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Jeremy Black is a prolific lecturer and writer, the author of over 100 books. Many concern aspects of eighteenth century British, European and American political, diplomatic and military history but he has also published on the history of the press, cartography, warfare, culture and on the nature and uses of history itself.

Public Roles

Editor of Archives, the journal of the British Records Association, and the leading archives journal in the world (1989-2005).

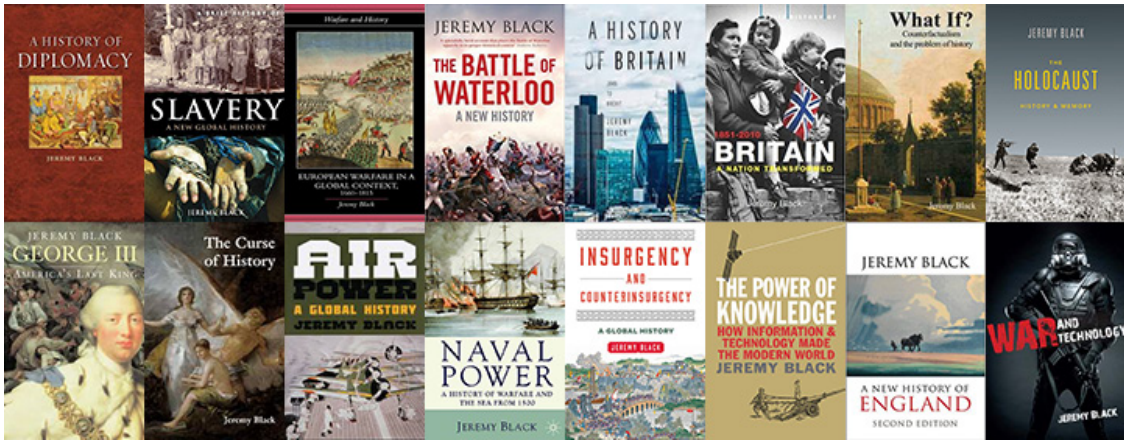
Member of the Council of the British Records Association 1989-2005, and of associated sub-committees, for example General Purposes Committee, Publication Committee.

Member of the Council of the Royal Historical Society 1993-1996 and 1997-2000, and of associated sub-committees, for example Membership Committee, Research Support Committee.

Member of the Council of the List and Index Society 1997-

Editorial board of History Today, International History Review, Journal of Military History, Media History.

These and other related activities have ensured that Jeremy Black is one of the leading figures in the world of archives and history.



Maritime Security – Naval Strategy in the Twenty-First Century

Jeremy BLACK, Ph.D.

The historical context is not the only one to consider when assessing maritime security today, but it is a context that offers an ability to assess long-term significance. This context can be approached in a number of ways, not least the rise and fall of maritime empires and its analytical value when considering China and America.

The linkage of power and technology is also a key element. It is now over a century since the meeting in London of the Royal Geographical Society in 1904 heard Halford Mackinder propose his new geopolitics of world power. Basing his argument explicitly on the transformative consequences of railways, Mackinder, both influential geographer and politician of empire, argued that what he termed the capabilities of land power had been greatly enhanced and that the always threatening Eurasian 'Heartland' would be able to redefine power relations in a way that threatened the leading naval power, Britain.

A questioner, the future, would-be, statesman of the British empire, Leo Amery, however proposed, instead at the meeting, a different geopolitics based on a newer technology, that of air power. In light of this grasping of the future, naval power, the basis of British imperial and military strength, appeared weak, if not redundant. Indeed, from the 1900s and, far more 1920s, those looking to the future placed great weight on the new and different in the shape of what air power would apparently be able to do in an undated and unverifiable future, rather than the more limited argument they could actually do in the present. And so those looking to the future have continued to do. The world was literally reconceptualised as new map projections and perspectives, for example centred on the North Pole, focused on the potential and exigencies of the aerial dimension, first with aircraft and then, even more dramatically, with intercontinental rockets.

