

Book Reviews

Seapower and Space. Norman Friedman. Chatham, 2000. Pp. 384. £25:00.

Norman Friedman has produced a formidable analysis of the influence of space-based systems on the application and strategic significance of maritime power. His *magnum opus* (over 300 pages, 48 pages of notes and an impressive bibliography) is not for the casual reader. Your humble reviewer, perhaps like other chance readers will do, has found the book hard to skim and even harder to digest page by page given its tendency to lapse into almost text-book-like detail that could perhaps have been consigned to appendices. However, the excellent 5-page introduction is an informative precis through which to explore this complex and acronym-ridden world of satellites, surveillance systems, space-based communications and weapon systems, and their linkage with maritime doctrine. The inside of the dust jacket reminds us that Chatham Publishing 'is dedicated to producing maritime reference books ... that are well researched (and) readable ...'. This strangely fascinating work certainly rates 10/10 on the first count (well researched). On the second (readable), the jury must remain out!

The thesis is straightforward and should be easily acknowledged by members of the Royal Institute – it is that 'the advent of space systems has transformed naval warfare'. Through a complex web of detail covering the physics of the use of space, the development of launch methods and the nature of the payloads they carry, Friedman gives us some insights into the higher level politico-military thinking which drove the remarkable Cold War development of these tools. He reminds us that, over some 40 years, they have been a key driver in enabling what, in current US parlance, is called the 'Revolution in Military Affairs'.

Space-based systems have given us precise navigation, a relative transparency of what is on the oceans and to a lesser extent what lies below the surface, as well as an ever more capable combination of command, control and communications. All of this had a progressively far-reaching effect on Cold War naval warfare and the strategic thinking that underpinned it. But the story does not stop there. The final chapter, 'A New Kind of War?' gives us a thoughtful assessment of the impact of all this space-related development on the conduct of maritime business in the new, turbulent and unpredictable post-Cold War era.

Regular, non-military readers of the *Journal* and the Proceedings will take little convincing of Friedman's underlying proposition given the impact that, for example, GPS and satellite imagery and communications have had in the civil marine and aeronautical business sectors.

The book strikes an important chord for present-day naval practitioners when it describes 'net-centric warfare'. As Friedman points out, the principle of this style of war fighting (i.e. the pooling of information and its subsequent distribution to a variety of users) is not new. Indeed, it is an area where current maritime operational doctrine is moving faster than any other. The aspect on which he so rightly focuses is that it is satellite sensors and satellite communications that make a net-centric approach really feasible – indeed, now virtually essential if a maritime commander is to get within his opponent's decision-making cycle. However, his deduction that 'it follows that eventually war will be fought in space' perhaps ignores the fact that ultimately, post-Cold War warfare is about power projection on land, quite probably from the sea. No matter how smart the satellite, ultimately it is the soldier with his rifle and bayonet who takes and holds ground.

Perhaps the last words should go to Friedman himself. They take the form of a warning to political and military leaders of the 'techno-Strangelove' persuasion. Such people may be tempted to conclude that, since developments in space have given them unprecedented levels of positional accuracy and a near-real time information flow as well as a virtually continuous ability to exercise tight control over their armed forces, this may have guaranteed a battle winning advantage. He makes some perceptive remarks about the Tomahawk cruise missile attacks on terrorist training camps in Afghanistan which, despite their accuracy in hitting the point of aim, failed to destroy Osama bin Laden's centre of gravity which was far from his movement's front line. There are parallel lessons from the Kosovo campaign. His conclusion that 'the new style of warfare demands far more of intelligence analysts than mere identification of physical targets' should serve to remind all of us that, clever though it may be, our exploitation of space in the last four decades of the 20th Century is a means to new military strategy and not the end in itself. The old Principles of War still hold good. Intelligent use of space will enable us to apply them to better effect.

Seapower and Space is not for the fainthearted but will provide a unique source of reference in a subject area that probably lacks such scholarly analysis to date.

Admiral Sir Nigel Essenhigh KCB, Commander-in-Chief Fleet