

## Book Review

Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, *Understanding Maritime Security*, USA: Oxford University Press NY (2024) pp. 222 (+xii)

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The oceans, covering seventy percent of the Earth's surface, are not just natural frontiers but important domains in the evolving global security agenda. According to the World Bank Group, "Maritime transport is the backbone of global trade, as more than eighty percent of goods are transported by sea". The idea of maintaining "good order at sea" emerged through this and has gained momentum with globalization, as stable maritime trade became vital for peace and prosperity. The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are heavily reliant on the oceans for their economic development. Problems such as terrorism and piracy, climate change, maritime border issues, and others have hindered the economic and sustenance activities in the oceans, in turn hampering the economies of SIDS and global maritime sector.

Navies and coastguards were tasked with protecting the economic systems from piracy, terrorism, and instability. However, after 2008, rising tensions with Russia and China shifted global focus back to great power competition, pushing maritime security down the agenda. Yet, the advent of piracy off the coast of Somalia from 2008 and Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea in late 2023 revealed that coastguards alone cannot manage such threats. Ultimately, warfighting and constabulary roles are intertwined, and maritime security must be understood as a unified, complex, and indispensable effort. It is against this backdrop that the book "Understanding Maritime Security" by Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds provides insights into these multifaceted challenges and their potential solutions. The authors have synthesized over a decade of scholarship, making the understanding of complex issues accessible without oversimplification.

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Methodically, the book is divided into eight chapters, highlighting the breadth of maritime security issues – traditional issues like piracy and interstate disputes, to emerging challenges including cyber threats and environmental crimes. The book provides readers with a detailed

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analysis of the evolution of maritime security agenda through four waves, capturing the interplay between historical legacies and contemporary demands.

The book starts with the basic introduction to maritime security and logically progresses to understanding its historic legacies, the various frameworks through which it is understood and governed, the dimensions of maritime security, crimes at the ocean, the various actors involved in the development of maritime security structures, and the solutions along with the emerging issues in the maritime domain. This progression benefits not only the scholars and practitioners but also the novices attempting to understand the nuances of maritime security. Among these diverse topics, the focus on “blue crime” is exceptional for its conceptual depth. The term blue crime epitomises the transnational crimes at sea like human trafficking, illegal fishing, and drug smuggling. It further expands on their deep connection to weak governance systems and persistent social and economic inequalities. Bueger and Edmunds persuasively argue that only maritime strategies will not suffice in tackling these issues, but they also need land-based interventions. This would need an integrated approach to tackle the problems at sea.

The discussion on Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is another key contribution of this book. Firstly, the authors have distinguished between the Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA) and MDA, which are often used as synonymous terms. Maritime Situational Awareness

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(MSA) provides a real-time understanding of activities at sea, while MDA expands on this by integrating intelligence and broader analysis to assess their implications for security, safety, the economy, and the environment. The authors further expand on the importance of technology like, radar and satellite imagery, and sensor technology, in gathering real-time data to tackle maritime issues. The downside of these technologies is also discussed. It progresses with highlighting the need for information sharing among the state agencies and non-state actors like

the shipping industry, and among regional and international partners for better understanding of the maritime domain. They also highlight the significant gaps in MDA across regions, especially in the Gulf of Guinea and the Western Indian Ocean. The dependence on fragmented surveillance systems in these areas emphasizes the importance of global collaboration and capacity-building efforts.

While the book offers a strong examination of state-led and institutional approaches to maritime security, it overlooks the growing influence of private and multilateral actors in this field. The discussion acknowledges the presence of private sector players, such as shipping companies and private security firms, however stops short of offering a deeper look at the ways these actors operate, coordinate with governments, or navigate regulatory challenges. A more detailed exploration of their contributions and limitations could have

provided valuable insights for policy-makers and practitioners working to strengthen maritime governance.

Similarly, the book briefly references international cooperation and does not fully engage with the efforts and struggles of multilateral organizations like the International Maritime Organization (IMO) or regional frameworks such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct. These mechanisms are central to addressing transnational maritime threats, yet their implementation challenges and evolving roles receive limited attention. It also fails to deeply explore the role of multinational naval forces – like the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) – in securing the seas. Expanding on the role of such organizations in fostering collaboration, or failing to, would have enriched the analysis and offered a more comprehensive understanding of global maritime security dynamics.

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One notable contribution of the book would be its focus on the new-age maritime issues, like cyber-security. The authors focus on the digitization and automation of maritime infrastructure – such as ports, shipping networks, and undersea cables – and their susceptibility to cyberattacks. These attacks have the potential to cripple the global supply chain systems which is highlighted in the book through the example of NotPetya incident. The authors have also urged the policymakers to be prepared for the same as there is intersectionality between cyber and physical attacks.

Climate change has added another dimension to the complexities of maritime security. The authors have adequately highlighted the intersectionality between climate change and maritime studies through examples like melting arctic and rising sea levels, which further complicate the challenge of securing the seas. They further argue that these challenges are bound to exacerbate the tensions over border and competition for the marine resources.

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The authors conclude by wondering if we are now entering a fifth wave of maritime security thinking – one shaped by the rapid industrialization of the oceans, growing human activity at sea, and the transformative power of new technologies. Above all, they emphasize that climate change is emerging as a defining force, one that will inevitably push the global community to prioritize maritime security more urgently. In their view, the environmental and technological shifts unfolding across the world's oceans will make addressing maritime security not just important, but unavoidable.

While the book could have explored certain areas in greater depth, such as the role of private actors and multilateral efforts, it still stands out as a landmark contribution to the study of maritime security. The volume's thoughtful balance of academic depth and practical insight makes it a valuable resource for students, researchers, and practitioners in international relations and security studies. Instead of providing fixed answers, it encourages readers to think critically about the evolving challenges and questions within the field. As a comprehensive and engaging overview, *Understanding Maritime Security* offers an excellent introduction to the subject and remains essential reading for both maritime professionals and anyone interested in the dynamics shaping the world's oceans.