In contrast, the map projections and perspectives, and linked assumptions, associated with the great age of naval power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to appear as redundant as the global trans-oceanic empires it had sustained and displayed. To survive, navies apparently had to adapt. This was an argument that was to be pursued over the following century, first with an emphasis on aircraft

carriers and, subsequently, with submarine-based rocket launchers. Moreover, as a further erosion of naval distinctiveness, 'jointness' came to the fore in the late twentieth century, as both doctrine and, less successfully, practice. Irrespective of this adaptability, the idea of aerial self-sufficiency was taken forward further in the 1990s and early 2000s as a key aspect of what was termed by its American originators and advocates the Revolution in Military Affairs. Air power appeared best to provide the speed and responsiveness that would give force to what was proclaimed to be a revolution in information technology. Mid-air refuelling apparently provided a power-projection for aircraft that made carriers, however dramatic a display of naval power, less relevant.

From a very different direction, the sea also appeared more marginal. Unprecedented and continuing population growth, combined with the breakdown of pre-existing patterns of social and political deference, increased the complexity of government. This contributed to what was termed, from the 1990s, 'wars among the people'. These wars or, at least, serious unrest led, in conflict and in planning and procurement for conflict, to a focus both on major urban centres and on marginal regions that were also difficult to control. Again, this scarcely corresponded to an emphasis on the sea. 'Wars among the people' was very much a doctrine that suited armies, which propounded it, and left navies apparently redundant, their ships as one with the heavy tanks now deemed superfluous. Air power and rapidly-deployed ground troops appeared to provide the speed, precision and force required.

Moreover, this shift appeared demonstrated in the 1990s by a series of developments. These included the continued decline of the once great naval power, Britain, as well as the extent to which America and Russia, the leading naval powers of the 1980s, no longer focused on this branch of their military. In particular, there was a major run down in the American navy, while much of its Russian counterpart literally rusted away. The disastrous loss of the Russian submarine *Kursk* in 2000 suggested that Russia lacked the capacity to maintain its ships effectively. Moreover, the degree to which, in the 1990s, the navy and the oceans were not the prime commitment, military, political and cultural, of the rising economic powers, China and India, appeared striking.

These indications however, were, and are, misleading, and trends in the 2010s pointed in other directions. In practice, naval power remains both very important and with highly significant potential for the future. In addition, a reading of the recent past and of the present, that minimises the role of this power, both neglects the place of naval power in power projection and risks extrapolating a misleading impression into the future.

Geography, as ever, is a key element. Here the prime factor is the location of population growth and the related economic activities of production and consumption. Most of this growth has occurred in coastal and littoral regions, and,

more generally, within 150 miles of the coast. There was been significant inland expansion of the area of settlement in some countries, notably Brazil, as well as population growth in already heavily-settled inland areas of the world, particularly in northern India. Nevertheless, the growth of coastal and littoral regions is more notable. In part, this growth has been linked to the move from the land that has been so conspicuous as petrol-powered machinery became more common in agriculture from the mid-twentieth century. As a result, rural areas lost people: in America (notably the Great Plains) and Western Europe from mid-century, and in Eastern Europe and China from the 1990s. The process is incomplete, particularly in India and Japan, but it is an aspect of the greater significance of cities, most of which are situated on navigable waterways, principally the coast or relevant estuaries. Shanghai is the centre of Chinese economic activity, and Mumbai its Indian counterpart.

The economic growth of these cities is linked to their position in the global trading system. This is one where maritime trade remains foremost. The geopolitical implications of the economic value of seaborne trade require emphasis. In large part, this value is due to the flexibility of this trade and related transport and storage systems. Containerisation from the 1950s proved a key development, as it permitted the ready movement and transhipment of large quantities of goods without high labour needs or costs, and with a low rate of pilfering and damage. Air transport lacked these characteristics, and the fuel cost implications of bulk transport by air made it not viable other than for high value, perishable products, such as cut flowers. The significance of containerisation was enhanced by the ability and willingness of the shipbuilding industry to respond to and shape the new opportunity.

As a result, the character and infrastructure of global trade by sea has been transformed since the 1950s. Moreover, this transformation continues and is readily apparent round the world. A good example is provided by the massed cranes in the new container facilities at Colombo, as well as the new harbour being built with Chinese help further along the Sri Lankan coast, and the numerous container ships off the southern coast of the island. Politics played key roles in this transformation. The development of the global economy after the end of the Cold War focused on the integration into the Western-dominated maritime trading system of states that had been, or still were, Communist, for example China and Vietnam, or that had adopted a Communist (or at least Socialist)-influenced preference for planning, for example India.

