

Conrad Waters (ed.). *Seaforth World Naval Review 2024*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Seaforth Publishing, www.seaforthpublishing.com, 2023. Distributed in North America by US Naval Institute Press. 192 pp., illustrations, tables, index. UK £28.00, US \$70.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-68247-484-6 (hardcover) (E-book available).

In an era of increasing competition and potential conflict, sea power has once again taken on greater importance. Countries keep naval forces for numerous roles and responsibilities related to national interests and international ambitions. They are valuable assets and expensive to field and maintain. The fifteenth edition of Seaforth Publishing's annual review of navies around the globe provides insights into the latest naval developments packaged in a familiar and convenient format. Since its inauguration in 2010, the *Seaforth World Naval Review* has become a go-to source cataloguing trends and additions to navies and fleets. Conrad Waters, the series editor from the start, is a lawyer with deep interests in naval affairs and the author of several technical histories. About half the book, including the reviews of world fleets by region, is authored by Waters. Various contributors add the remaining content, including both guest contributors and ones from earlier annuals.

Like the other standard-format editions, the book is divided into four primary sections, each further subdivided. The first comprises an overview with introduction and comparative tables showing the defence spending and fleet strengths of leading countries. The second section, really the book's primary purpose, gives reviews of naval developments and ships by country in the regions of North and South America, Asia and the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and Africa, and Europe and Russia. The fleets of Brazil, Great Britain, and Greece receive extended treatment in dedicated sections written by guest contributors, with added captioned photographs. The third section, titled "Significant Ships" has three subsections that highlight: France's new class of Félix Eboué patrol vessels, which were built specifically for service in overseas possessions and territories; India's Project 15A and Project 15B destroyers, which are updated and improved variants of earlier builds that incorporate significant network-centric warfare capabilities; and Spain's S-80-class large conventional submarines, which are meant for operation, intelligence-gathering, and strike missions. These all give a big boost to the local economies and the maritime manufacturing sector within the country. The fourth section focuses on technological trends with a standard chapter on world naval aviation by the regular contributor David Hobbs, another by noted authority Norman Friedman considering naval propulsion, and Richard Scott's examination of a Norwegian company's state-supported development of the Naval Strike Missile that has become the de facto NATO standard and likely

successor to the aging Harpoon anti-ship missile in western arsenals. Each of the sections is nicely balanced and informative in their own right. Common themes and observations prevail throughout and build upon each other.

In the regional overviews, the United States remains the country with the most sophisticated navy and most capable fleets by virtue of out-spending almost all the others combined. Overall fleet strength is little changed from years previous, although newer aircraft carriers, destroyers, and ballistic missile submarines are entering service or on the design boards. Withdrawal of older cruisers and amphibious support ships has been deferred by Congress until replacements are in hand. The United States Navy has decided to divest itself of relatively new littoral combat ships for possible transfer or sale to allies. It remains committed to the defence of North America, Europe, and Asia as part of bi-lateral and alliance arrangements.

China, which spends about a third as much, is next. Newer aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, submarines (nuclear and conventional), and amphibious assault ships populate the People's Liberation Army Navy's front-line strength. The dispute over Taiwan and conflicting claims in the South China Sea figure prominently in China's maritime stance and might one day bring it into conflict with the United States. Certainly, many observers and analysts consider China as the most likely challenger to the current predominance of the United States Navy on the high seas. These assessments are largely based on open-source materials and may reflect biased assumptions in the absence of more detailed information on Chinese intentions. As Walters explains, China has progressively expanded its zone of Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) outward with networked sub-surface, surface, and air assets, which makes entry very dangerous and potentially deadly. Periodic freedom of navigation operations by American and Canadian warships and aircraft test the capabilities (and patience) of the Chinese and buck up worried allies in the region.

The next tiers of navies in the regional overviews share similar characteristics and fleet mixes. The nuclear club includes Russia, Great Britain, and France with ballistic missile carrying (SSBN) and attack (SSN) submarines. India and Brazil are actively moving in that direction beyond the experimental, and Australia is dumping its fleet of existing conventional submarines and a planned French replacement in favour of promised American and British assistance to acquire nuclear submarines at some future date. Several navies are replacing older conventional standbys with newer ones, the export *Scorpène* being a popular choice amongst German and Chinese alternatives. Several countries have made targeted additions in terms of surface combatants and patrol craft. Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force, for example, is rearming as part of strategic and defence reviews that will see significant increases to principal fleet units, and the Republic of Korea has

prioritized a “Three Axis” response to a prospective nuclear attack from North Korea that bodes well for the submarine fleet and the ballistic missile defence capability resident in Aegis destroyers while aircraft carrier plans have been shelved.

In many countries, economic woes and strained finances continue to delay and inhibit planned renewals in navies and fleets. Pakistan, Egypt, Peru, and Chile have fared perhaps the best with well-conceived recapitalization plans and actual delivery or purchase of warships. At the other end, financially challenged Argentina struggles along, and South Africa has suspended normal maintenance and refits, putting into question availability of existing warships and submarines. Canada’s navy faces similar challenges with a gracefully maturing fleet that has seen delayed completion of two replenishment ships at a British Columbia shipyard, inflated costs and technical concerns over a frigate replacement, and musings about submarines capable of operating under sea ice. On the brighter side, the Canadian government has procured maritime patrol and surveillance aircraft with Boeing’s P-8 Poseidon and unmanned MQ9-B drone which should be available and operational by the end of the decade.

The war in Ukraine has breathed new life into NATO and added two new member states with the admission of Sweden and Finland. Post-Brexit, France represents Europe’s leading navy with design work started on a new nuclear aircraft carrier and newer generation strategic ballistic missile submarines, and with relatively modern frigates completed or completing. Italy likewise maintains an established fleet of conventional aircraft carriers, frigates, submarines, and amphibious ships, as does Spain, minus the aircraft carriers. Individual chapters by Richard Beedall and Guy Toremans focus on Great Britain’s Royal Navy and Greece’s Hellenic Navy respectively, each voicing cautious optimism for the future even as present realities shrink fleets and defer replacement projects. Russia has suffered some notable losses in the Black Sea to missiles and unmanned aerial and speedboat drones but remains committed to modernizing their nuclear strategic and attack submarine force, perhaps to the detriment of the surface fleet, which has proven particularly vulnerable in the modern battlespace. Use of drones is certainly revolutionizing warfare at sea and navies are looking to add that capability wherever possible.

Seaforth World Naval Review 2024 is recommended for readers interested in contemporary naval affairs and navies. It is an authoritative source that follows a proven format packed with considerable data, information, and analysis. The book furnishes a one-stop primer on the latest naval developments around the world until next year’s eagerly awaiting edition appears.

Chris Madsen
Toronto, Ontario