



Bruce D. Jones. *To Rule the Waves: How Control of the Oceans Shapes the Fate of the Superpowers.* New York: Scribner, 2021. 400 pp. \$18.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-982127-26-8.

Reviewed by Aria Finkelstein (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

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Commissioned by Daniella McCahey (Texas Tech University)

Aria Finkelstein on Bruce D. Jones, *To Rule the Waves: How Control of the Oceans Shapes the Fate of the Superpowers*

“The geopolitics of globalization”—this is what Jones tells us his book is about, the ocean the setting within which he places them. The sheer size of the drama he takes on is far too vast to take in at once, but by giving us the experiential details of port and sea he makes them tangible. Perhaps this is the book’s greatest strength, the recounting of those small moments in which materiality and sensation have something particular to tell about a global drama. Jones first introduces us to the military uses of the sea by describing the equipment that armies need, and for which they rely on the private sector (spoiler: It’s all very big!). Vividly, the trips through layers of security to get up rivers, onto ships, and into cargo containers illustrate the physical manifestation of the relationships between geopolitics, security, trade, production, culture, administrative networks, engineering, and environment.

Shipping company Maersk’s complex global network, for example, takes shape once Jones illustrates it by way of its 2017 cybersecurity breach and the trip that one little USB drive carrying a backup needed to make around the world, from one office in Nigeria to another in London, to al-

low the company to repair its operations. Again, to convey the importance of shipping schedules, Jones gives us a Danish ship captain’s annoyance at his company’s micromanagement—how the company orchestrates the movements of ships, port operators, and workers, and also how these rub up against the realities of waves, wind, and engines. Each time Jones leads us into a geopolitical oceanic story it is through such a concrete entry point: the factory in which a ship is built, the building in which a decision happens, the city whose infrastructure supports a port. This attention to material details makes the entire book an exciting trip, but, more than just stylistic flourishes, these details are often the story themselves.

Another place the book really gets cooking, and demonstrates the complex knot of money, physical geography, military conflict, law, and technology, is when it gets to the history of a powerful force coming onto the maritime scene—insurance. Risk of conflict increases the premiums that maritime insurance companies charge, and because of the sheer numbers of ships and goods traveling, these numbers aggregate to enormous sums. Jones takes us to Singapore, next to the

Strait of Malacca, which is a critical and contested point of transit. Its passages are narrow, and the states around it are archipelagic, so their capitals are far from each other. Therefore, it is particularly vulnerable to piracy, and any spike in this risk means a rise in insurance costs. This is a problem that affects not only Singapore but everyone. But, working under Singapore's navy, the world's governments have data capabilities that pirates do not, and that is exactly what they have used. Big data has allowed them to track maritime traffic to a high level of accuracy to fight piracy coming through the strait. A problem that this does not solve, though, is that of the open ocean's size. The Indian Ocean is simply too big to monitor with enough accuracy, so to fight against Somali pirates the United States has partnered with its NATO allies but, more surprisingly, also with Korea, Turkey, the UAE, Bahrain, and Pakistan, with collaboration from Russia and China. Jones explains: China has no interest in shutting off the strait and in fact has every interest in the US Navy protecting it, as it needs it for trade imports but more crucially for oil imports. As Jones writes, this situation worked until it didn't, when the US began to grow concerned that China was using the situation to grow its military power. Again, the geographic details are not only the backdrop of the drama. Rather, the drama illustrates just how much these details are themselves crucial actors.

The nature of the maritime subject makes it open to fascinating anecdotes. This can make the book a bit freewheeling at times and even occasionally repetitive, but the stories are worth any looseness in the book's structure for their power to illustrate both how these global dynamics, their physical contingencies, and their oceanic settings make for particular built forms on shore and afloat and vice versa. In recent decades more and more policy scholarship, borrowing especially from anthropology and sociology, has linked the global level to the regional, the local, and even the level of the household. This multi-scalar work uncovers the connections between all of these and

the way that global dynamics play out in specific, locally contingent policies and practices. Jones's presentation of these relationships is not only an engaging read. In fact, through it the dynamics of these relationships emerge.

The book is about military concerns, but it is just as much about infrastructure, science, and technology studies, in good company with a series of recent works about such global technologies including Nicole Starosliksi's *The Undersea Network* (2015), William Rankin's *After the Map* (2018), Lisa Messeri's *Placing Outer Space* (2016), and even a growing library of sensory ethnography films including V  rena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's 2012 film, *Leviathan*. Here, physical details both as big as the Suez Canal and as small as a coat of paint on a US naval vessel get their due. For scholars of science and technology studies and of blue humanities, this embodied strategy and its attention to the (literal) nuts and bolts of our world will not be new, but it will still be both effective and evocative in telling the story of global power struggles. For scholars of geopolitics, this approach will be fresh and welcome, and instructive in its own right. This multi-scalar scholarship still has much to teach us, and *To Rule the Waves* is a welcome addition to the body of work that takes seriously the materiality of information, capital, and military might.

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