Moreover, in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, the general trend was toward free market liberalism and against autarky, protectionism, and barter or controlled trading systems. This trend encouraged a major growth in trade, notably of Chinese exports to America and Western Europe. This trend remained significant in the 2000s and early 2010s despite political tensions, particularly between America and China, as well as the consequences of the serious global economic crisis that began in 2008. Crucially, that did not lead to a protectionism comparable to what was seen in the

1930s. Both prior to the crisis and during it, the focus on trade between East Asia and America ensured that maritime trade expanded greatly. The situation changed, however, in the 2020s in a developing international crisis.

Speculation about developing trade from East Asia overland to Western Europe was not brought to fruition at any scale. Only the Trans-Siberian Railway was in a position to provide a link. To that extent, Mackinder's analysis proved flawed. The ambitious railway construction plans of China notwithstanding, there is no sign that this will change. The Chinese railway boom is much to do with high-speed lines to carry passengers and troops. It is driven by politics rather than economics, as in the building of a line to Lhasa in Tibet. Overland trade from the Far East has not prospered for economic as well as political reasons. Railway transport costs remain stubbornly higher than shipping; indeed, containers have widened the gap. Chinese railways, old and new, provide no links to Europe.

The growth in trade after World War Two, much of it maritime trade, was linked to the enhanced specialisation and integration of production and supply networks that was a consequence of economic liberalism, as well as of the economies of scale and the attraction of locating particular parts of the networks near raw material sources, transhipment points, or the centres of consumption. This growth was further fuelled by the opportunities and needs linked to population increases. The latter helped ensure that regions hitherto able to produce what they required were obliged now to import goods, not only food and fuel, but also manufactured products. Trade links that would have caused amazement in the nineteenth century, or even the 1950s, such as the export of food from Zambia to the Middle East and from Canada to Japan, or of oil from Equatorial Guinea to China, became significant. Most, although not all, of the resulting trade was by sea. According to the *Financial Times* of 10 July 2014, $5,300 billion worth of goods crossed the South China Sea by sea each year, which made control over it of particular significance.

Naval power was the key guarantor of this trade and played the role of providing the security of what was termed the 'global commons'. This concept presented sea power in a far more benign fashion than had been the case when it had been seen as an expression of imperial power. Instead, there was an emphasis on shared value. This emphasis was greatly enhanced from the late 2000s in response to a major increase in piracy, notably in the Indian Ocean, a topic covered in the chapter by Martin Murphy. This increase exposed the broader implications for maritime trade of specific sites of instability. It was not only that pirates from Somalia proved capable of operating at a considerable distance into the Indian Ocean, but also that their range of operations affected shipping and maritime trade from distant waters. This was not new. Muscat raiders in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had operated from Oman to the west coast of India and the Swahili coast of Africa, challenging European trade to India. However, in the 2000s, the challenge appeared greater, both because piracy had largely been stamped out in the nineteenth century

and because the scale of international maritime trade, and the number of states directly involved, were far larger.

If the operations against Somali piracy, operations that reduced its extent and enabled states such as China and India to display their naval power and train their crew, proved a clear demonstration of the importance of naval power and its ability to counter failure on land, its potential significance was further demonstrated by the expansion of piracy elsewhere, notably off Nigeria. This threat suggested a multi-layered need for naval power. For most of the twentieth century, this had very much been a form of power dominated by the major states, while most states, instead, focused on their armies, not least for internal control and policing. In the early twenty-first century, such control and policing increasingly also encompassed maritime tasks. Control over refugee flows, the maintenance of fishing rights, and the prevention of drug smuggling, proved prime instances.

As a consequence, naval power became as much a matter of the patrol boat as of the guided missile destroyer. Drug money is a threat to the stability of Caribbean states which, however, have tiny navies. As a result, it is the navies of major powers that have a Caribbean presence, America, Britain and France, each of which also have colonies there, that play a key role, one that is greatly facilitated by aerial surveillance and interception capabilities.
Naval action against pirates, drug smugglers and people traffickers, the last a major task for the navies of Australia, Greece, Italy and Spain, but not only for them, is reminiscent of the moral agenda of nineteenth-century naval power. Such action is also an implementation of sovereignty as well as of specific governmental and political agendas.

