

Book Review: *From Sun Tzu to Hyperwar, a strategic encyclopaedia*

Lars Wedin

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Reviewed by

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The author, Lars Wedin is a retired Captain of the Royal Swedish Navy, with command experience of surface vessels. He is a prolific writer on military and naval issues, being a member of the Royal Swedish Society of Naval Sciences and an editor of its *Journal*. He is also a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences and an associate member of the French Académie de marine.

His latest book *From Sun Tzu to Hyperwar, a Strategic Encyclopaedia* covers, as the title indicates, a vast subject. However, as with any encyclopedia, it is not recommended to read this book from cover to cover. Instead the content registry or the subject index should be used in order to get most value from the book. For the naval minded reader, the search for knowledge can be further narrowed down by concentrating on the maritime/naval strategy paragraphs. The book starts with describing the history of strategy, from Antiquity to the present Post-Cold war era, or as the title states, from the theories of the Chinese general Sun Tzu in the fourth century BC to the high-tech concept of artificial intelligence and Hyperwar. In depth, strategies are explained that during the course of history have evolved from being only concerned with land and naval warfare to “Star Wars” and cyber warfare. There is a very interesting chapter with biographies of military thinkers like Frederick the Great, Napoleon and Clausewitz to modern era influencers like Mao Zedong and the Vietnamese general Giap. Also mentioned are such famous naval thinkers as Sir Julian S. Corbett and Alfred Thayer Mahan.

From a naval and maritime aspect there are paragraphs in the book outlining concepts like maritime domain, irregular naval warfare, and maritime strategy. The maritime domain is interestingly described as comprising three different domains: water, air, and ocean bottoms. The interface between water and air is the surface, where most naval and maritime activities take place and commonly referred to when discussing the maritime domain. The maritime domain is not only concerned with mobile objects like naval and merchant ships, but also fixed objects like oil/gas platforms and wind turbines. Furthermore, the author also rightly mentions the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) as being included in the maritime domain, with reference to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the doctrine of freedom of navigation.

However, neither in that section, nor elsewhere in the book, the author does not specifically mention the extensive efforts being made to uphold the doctrine through what is now called Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS). However, the author thoroughly explains the definitions of maritime strategy, naval strategy, sea power and sea power.

Referring to Corbett’s classical definition of maritime strategy, where naval strategy is a subset of maritime strategy, the author gives his own definition; “Maritime strategy is the science and art of

carrying out manoeuvres with forces in order to contribute to the achievement of the grand strategy in the maritime domain”.

The difference between the two terms sea power and sea power is aptly described.

The former is about strategy and the latter is about the identity. Although the book does not define or mention “maritime security”, the author touches on the subject under the headline “Irregular War”.

The author refers, as he must, to Private Military Enterprises, being a modern version of the Italian Renaissance “Condottieri”, re-emerging in the 21st century wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with duties as logistics, intelligence, and protection. The author says that these companies are playing an important role in protecting merchant ships against pirates. As they are.

In this reviewer's opinion the right term for these companies is a Private Military Company (or Private Security Company and Private Maritime Security Company if employed in the maritime domain). Further, this type of business re-emerged first mainly in Africa after the end of the Cold War, taking part in some rather spectacular operations. However, there was tremendous business growth due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where many traditional, state-run military duties were sub-contracted to civilian contractors. Also, by referring to these companies as a modern type of “Condottieri”, the author perhaps invokes a negative connotation through its association with mercenaries. The author also says that the legal status of these companies is ambiguous. That is certainly not the case for Private Maritime Security Companies, an industry which is now properly regulated.

The book inevitably deals with asymmetrical naval warfare and maritime terrorism, and correctly states that fortunately the incidents are few and far between. However, an argument could be raised against the statement that the guerrilla war at sea by the Tamil Tigers against the Sri Lanka government is the only modern example of this type of warfare. Certainly, the maritime criminal activities by the Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in Nigeria, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines and the Houthi Movement in Yemen are other examples. The activities of state actors against merchant shipping, like the Navy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, could also stand as an example.

The book lists the famous cases of maritime terrorism, like the 2004 *Superferry 14* attack in Manila Bay, and the 2000 attack on USS *Cole* as well as the 2008 sea-launched Mumbai attacks and the 2011 attack on PNS Mehran naval station in Pakistan. In the reviewer's opinion the October 1985 *Achille Lauro* hijacking should also have been mentioned, since the 1988 SUA Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation was a result of the hijacking.

As a conclusion, *From Sun Tzu to Hyperwar, a Strategic Encyclopedia* is an excellent academic book with a tremendous lot of information and references. A reference book, which should be a part of any military, naval and maritime library.

About Lars H. Bergqvist

Lars H. Bergqvist has an extensive experience of maritime and military affairs. He is a Master Mariner, an Officer in The Royal Swedish Naval Reserve and a former United Nations Military Observer. He is a Freeman of The Honourable Company of Master Mariners, an Associate Fellow of The Nautical Institute and an Associate of The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. Captain Bergqvist is a subject matter expert in maritime security, terrorism, and piracy, being a member of The Center for International Maritime Security and an Associate Member of The Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies.