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Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age

Thomas H. Etzold

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PROFESSIONAL READING

“If an officer has time or inclination to read only one survey of great ideas, men and books relevant to the naval service, this for now should be that one.”

by

Thomas H. Etzold*

Till, Geoffrey. *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982. 274 pp. \$35

This book contains authoritative assessments of important individuals and issues: Mahan, Corbett, Richmond, Gorshkov, American thinking on modern naval strategy, and changing political and legal environments for navies. Sensibly, Mr. Till, a faculty member of the Royal Naval College (Greenwich), has augmented his own expertise with that of John Hattendorf, Richard Hill, Barry Hunt, Peter Nailor, Bryan Ranft, Stephen Roskill, and Craig Symonds. These contributors and topics augment the author's principal concerns—principles of seapower, a review of classical literature and thought on maritime matters, the “sources and elements” of maritime power, the concept of command of the sea, and evolving technology's effects on principles and concepts.

Till and company assert the continuing importance of battle in the thinking of the American and Soviet navies; emphasize the revolutionary influence of air power on naval warfare; and endorse Mahan's belief that technological advance, by reducing the level of uncertainty in operations, “actually made strategic theory more, not less, possible.” The author and his colleagues endorse presence and deterrence functions of naval and maritime forces,

*Dr. Thomas H. Etzold is Special Assistant for the Director, Center for Naval Warfare Studies, Naval War College.

quoting, among others, John Stuart Mill to the effect that “our diplomacy stands for nothing when we have not a fleet to back it.” On this they also cite Stansfield Turner (who seems to be the *only* really modern American authority whose ideas appear meritorious to the author): “I think that we who exercise naval presence do not know enough about how to fit the action to the situation: how to be sure that the force we bring to bear, when told to help in some situation, is in fact the one most appropriate to the circumstances.”

Further, Till and his associates implicitly favor forward maritime posture and operations. Equally important, they support the view that, as Rear Adm. R.C. Brown said at the Naval War College in 1949, there is a need for “brilliant strategists, not of land power, not of sea power, and not of air power, but able, broad-gauged individuals who can view the whole picture of *military* strategy.” In short, they recognize the enduring importance of combined arms approaches to warfare, not only as tactics but as strategy. As for the influence of nuclear weapons, the author says little more than that they have made some portions of the maritime forces more vulnerable while making other portions more important than ever.

In its canvassing of classical literature and ideas, this book shows a truth. There are few if any really new ideas. Trying to find a truly new idea in modern naval thought and circumstances is much like the quest for the Holy Grail, which occupied the Knights of the Round Table and others who in the Middle Ages found themselves irrelevant or unoccupied. It is, ironically, possible that military science and humanism have little in common save their shared belief in progress. Yet, in this or in any competent review of naval theory and literature, one cannot be struck by the durability of a few crucial questions: what great states need from the sea; what they need from maritime forces (not at all the same question); the role of battle in the exercise of maritime power; what to do—and what can be done—with inferior maritime forces; the relationship between sea and land (and now air) campaigns; the effects of law and other constraints on the exercise of maritime power.

Till notes interestingly, Matthew Sutcliffe’s 1593 summary of the uses of maritime forces:

“The use of the Navy is great in peace, greater in wars. Thereby traffic and intercourse betwixt friends is maintained, victuals that go to the enemy are stopped, our wants of victuals, arms, munitions, and other necessaries are supplied; the enemy’s coast is spoiled, our own defended, the coast towns of the enemy’s country that live upon the sea are brought to great extremities, our own maintained . . . [without it] the trade of merchandise cannot be maintained . . . [nor] the sea towns of the enemy be besieged, nor can be understand the enemy’s proceedings, nor help or well defend our friends or ourselves.”

It is not at all clear, after reading this overview of late 19th and early 20th century literature, that the naval profession today has as good a grasp of these questions and their possible answers as did their predecessors. Two generations ago and, indeed, ten, naval thinkers may have understood their business better than they did their circumstances. Today's officers and thinkers sometimes seem to know their circumstances better than their heritage.

Despite its misleading title, Geoffrey Till's book should be part of every naval officer's library. This volume admirably and economically sets the context for the enduring debates concerning the objectives and methods of naval warfare, though not in terms particularly specific to the nuclear age. If an officer has time or inclination to read only one survey of great ideas, men, and books relevant to the naval service, this for now should be that one.

Heikal, Mohamed. *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*. New York: Random House, 1983. 290pp. \$17.95

As the former editor of the powerful Cairo daily *Al Ahram*, cabinet minister, and close confidant to President Sadat, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal had an unusual opportunity in his latest book, *Autumn of Fury*, to write the background story about the events leading up to Sadat's assassination. His previous efforts such as *Road to Ramadan* and *The Sphinx and the Commissar* demonstrated his insider knowledge and astute observations of Middle East politics. But those who expect the same quality of effort as in his previous works will be disappointed.

The emphasis of *Autumn of Fury* is on the interesting contention that the plot against Sadat was far different from those which killed President Kennedy and his brother Robert and

attempted to kill the Pope and President Reagan. Instead of being the actions of a single crazed individual, Heikal argues that Sadat's death was the logical result of mainstream movements within Egyptian society.

To support this thesis, Heikal presents a historical overview of the role of the Moslem Brotherhood and the Coptic church from their origins to their involvement in present-day Egyptian affairs. Heikal has a great deal of personal interest in the activity of these groups in the fall of 1981. At that time, shortly before the assassination, Sadat had to resort to massive arrests of Christian and Muslim extremists as well as prominent members of the political opposition. Among those arrested was Heikal, supposedly because he had taken funds from the Coptic Pope Shenouda III to organize an anti-Sadat press campaign. Despite his imprisonment, Heikal disavows