This is an excellent book for officers and civilians tasked to determine the Navy's future course. It will enable the reader to observe the Navy's strategic wake and understand the myriad institutions involved in shaping its track, and provide clarity about how we got where we are. Few have walked in Hanley's shoes and his work is a great insider's perspective on how our national-security enterprise works, and how we might make it work better.

JONATHAN W. GREENERT



Is Remote Warfare Moral? Weighing Issues of Life + Death from 7,000 Miles, by Joseph O. Chapa. New York: PublicAffairs, 2022. 275 pages. \$29.

Moving beyond the legal debates in international humanitarian law and the law of war (LOW) around the use of remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) in war, Joseph Chapa considers some of the deeper moral and psychological questions about this type of warfare. As a U.S. Air Force officer with a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Oxford who has served as a Predator pilot and instructor, he brings a unique credibility and perspective to the subject. He presently serves on the Air Staff, where he focuses on artificial intelligence (AI) ethics for the Department of the Air Force.

Chapa begins with a brief history of combat airpower to highlight the seismic shift that RPA warfare represented as well as its socio-technical nature. The scope of his analysis is the tactical level of war, which focuses more on RPA warfare's effects on the individual warfighter and raises different questions in the areas of morality, warfare, and risk: "What is—and what ought to be—the warfighter's relationship to war, the enemy, or the members of the political community for whom the person fights? What is the moral significance of risk in war, the moral psychology of remote killing, or the remote warfighters' ability to cultivate martial virtue?" (p. 18).

The first significant issue Chapa addresses is the relationship between risk and war, as some cast doubt and aspersions on whether RPA crews truly can be considered warriors, because they kill with impunity and without risk to themselves; as he notes, "The remote warfighter takes life but does not risk death" (p. 58). Through historical analysis on the warrior ethos, Chapa demonstrates that "the use of force is even more central to the warrior ethos than the risk of death is. . . . There must be more to the warrior ethos than the risk of death in war" (p. 65). Opponents of riskless warfare often reference the Clausewitzian "warfare as duel" paradigm, citing risk to one side but not the other. Chapa explains that Clausewitz's duel analogy refers to war in general, in which two political communities face off, and not to individual combatants. The author additionally cites several examples of military technologies that increase distance and change our understanding of modern war and proximity of risk: "If we attempt to define what warfare is in terms of the risk a warfighter faces,