Moreover, the utility of naval power in the early twenty-first century in part reflected the extent to which the 'end of history' that had been signposted in 1989 with the close of the Cold War proved a premature sighting. Instead, there was a recurrence in international tension focused on traditional interests. Territorial waters proved a particular source of dispute, not least when linked to hopes over oil and other resources. Indeed, by 2014, there were key disputes over competing claims in the East and South China Seas, disputes that drove a major regional naval race, particularly between China and Japan. These disputes were characterised by aggressive Chinese steps, as in 2012 when China took over the Scarborough Shoal west of the Philippines.

Moreover, control over the naval base of Sevastopol and over maritime and drilling rights in the Black Sea were important in the crisis over Crimea and, more generally, Ukraine in early 2014. Once the Russians gained control, they announced an expansion and modernisation of their Black Sea fleet, with new warships and submarines. In turn, in the war that began in 2022, Russia used its navy to blockade and bombard Ukraine.

Concern about coastal waters encouraged a drive to ensure the necessary naval power. The disputes over the East and South China Seas and the Black Sea, and the prospect of their becoming more serious, or of other disputes following, led to a determination, on the part of regional powers, to step up naval strength and preparedness. In the case of Japan, there was a major strategic shift in focus from the defence of Hokkaido to concern about the southwest part of the archipelago and in particular the offshore islands in the East China Sea. This led to a greater emphasis on the navy and on a more mobile, flexible and versatile power-profile. Moreover, military exercises were increasingly geared to maritime concerns and naval power.

Regional disputes also directed attention to the situation as far as other powers, principally America, were concerned. These powers were concerned both about these regions and about the possibility that disputes over sovereignty would become more serious in other regions, for example the Arctic. As a result, the nature and effectiveness of naval power came to the fore as a topic in the mid-2010s. So also did the extent to which governments and societies identified with this power. This was of particular significance in East and South Asia, as, with the exception of Japan, there was little recent history of naval power. Moreover, the relevant Japanese history was complicated by the legacy of World War Two and the provisions of the subsequent peace treaty.

However, the situation was transformed from the 2000s. In China, there was an emphasis on past naval activity, notably the early fifteenth century voyages of Zheng He into the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the *Zheng He* was the name of the Chinese officer-training ship. Inaccurately linked to these voyages, the *China Daily* claimed in July 2004 that the Chinese circumnavigated the world in 1421, well before Columbus and Magellan. The voyages of Zheng He were highlighted in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. There was also a presentation of naval strength as a product of government initiative, an aspect of great power status, and a sign of modernity.

Both elements were seen in the treatment of history. In particular, *Da Guo Jue Qi* (*The Rise of Great Powers*), a Chinese government study finished in 2006, attempted to determine the reasons why Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia and the USA became great powers. This study was apparently inspired by a directive from Hu Jintao, the Chinese President, to determine which factors enabled great powers to grow most rapidly. The study drew together government, academic methods, as many scholars were consulted, some reportedly briefing the Politburo, and popular interest. A twelve-part programme was twice broadcast on the state-owned television channel in 2006, and an eight-volume book series was produced and sold rapidly. The president of the television channel made the utilitarian purpose of the series clear. The book project argued the value of naval power, but also the need for a dynamic economy with international trade linking the two, a factor seen as suggesting a lesson about the value of international cooperation.

Chinese naval strategy, however, focuses not on the history of other states, but on that of Chinese history. The traditional land-based focus on 'interior strategies' – the development of expanding rings of security around a state's territory – has been applied to the maritime domain in part in response to a reading of Chinese history in which it is argued that, from the 1830s, the ability of foreign powers to apply pressure from the sea has greatly compromised Chinese interests and integrity. Near China has therefore been extended as a concept to cover the nearby seas. This provides both an enhancement of security and a sense of historical validity, one that provides purpose to the Communist Party.

However, the definition and implementation of the relevant attitudes and policies ensure both considerable problems and mission creep, as the security of what may seem to be the near seas apparently requires regional hegemony and an ability to repel any potential oceanic-based power, which means at present America. The Chinese desire may be motivated by security, but it challenges that of all others and, crucially, does not adopt or advance a definition of security that is readily capable to compromise or, indeed, negotiation. In part, this is a reflection of the Chinese focus on 'hard power', a power very much presented by naval strength as a support for non-militarised coercion in the shape of maritime law enforcement. The Chinese navy offers force to support the application of psychological and political pressure. A willingness to resort to force creates for others a key element of uncertainty.

