

Naval War College Review

Volume 26
Number 2 *March-April*

Article 12

1973

The Politics of the Ocean

Wayne J. Smith
U.S. Navy

Edward Wenk Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Smith, Wayne J. and Wenk, Edward Jr. (1973) "The Politics of the Ocean," *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 26 : No. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol26/iss2/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Wenk, Edward, Jr. *The Politics of the Ocean*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972. 588p.

The Politics of the Ocean is an unusual book, unusual in that while it is written as a contemporary chronicle of recent developments, it remains one of the most valuable reference works in the field of oceanology today. In his first three chapters, the author describes the sequence of events which ultimately led to congressional passage of the Marine Resources and Engineering Development Act of 1966 and subsequent congressional efforts which created the National Council on Marine Resources and Engineering Development to implement this mandate. As Executive Secretary of the Marine Resources Council, Dr. Wenk is in a unique position to report on the council's continuing efforts.

Inasmuch as oceanology is a relatively new and expanding field and one which will grow in importance in the future, the remainder of the book concentrates on the formidable challenge it presents to those interested in the future well-being of this country. Five case studies are presented which illustrate the problems associated with trying to develop rational means of managing an area which amounts to 85 percent of the surface of this planet. Foremost amongst these are: the difficulties in developing an agreed upon concept of the coastal zone as an area of public trust; gaining greater knowledge and understanding of the oceans as a basis for new concepts of ocean law and international relations; Government and industry efforts to develop the resources of the oceans and the failure of these efforts to achieve the critical mass required for synergistic action; and the high hopes for a wet NASA as an institutional focal point for ocean-related projects and problems.

Progress today in each one of these areas has been unsatisfactory, largely because of the Government's failure to

effectively coordinate a national program focusing on the full range of ocean problems. Although the Congress gave the executive branch a clear mandate to initiate and implement a National Maritime Program in the Marine Resources Act of 1966 and supported the executive branch whenever it exercised its mandate, difficulties arose in the implementation of these new programs. There are over 35 Federal agencies or departments which have varying degrees of responsibility for implementing programs of maritime concern, not to mention the many states with coastal areas and rights. Given this fragmentation of authority, it is not surprising that the Government's overall program has only achieved limited success to date. The Marine Resources Council, with the Vice President of the United States as its chairman, did have sufficient power to accomplish some of its goals before it was disbanded. Dr. Wenk clearly shows that the proximity of the council to the White House was the source of its power and that without the support of the White House it became less effective. With the advent of the National Oceans and Atmosphere Agency (NOAA) and its advisory committee (NACOA), however, the Marine Resources Council disappeared from the scene.

The book is a powerful one. Dr. Wenk identifies the persons involved in most of the proceedings by name; gives the facts surrounding situations as he sees them; states his opinions forcefully on many subjects concerning the oceans; and while the book is not unbiased, the insights it provides are nonetheless important because of the key role its author played in the events described. No one is better qualified to express his opinions, for no one has had access to more facts or has been more involved with this attempt than Dr. Wenk.

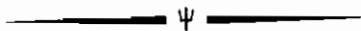
The author very properly points out that the task of bringing rational man-

agement to our ocean resources has just begun. While we have just taken the first halting steps on a national scale, we must also acknowledge the need to concurrently develop international institutions designed to manage the world's oceans as a whole within the context of the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference. The book ends with a ringing call to seize the initiative in this area, imploring the reader to consider

the law of the sea as one of the possible alternatives in the development of our own national strategy.

In summary, *The Politics of the Oceans* is mandatory reading for anyone who understands that a nation's maritime policy must entail more than maintaining naval forces in readiness.

WAYNE J. SMITH
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy



If your book could persuade some of our new soldiers to read and mark and learn things outside drill manuals and tactical diagrams, it would do a good work.

T.E. Lawrence: Letter to Liddell Hart, 26 June 1933