

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 41  
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 25

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1988

# American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific

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### Recommended Citation

Boutilier, James A. and Hayes, Peter (1988) "American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 2 , Article 25.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss2/25>

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vigorous U.S. participation in the many space programs now under consideration, including settlements on the Moon and Mars and ultimately to bridging the gulf between the stars. I can only hope that our country's leaders can be persuaded that this is the way to go.

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Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

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Hayes, Peter et al. *American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987. 529pp. \$6.95

Unlike the late Herman Kahn, who maintained that the growth of nuclear stockpiles made all forms of war less likely, the authors of *American Lake* argue persuasively that it is the multiplication of weapons systems and the fatal asymmetry between American and Soviet nuclear arsenals and strategic policies that make war ever more likely, particularly in the volatile Asia-Pacific region.

Central to their thought-provoking account are considerations of weakness. American interventionary ends exceed their means and thus the United States is obliged to rely more and more heavily on regional allies and is increasingly likely to rely on nuclear weapons—with all the risks they entail—to project power. At the same time the Russians have sought to compensate for their weaknesses and lack of power projection capability in the Pacific by developing a huge, primarily home-based, nuclear inventory.

Students of naval affairs should be particularly interested in this analysis because of the crucial role played by the U.S. Navy in American containment policies. At the end of the Second World War the U.S. Navy, undermined by bitter interservice rivalry and doubts about the nature of naval warfare in the atomic age, was in search of a reason for being. The Korean war and the Indochina conflict came to its rescue. The former elevated containment from a strategy of selective response to a militaristic ideology which placed a premium on mobile, flexible carrier striking forces. The latter generated an almost obsessive concern about involvement in an Asian land war that renewed America's faith in big carriers.

That faith was further reinforced in the 1980s when maritime supremacists gained control of U.S. foreign policy. The Lehman Doctrines of fleet expansion, targeting the Soviets, and forward deployment coupled with the concept of horizontal escalation have, in the authors' estimation, dramatically increased the likelihood of an outbreak of nuclear war in the Pacific.

They dismiss out-of-hand arguments that there are controllable nuclear wars. American conventional and nuclear forces are so technologically inseparable, the distinctions between nuclear and conventional war planning so blurred, the problems of command, communications, and control (which they call the Soviet and American "glass jaw") so grave, the strategy of attacking Soviet SSBN

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sanctuaries so provocative, and the addition of weapons like the Tomahawk ("an aimless missile, blundering into the Pacific without a mission") so destabilizing that all talk of manageable war between the super-powers is an exercise in the most insane wishful thinking.

That being the case, what is to be done? Unfortunately the set of prescriptions which Hayes, Bello, and Zarsky advance (the creation of nuclear-free and noninterventionist zones, as well as a reversal of the global nuclear arms race) appear to have been the least well-thought-out part of their analysis. They pay relatively little attention to geographical determinants, the interests of the regional players who are expected to apply equal pressure on the Soviets and the Americans, and the lack of real leverage that nations like Australia (where *American Lake* was first published) have in terms of influencing the super-powers.

These criticisms aside, this extraordinarily detailed account, with encyclopedic tables and appendices, is a very valuable and timely *tour d'horizon* of the evolution and current application of American military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. While it is anti-American and anti-nuclear in complexion, it is, nevertheless, sanely and powerfully argued. Some readers may feel that the authors have been guilty of the selective use of evidence and of faulty logic in places, but the central thesis is impossible to ignore. By exploding the puffery of nuclear

theories, reducing the Soviet naval threat to its proper proportions, and highlighting the dangerous asymmetries in Soviet and American nuclear power in the Pacific, the authors have done us a very real service.

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Gibson, James W. *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986. 508pp. \$19.95

In his book, James William Gibson argues that U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war was planned, organized, and run according to the "basic logic of Technowar, mapping the capitalist production system onto military conduct." Technowar, states Gibson, is the American Defense Establishment's mind-set which "conceives war to be a struggle between two machine-like, technobureaucratic apparatuses." According to Gibson, the United States waged the Vietnam war wholly under the influence of this mind-set, which viewed the North Vietnamese and Vietcong as the technologically inferior foreign "Other" doomed to defeat once Washington decided to engage its technological-production systems against them, utilizing capitalist management principles of production, debit-credit, return on investment, etc.

Gibson's thesis, while containing elements of truth (e.g., the United States *did* rely on its comparative