The Chinese emphasis on naval strength as a key aspect of national destiny, and the rapid buildup of the Chinese navy, has helped drive the pace for other states, leading Japan and India, in particular, to put greater emphasis on a naval buildup, while also ensuring that America focuses more of its attention on the region. Repeated talk from 2014, that conflict over the East China Sea might lead to a broader international struggle, with America backing Japan, underlined the significance of maritime issues and power. The previous October, the USA agreed to base surveillance drones and reconnaissance planes in Japan so as to patrol waters in the region. The development of anti-ship missiles by China able to challenge American carriers, notably the BF-21F intermediate-range ballistic missile fitted with a manoeuvring re-entry head containing an anti-ship seeker, poses a major problem. As a result, the carriers may have to operate well to the east of Taiwan, in other words beyond the range of the Navy's F-35s.

The ready willingness of Chinese Internet users to identify with these issues reflected their salience in terms of national identity and interests. Moreover, this willingness suggested a pattern that would also be adopted in other conflicts over maritime rights. They proved readily graspable. The Chinese government is struggling to ride the tiger of popular xenophobia. In China, as earlier with Tirpitz and the *Flottenverein* in Germany, popular support for naval expansion has proved easier to arouse than to calm.

Thus, the utility of naval power was symbolic, ideological and cultural as much as it was based on 'realist' criteria of military, political and economic party. It has been ever thus, but became more so in an age of democratisation when ideas of national interest and identity had to be reconceptualised for domestic and international publics. The ability to deploy and demonstrate power was important in this equation, and navies proved particularly well suited to it, not least as they lacked the ambiguous record associated with armies and air forces after the interventionist wars of the 2000s and as a consequence of the role of some armies in civil control. 120 years later, Mackinder's lecture appears not prescient but an instance of the weakness of theory when confronted by economic, technological and military realities. China, not Russia, is the key power in Mackinder's 'Heartland', but this is a China with global trading interests and oceanic power aspirations, and not, as Russia seemed to be, the successor to the interior power controlling some supposed 'pivot', centred in West Siberia.

The likely future trajectory of Chinese naval ambitions and power is currently a, if not the, foremost question for commentators focused on power politics and that itself is a clear instance of the continuing relevance of naval strength. It has proved far more successful than either armies or air forces in combining the cutting-edge, apocalyptic lethality of nuclear weaponry with the ability to wield power successfully at the sub-nuclear level. Moreover, this ability is underlined by the range, scale and persistence of naval power, all of which provide, alongside tactical and operational advantages, a strategic capability not matched by the other branches. Despite aerial refuelling, air power lacks the continuous presence, and thus persistence and durability, that warships can convey. Moreover, warships offer a firepower and visual presence that is more impressive than that of many armies.

The significance of coastal regions underlines the value of amphibious power projection. In 2014, in an exercise in Hawaii, the American Marine Corps displayed the prototype of the Ultra Heavy-lift Amphibious Connector, a vehicle designed to cut through the waves in order to carry vehicles to the coast. The tracks are made from captured-air foam blocks that stick out like flippers. The full-size version is designed to be 84 foot long and 34 foot high and should be able to transport at least four vehicles. Also in 2014, the building by France for Russia of Mistral-class warships intended to support amphibious operations created a serious issue when an arms embargo of Russia was proposed. Such warships were seen as a particular threat in the Black Sea.

At the same time, the ability of land-based power to challenge navies is much greater than was the situation when Mackinder was writing. Indeed, his view both of the relationship between land and sea and of the capacity of technological change did not really comprehend this challenge. It had begun as soon as cannon greatly enhanced the capacity of coastal defences to resist naval attack. The major improvement in artillery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries greatly

increased this capacity, and the surviving sites of coastal defence, for example off Auckland, remain formidably impressive. In the twentieth the range and nature of such defence was increased first by aircraft and then by missiles. Both are now central to the equations of naval power projection, and not least in the key choke-points, such as the Taiwan Strait and the Strait of Hormuz. Although longer-range weapons allow ships to project power far inshore at the same time that they permit coastal defences to project power far offshore, the smaller number of naval targets and greater vulnerability of warships mean that this range factor does not balance out capabilities.

Indeed, this capability has led to the suggestion that the very nature of naval power has changed with consequent implications for the ranking of the major powers. In particular, whereas air power is dominated by the major powers, and notably America, the possibility of lesser powers using new technologies to counteract existing advantages is significant. This reflects a longstanding aspiration and practice, for example as seen with the ideas of the French *jeune école* in the 1880s and of Soviet naval planners in the 1920s. The extent to which small and/or unconventional forces may be as effective in their chosen spheres as major navies therefore raises the question whether this sphere can extent in order to deny the latter advantage in large areas or, more plausibly, to make that advantage very costly not least at a time of rising costs for cutting-edge warships.

