

Book Review

US Naval Power in the 21st Century: A New Strategy for Facing the Chinese and Russian Threat

(Brent Drost Sadler, Naval Institute Press, Maryland, 2023)

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Brent D. Sadler offers a comprehensive analysis of the greater maritime competition unfolding globally, especially between the United States and revisionist powers such as China and Russia. The book's central theme centres on the idea that the US, China, and Russia will engage in the most significant maritime competition in the upcoming decades. The latter are rapidly bolstering their forces in maritime domains to counterbalance US influence over the global commons. The author argues that the Cold War legacy-rooted American naval policy fails to adequately address the challenges of the 21st century. Serving as the latest policy prescription for American policymakers, this book outlines how the US can effectively tackle the naval challenges posed by China and Russia while remaining in peaceful competition. The book covers a wide array of topics expounded upon in detail by the author.

The first chapter, "Naval Statecraft," explains the use of naval power, along with diplomatic, economic, and political tools, to tackle long-term challenges like climate security, emerging technologies, and the changing dynamics of global trade. The author illustrates this by citing the South China Sea and ASEAN states' economic imperatives, which stand to benefit from the US Navy's forward presence. Intriguingly, the author presents data indicating a direct correlation between increased military presence (troops and infrastructure) and a significant rise in bilateral economic activity. Moreover, forward naval presence fosters political goodwill, as exemplified by disaster responses such as the US Navy's rescue operations during Typhoon Goni in 2020. The chapter underscores the necessity for dynamic naval approaches that encompass local

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needs and non-military issues, thereby enabling a revitalised US influence. The second chapter, 'Competition to the Rule of the Seas, explains how China and Russia have been gearing up to compete with the US. The author examines how the 2012 "Rebalance to Asia Pacific" policy unveiled during the Obama years remained languid in addressing emerging challenges throughout the second decade of the 21st century. China's rapid naval build-up and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have constrained the time the US has to respond to an impending multipolar scenario. The author cites the rise of nationalism in China, which is on par with its military modernization, as potentially leading to a faceoff with the US, particularly in Taiwan.

The chapter discusses how Russia's Gerasimov doctrine aims to counter US influence through asymmetric means, as well as China's economic statecraft to discourage Asian states from increasing military partnerships with the US. China halted tourism and Korean automobiles in response to South Korea's deployment of THAAD missile systems. In the third chapter, "Global Maritime 2050," the author paints a picture of the maritime landscape that will emerge in the next three decades. Sadler asserts that the US, China, and Russia will engage in the most significant competitions from the current period to 2035, with navies tasked with ensuring free access to open markets. Future naval competition relies heavily on active forward presence, the emergence of new markets, new routes (such as the new Arctic sea routes due to melting ice caps), and the role of emerging technology that will characterise maritime dynamics by the year 2050. The chapter also underscores the role of climate change in affecting maritime infrastructure. The author cites data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which indicates an increasing occurrence of strong tropical cyclones (categories 4 and 5) in the areas surrounding the US coast in the coming decades. The following chapter sheds light on eight crucial theatres where this contestation will take place. Sadler advises the United States to enhance its military presence through economic initiatives in order to align with Russian and Chinese strategies.

Sadler bases his advice for various regions on three distinct approaches: hold, build, and advance. Hold refers to increased US engagements in the Indian Ocean, North Atlantic, the Arctic, and Northeast Asia/Northwest Pacific. The author calls for building security partnerships in the overlooked regions of the Central and South Pacific, especially from the Caribbean to the Gulf of Guinea (in the backdrop of increasing Russian and Chinese interests). Finally, to counter Russia

and China, we must reinvigorate two regions: The Eastern Mediterranean and the South China Sea, establishing what Sadler refers to as a 'economy of force' to deter unwanted behaviour from respective belligerents. The author provides valuable insights in the next two chapters, highlighting the existing force management frameworks and their potential for reform to meet emerging needs. The chapters specifically address the need to transition fleet operations from geographic-based commands to a numbered fleet structure. The new structure would function according to operational requirements, facilitating the pooling of assets without the hindrances caused by regional-based commands. The author, in the chapter "The New Model Navy," highlights the necessity of operationalizing naval assets to keep pace with the emerging technologies of the fourth and fifth waves of industrialization, specifically bio-engineering, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence. It explains the evolution of the US Navy's network-centric warfare doctrines, including Project Over watch and Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2). These initiatives not only aim to enhance the cyber and electronic warfare capabilities of one's own forces but also to obfuscate the decision-making abilities of adversaries.

Sadler proceeds with a thorough theorization of emerging technologies and their effects on naval warfare, such as biogenetics, robots, AI regulations, and energy weapons, to name a few. In the subsequent sections, the author calls for a revitalised approach to naval build-up as existing allocations fall short of addressing the prescriptive needs. Sadler criticises the Battle Force 2045 plan, which aimed to operate more than 500 vessels by the year 2045. He advocates for a force with a more forward posture, capable of responding promptly to contingencies due to its proximity to incidents. In the future, the Naval Force will need more unmanned systems for cross-domain operations, as well as to replace many of its existing manned systems. In the second-to-last chapter, "A National Maritime Programme," the author emphasises the necessity of allocating sufficient resources, particularly funding, to future naval programs. The chapter discusses the decline in shipbuilding capabilities since the end of the Cold War and its impact on the ability to compete in the global maritime arena, particularly in maintaining fleet numbers. The author also evaluates various methods used to finance naval projects, outlining their advantages and disadvantages.

Additionally, the chapter delves into the technical aspects of the shipbuilding process, addressing issues such as supply chain management and retrofitting techniques. Sadler advocates for the development of new types of warships tailored to specific missions that align with long-

term maritime goals. Furthermore, the chapter underscores the importance of American merchant vessel crews and the necessity of retaining their skills for the American shipbuilding sector. The last chapter, “Developing Leaders for Great Power Competition,” delves into the foundational aspect of the book’s theme. Sadler gives the example of the Reagan Era, where the Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, successfully strategized naval build-up to counter the Soviet Union’s Brezhnev doctrine. To have an enduring impact, an overarching strategic purview requires the support of Congress and the electorate. To effectively participate in great power competition, naval leaders must undergo effective mariner training. Strategic decision-making necessitates that they be more familiar with local dynamics than before, and, where possible, take initiative in partnership and interagency coordination. The author concludes his book with a blueprint for policymakers who want to achieve parity in forthcoming contestations for a decisive victory, as well as formidable peacetime competitors.