

Book Reviews

Lessons Not Learned: The U.S. Navy's Status Quo Culture, by Roger Thompson, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007, xvi + 252 pages, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, ISBN 978-1-59114-865-4

Reviewed by Ken Hansen

Roger Thompson, a Canadian with extensive experience as a defence analyst in the United States and currently a lecturer at Kyung Hee University in South Korea, argues passionately that the United States Navy (USN) is making errors of strategic proportions by maintaining a fleet optimized for fleet engagement against a non-existent peer opponent. The USN aircraft carriers and other major warships, the design evolution of which he traces back to the inter-war period, are not particularly useful in responding to the threats in the world's oceans today. Among these, he argues that rogue states armed with conventional submarines, terrorists and pirates are the most problematic.

Thompson explores a number of scenarios, some of which date back to the Cold War, to explode what he views as the myth of the unmatched combat skills and technological superiority of the USN. Weaknesses in anti-submarine warfare and mine warfare figure prominently in his list. While these may not be surprising to some, his characterization of American naval aviation skills as sub-par will certainly raise eyebrows among traditional supporters. His criticisms of the skills of the USN nuclear-attack submariners, especially against conventionally powered submarines, are equally aggressive.

Thompson goes much further and accuses the leadership of the USN of running inferior training systems, inadequate weapon systems testing and outdated personnel policies. In particular, he views the 'up or out' policy that compulsorily releases officers not selected for promotion as wasteful of skilled personnel in an era of chronic shortages.

The author's articulation of all these issues into one damning 'tell-all' exposé does make for a thought-provoking read. However, Thompson's style is so rough and stilted that it detracts significantly from his purpose. The introduction is a peculiar mix of ultra-inflammatory statements and hyper-defensive posturing. Rather than setting out his plan, he begins with a set of self-justifications that are quite simply odd. Faults in structure, logic and balance are rife throughout the text. The conclusion totals only two pages, most of which is taken up by 12 single-sentence

recommendations in bullet form. After such an extensive critique, the ending is abrupt and completely disappointing; no master plan is offered to shape a new course.

The main failure in Thompson's analysis is that it lacks a theoretical framework. Understanding the fundamental changes that have occurred in the conduct of naval fleet engagement since the First World War is essential to grasping why things have changed and what they mean. Wayne Hughes' seminal work *Fleet Tactics and Coastal Combat* (Naval Institute Press, 2000) explains the transition from slow gun engagements to the 'blink of an eye' type of missile warfare of the current era. Thompson comes close to developing his own theory on missile warfare in his sixth chapter that describes how the Soviets could have attacked and sunk three different USN carriers (*Kitty Hawk*, *Saratoga* and *Carl Vinson*) on separate occasions. The problem with his analysis, in these and other cases, is that the lessons are drawn from exercises or non-combat scenarios and the hypothetical outcomes are taken out of context. Without more detail, the accusations read more like tabloid revelations than analysis of enduring worth.

This assessment does not mean that Thompson's book is unworthy. The question 'What line of argument is necessary to illicit strategic change from a conservative bureaucracy?' is well worth asking. However, the question of whether to specialize and develop superlative competencies in response to specific threats or to strive for general capabilities in an era of uncertainty is not adequately discussed. The uniformed will read this alarmist book and draw some very dire conclusions. Everyone is encouraged to do some preparatory reading before undertaking this work, or simply to take it with a very large grain of salt. 🧂

Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs: Australian Maritime Issues, No 21, edited by Andrew Forbes, 2008, 286 pages, ISBN 978-0-642-29678-8; *Freedom of Navigation in the Indo-Pacific Region*, No. 22, by Stuart Kaye, 2008, 56 pages, ISBN 978-0-642-29681-8; *Asian Energy Security (Regional Cooperation in the Malacca Straits)*, No. 23, edited by Andrew Forbes, 2008, 200 pages, ISBN 978-0-642-29700-6, Sea Power Centre, Australia

Reviewed by Dave Mugridge

These three associated publications illustrate the breadth and depth of the Australian Sea Power Centre's contribution to the development of recent maritime security doctrine and strategy. It should come as no surprise to readers that under the editorial control of Andrew Forbes Papers Number 21 and 23 combine into an insightful text



which contains many apposite and contemporary lessons for the development of Canadian maritime security. Stuart Kaye produces a short, readable yet comprehensive pamphlet on the freedom of navigation within the region. With its current rate of quality publications, the Sea Power Centre is fast becoming an international think tank of some note, pleasingly combining the work of both military and academic minds from across the region into an authoritative voice.