That is the doctrine that Iran, with its doctrine of asymmetrical swarm attacks, appears to be pursuing. The assertion of naval power in this fashion is frequently linked to territorial assertion, and complicates the traditional military hierarchy and legacy. In most states, navies have far less political clout than armies and play a smaller role in national self-image. This is the case, for example, of Turkey, Iran, India, Israel and Pakistan. Yet issues of military need and power politics complicate such situations, as with Iran. For example, the quest for a regional political role judged commensurate to its population size, economic development, resource concerns and political pretensions will continue to ensure that India seeks naval strength. Warships provide the ability to act at a distance, notably in establishing blockades, as with Israel and Sri Lanka.

There is an important contrast between the extension of national jurisdiction over the seas, a jurisdiction that covered more than a third of their extent in 2008, and the fact that many states cannot ensure their own maritime security. This is the case for Oceania, the Caribbean, and Indian Ocean states such as Mauritius, the Maldives, and the Seychelles. These weaknesses encourage the major powers to maintain naval strength and intervene, but also led to initiatives for regional solutions, such as that supported by India from 2007.

There are therefore a number of levels of naval asymmetry. The possibility of making advantages in naval capability, notably, but not only, those enjoyed the leading naval

powers, too costly is enhanced by the extent to which the procurement structure of naval power has driven leading navies toward fewer, more expensive vessels. For example, each of the new British D class Type 45 destroyers, the first of which was launched in 2006 has more firepower than the combined fleet of eight Type 42 destroyers they replaced, destroyers which came into service in 1978. This is because the missile system of the D class can track and attack multiple incoming aircraft and missiles. The maintenance in service of each of such vessels thus becomes more significant, and this enhances vulnerability, irrespective of the specific weapons characteristics of these vessels and their likely opponents. The availability of fewer, larger and more expensive warships reduces their individual vulnerability, but makes them harder to risk. A similar process has affected aircraft.

The cost element helped drive American military retrenchment in the 2010s. American military spending fell with the end of the American military commitment in Iraq and its run-down in Afghanistan. The size of the accumulated debt and of the annual deficit had an impact as did the political preference, notably under the Obama administration (2009-17) for welfare expenditure. While the army and marines were scheduled for significant cuts in the 2010s, there were even more substantial ones in the navy. Partly as a result, the ability of America to inflict a rapid defeat on Iran was called into question in 2013. Moreover, the reduction in American naval strength created concern among regional allies worried about Chinese naval plans and expansionism, which has a far larger naval shipbuilding industry than America.

The net effect is to introduce a volatility to naval power that is greater than the situation during the Cold War, a volatility that challenges maritime security at the level of state power. This volatility is not indicated if the emphasis is on the strength of the leading navy and its new weapon systems, for example the American Aegis BMD defence system intended to engage missiles in flight and the projected electromagnetic rail gun capable of projecting projectiles at six or seven times the speed of sound.

Instead, it is appropriate to think of naval power as broader ranging and multi-purpose. This range will be enhanced by competition over resources as many of these untapped are offshore and linked to territorial claims. At sea, therefore, we are moving rapidly from the apparent unipolarity of the 1990s, the supposed 'end of history', to a situation in which the capacity to display, use and contest strength is significant to a large number of powers and to their rivals. That spread of capacity does not automatically lead to conflict for the processes of international relations will be employed to seek to lessen tension. However, insecurity in the sense of an absence of confidence that deterrence will be successfully employed has become more apparent, a process that will continue. Moreover, this insecurity will probably provide more opportunities for non-state actors keen to use the seas in order to pursue particular interests that create another level of insecurity.

Conclusion

The nature of naval power is by its inherent character dependent on a combination of geopolitics, technology, resources and the unexpected. Thus, in 2022-23, the failure of Russia to overcome Ukraine rapidly, as planned, ensured that the conflict came to involve a major naval dimension, with Ukrainian anti-ship tactics thwarting or lessening attempts at bombardment, amphibious landings and blockade. The possibility of a Chinese landing n Taiwan underlines the continuing uncertainty. That is the appropriate conclusion.