



## *To Provide and Maintain a Navy: Why Naval Primacy Is America's First, Best Strategy* by Henry J. Hendrix.

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Henry J. “Jerry” Hendrix has produced what can only be described as a “polemic”—in the best sense of that word—whose thesis resides in its title. A title that quotes a key passage of the US Constitution<sup>1</sup> that provides the basis for the nation to have a Navy. Hendrix served as a Naval aviator and ended his career as director of the US Navy History and Heritage Command (formerly Naval Historical Center) with the rank of captain, one of the few US Navy officers of his generation to earn a PhD while on active duty. His breadth of academic and operational experience in the US Navy during its post-World War II heyday informs his efforts to persuade a wide audience of the need for a strong Navy in the service of American grand strategy. Hendrix gets right to the point in his short preface:

if China and Russia, separated from the United States by two great oceans, are indeed the rising great powers that present the most imminent strategic challenge to the United States, then those challenges are best met by the country’s Navy. (xviii)

He shares this conviction with the early sea-power historian and theorist Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), who wrote for a broad audience of American citizens<sup>2</sup> in hopes of persuading them that a formidable Navy should underwrite and guarantee the powerful economy of the United States.

The titles of chapters 1–4 encapsulate the arguments Hendrix makes in support of his primary thesis, each adducing relevant historical examples. Chapter 1 concerns the “Difference in Perspectives” between a land (or continental) viewpoint and one more focused on international competition for sea power (1-3). Chapter 2, “The Sea as the Source of the Wealth of Nations,” stresses the importance of maritime trade to the global economy. Chapter 3 examines “The Creation of a Free and Safe Sea,” while 4 discusses the “Pax Mare Americana” that resulted from the establishment of a safe “global commons”<sup>3</sup> and boosted economic growth after World War II. The titles of chapters 5–8 are less indicative of their content.

In his 5th chapter, “Things Fall Apart: The Center Cannot Hold,” the author maintains that the US-led international cooperation that formerly secured seaborne trade is now collapsing. Chapter 6 further explores this change by revisiting the distinction between the two “varieties” of state powers, “continental and sea power.” On this view, Russia and China are archetypal continental states, who espouse a “closed sea strategy” and treat the sea as if it were a region to be fenced off and claimed as sovereign territory (46–49).

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1. Viz., Art. I, § 8, cl. 13 (available online). The brevity of the Navy establishment clause is still stunning, even today, and there is no qualifier for its retention as there is for “Armies” (cl. 12).

2. Notably in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1890).

3. A.T. Mahan, “The Future in Relation to American Naval Power,” *Harpers Magazine* (Oct. 1895).

At this point, Hendrix begins to rely less on historical examples and more on developments in international relations theory and the social and political sciences. People with Defense Department backgrounds will find that this part of the book reads like a threat assessment regarding a new weapons system that needs a place in the Defense budget. The rather opaque title of chapter 7—“Upholding the Law Means Getting the Right Mix, Playing Ball, and then Finding the Beat” (74) should have been “A Large Navy is Needed to Uphold International Laws at Sea.”

The last chapter—“By Land or Sea?”—summarizes the argument that sea power should be the centerpiece of American strategy and security; Hendrix identifies what sort of fleet is needed by 2040 to accomplish this: aside from eighteen “Large Unmanned Surface Vessels,” it should feature large aircraft carriers and amphibious platforms.<sup>4</sup> Hendrix also, finally, cites the US Constitution in support of his argument (102-3). He also writes that,

Given the preponderance of national interests that reside on and below the world’s ocean [sic], the continued favorable security conditions here in the American homeland, and the location and geographic distribution of the two rising great powers, it is time for the nation to fully invest in a return to the sea. (103)

This terse, hard-hitting book is meant for the many readers who, Hendrix worries, may have forgotten the sea. In that regard, the points made in chapter 3 (the best of the eight) are especially timely in light of the recent crisis in the global maritime economy caused when the container ship *Ever Given* “plugged up” the Suez Canal for six days late last March.<sup>5</sup> But, like most polemicists, Hendrix is prone to hyperbole; he overstates, for instance, the threat posed by Russia. Moreover, his prescribed solutions look like “more of the same,” only in larger amounts. Make no mistake, he has written a significant and perceptive book that makes the case for the continued value of navies in the twenty-first century. One wishes he had pulled some of his punches and left his prescriptions for what a larger US Navy should look like—beyond being the centerpiece of US national strategy—to another book.

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4. See my reservations in “Carriers and Amphibs: Shibboleths of Sea Power,” *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* (2020) 106–18.

5. See Mary-Ann Russon, “The Cost of the Suez Canal Blockage,” *BBC News* (30 Mar. 2021).