

The Silent Deep by Hennessy & Jinks (Allen Lane 2015) reviewed by Dr. Jeffrey Bradford Research Director, UK Defence Forum

The Silent Deep is a timely and authoritative history of the United Kingdom Royal Navy's submarine service from inception through the Cold War. Against the current political environment with the outcome of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) being the decision to postpone, or in defence acquisition parlance to "move right" the planned in-service date for the next generation submarine based nuclear deterrent vessels, understanding the path to this point is critical both for legislators, the wider defence community and indeed the general reader.

The Submarine service probably is among one of the most secretive elements of the defence and intelligence community and whilst this has been a major plus point in terms of operational security it has probably worked to a degree against their political position, both within the Royal Navy for budget and status and more broadly the political appreciation of the value of their on-going activities.

The Silent Deep combines both strong document based research along with extensive access to the current generation of senior figures in the service and those who has served with prominence in the field. Peter Hennessy, well known for his knowledge of the machinery of government brings to the work the broader political and administrative context for the service.

Amongst the key lessons which the book drives home in considerable detail is the on-going relevance of the relationship with the United States, in which you are left no doubt that the United Kingdom deterrent although independent strategically is operationally reliant on United States cooperation. Secondly, the detailed historical research into the evolving role of the submarine service in operations in Asia and the Falklands War of 1982, alongside cold war operations against the Soviet Union show the value and flexibility of the real capital ships of a modern first-tier navy.

For legislators and their opponents the insights into key decisions surrounding the choice of basing method for the deterrent, numbers and logic are several. Essential reading includes The discussion surrounding the decision to move the nuclear deterrent to sea with Polaris (Chapter 4) and later the successor Trident system (Chapter 8). Publication in full of the December 1, 1977 minute of the Callahan administration, "Cabinet Nuclear Defence Policy" (pages 472-482) remains relevant and will underpin the arguments for debates around the successor to trident. Later reference to Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet Secretary's notes on the six key decisions for Ministers surrounding the deterrent (page 495) are unchanged from the 1940s;

- ◆ Do we retain our strategic deterrent ?
- ◆ What should it be capable of doing ?
- ◆ Which weapon should we choose ?
- ◆ How many boats [submarines] ?
- ◆ Foreign policy factors ?
- ◆ Timing of announcement ?

The Silent Deep is strongest in both its political research and the operational insights into both the Falklands War (where the role of the submarine service adds an entirely new dimension) and intelligence gathering operations in the Cold War - where the role of the service was largely articulated prior by fiction authors such as Tom Clancy, The Silent Deep alongside recent works on the role of submarines in the Cold War such as Red November by W. Craig Reed offer us new insights into the ongoing relevance of this unique military capability.

Due to secrecy both books draw a veil over what the service has done since the end of the Cold War a quarter century ago. The Silent Deep aims to be as current as possible and has a final chapter summarizing neatly the public chronology of events since 1990 where the service has been in the public domain, not least the introduction of the Astute class SSN into the Fleet and the early discussions of the successor to Trident.

Very occasionally the book over-stresses the impact of the service, most notably in the mid 1960s discussion of the cancelled aircraft carrier program, the CVA-01. Whilst the authors see resource competition for

the submarine service as a key factor in its cancellation it could be suggested that the battle with the Royal Air Force over land basing of aircraft versus at sea with the Royal Navy in a desperate budgetary environment was of greater importance.

Nonetheless, *The Silent Deep* is a well-research book of importance to understanding both nuclear naval operations, British political decision making and an essential element of the functional "special" relationship with the United States in nuclear matters.

*The Silent Deep*, Peter Hennessy & James Jinks (Allen Lane 2015). ISBN: 978-1-846-14580-3