

**Augustín Guimerá and Richard Harding (eds.) *Sailors, Statesmen and the Implementation of Naval Strategy*. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com), 2024. 216 pp., illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. UK £75.00, US \$115.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-83765-120-7. (E-book available.)**

*Sailors, Statesmen, and the Implementation of Naval Strategy* explores the relationship between civil authorities and naval strategists to offer new insights into how naval policy has been made in the past across a range of nations and situations. Nine authors offer their research in different civilian-naval policy interactions from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Spain. Editor Richard Harding highlights a tension between naval experts and civilian policy makers who can be thrust together in time of war or have to interact in the overall planning of national naval policy but otherwise operate in vastly different worlds and know little about the expertise and experience of their counterparts. Career politicians often have difficulties understanding the needs of their nation's navy, and naval leadership has historically struggled to "ensure a long-term focus on their needs by political leadership" (11).

Though Harding states that this collection does not seek to answer any single question, the authors show the successes and failures of this tricky naval-civilian policy relationship in several case studies. Alan James explores this relationship in seventeenth century France, where the centralizing state under King Louis XIV largely allowed the navy operational independence, but also neglected the naval force as an instrument of power projection, opting instead to make the navy a reflection of royal power and priorities. For example, officer appointments went to men who demonstrated great loyalty to king and church. Ivan Valdez-Bubnov examines the efforts to build a professional navy in Bourbon Spain, demonstrating that a political administration with a long-term dedicated interest in naval affairs could reform a navy from a decentralized force to one that could serve the national interest in versatile ways and in multiple theatres within a century.

Harding's own chapter on 1740s Britain shows how a navy with significant political influence can overplay its hand and lead to an overconfidence of government in the navy, which was sharply reversed by a series of strategic setbacks that the Royal Navy could not handle. Agustín Guimerá argues that the close relationship between naval and foreign policy decision-makers in late-eighteenth-century Spain enabled its navy to meet the policy needs of a global empire. Olivier Chaline shows the opposite naval-political relationship in Bourbon France, where the reliance on allies with varying objectives, differences among court decision-makers, and lack of naval expertise caused

France to often lack direction for its naval strategy, even in wartime.

Agustín Rodríguez examines how a Spanish naval officer in the mid-nineteenth century could combine tactical and political savvy to provide his country with a hero and figure of stability during a national crisis. Andrew Lambert writes on Julian Corbett's role as a naval strategist in early-twentieth-century Britain, where the Royal Navy sometimes had difficulty communicating its expertise to the government. Corbett's legal and civilian background enabled him to communicate strategic ideas in ways that both naval officers and policy makers could understand. Adolfo Morales Trueba demonstrates that when a civilian policy maker dedicated time and effort to understanding naval affairs, as was the case with Spanish Republican Navy Minister José Giral Pereira, civil and naval experts could create a robust plan for a nation's navy. John Hattendorf applies the civil-naval problem to the United States, showing how over the course of the U.S. Navy's history, the service rose from a fledgling outfit mistrusted by the nation's republican culture to having a respected culture of leadership refined by incorporating other disciplines into its education programme through institutions like the U.S. Naval War College.

Together, the authors demonstrate not only the number of different strategic situations that navies have encountered in the last four centuries but illustrate a wide range of ways states have used and neglected their navies within larger national strategy. The research presented in this collection shows that both the culture of a government and a navy can promote or undermine a sound naval strategy. Some navies have made efforts to better understand the government under which they work, and some navy ministers and policymakers have given naval experts a greater platform to voice their thoughts, but these two groups have to communicate effectively.

This volume addresses the issue of civil-naval relations in light of growing geo-political tensions between China, Russia, and the West, but lacks the perspective of non-Western experiences. Although the four nations discussed in this book are among those with the richest naval history, one or two chapters exploring the relationship between the government and the navy elsewhere (Japan, China, or Russia, for instance) could have offered a more global picture of civil-naval relations for academics and more relevant context for contemporary naval experts. Despite this shortcoming, this volume's contributions provide fresh ways of looking at the relationship between governments and navies, and *Sailors, Statesmen, and the Implementation of Naval Strategy* would be a welcome addition to the libraries of both naval historians and officers alike.

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