To put this review in context, I would like to set the stage by a short digest of the Australian Defence White Paper (2009) which outlined a dramatic transformation in the future force levels of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and its security role on the global stage. This review came about from the realization that Australia's position in the world had changed and the new security context had catapulted the country from a benign back-water into a dangerous international multi-polar world. Many speculated that this more muscular Australia was a response to the rise of China but this observation only addresses one facet of the developing strategic environment.

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) will be the main beneficiary of this re-aligned focus on defence but not to the exclusion of its army and air force siblings. The revised force structure will allow far greater integration and deliver truly joint effects both on the battlefield and in the management of peacetime security. Above all it recognizes that in a multi-polar world where the United States is no longer in a position of hegemony, the ADF needs to be capable of unilateral and independent deployment. The pertinence of this lesson is one that sits uncomfortably in Europe and Canada, where the culture of over-reliance has increased along with harvesting the peace dividend from the end of the Cold War.

The value of these publications is that while they are unashamedly regional in their focus on southeast Asia, the conclusions they draw are applicable elsewhere in the world and are worthy of very detailed study within the defence ministries of NATO members. The books identify and celebrate the value of comprehensive international collaboration, without forgetting the difficulty on the road to success. They acknowledge the complexity of new issues like organized crime and terrorism, dispassionately examining them with evidence-based analysis and delivering defensible conclusions. Even the shortest of the monographs graphically illustrates the potential exploitation of national boundaries by criminal and terrorist organizations.

The contributors are from predominantly military and academic backgrounds, which is slightly disappointing as

more could have been made by including those from fields such as law enforcement, border control, international development and foreign policy formulation. Yet this is a small distraction from their valuable contribution to the debate about how comprehensive an effective maritime security strategy actually should be if it is to be enforceable without being overly bureaucratic.

Their collective examination of regional security issues and concerns demonstrates conclusively why Australia has proactively responded as it has in its Defence White Paper. Strategically the rise of both China and India will be of concern to all in the region. The value of these publications is that they put meat on the bone so as to educate and inform those from outside of the region's unique dynamics and nuances. Australia is not looking to replace the United States as the regional power or to threaten the emerging powers but to defend itself more effectively, more dynamically and at greater range than it can do at this time. These publications also demonstrate the growing maturity of Antipodean self-awareness of the region's place in the Asian century.

The lessons learnt here are appropriate for the Canadian Navy as it faces the financial rigours associated with losing the relevance argument to an over-stretched army. Australia has chosen to look beyond today and its own campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan to recognize that international power projection is more sophisticated than simply boots on the ground. Real international clout comes from having a wide range of security options that can be employed individually or collectively to secure influence or support the tenets of foreign policy. Perhaps the early lessons from establishing a viable regional security apparatus have a multitude of applications for Canada as Arctic sovereignty begins to cause friction or the impact of organized crime within NAFTA begins to take hold? Australia and the Sea Power Centre have put these issues on the table for discussion and review. Will Ottawa?

In conclusion, these are good wide-ranging reads that represent a valuable contribution to the maritime security debate. They illustrate a country, a navy and its doctrinal heart moving forward with one voice. This voice should be listened to in Canada now and certainly beyond the date of withdrawing Canadian troops from combat roles in Afghanistan. Otherwise with stale doctrine the army-centric Department of National Defence will end up very well prepared for the last war and lose the next by having its head in the sand. Without clear strategy and vision for the years ahead very little of value will be achieved. 🍷

