

***Understanding Maritime Security*. By Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2024. Soft cover: 222pp.**

In both theory and practice, “maritime security” is a contested term. Does it refer to perceived threats or proposed solutions? The multiple interpretations lead to a complex and often fragmented discourse. However, as maritime issues increasingly shape day-to-day developments across global regions, achieving a clearer understanding of maritime security has become more urgent than ever for scholars and practitioners alike. *Understanding Maritime Security*, authored by two of the world’s leading maritime theorists, Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, represents a bold and systematic effort to unpack this complicated subject and its web of interrelated challenges.

It begins by establishing the historical and contemporary context of maritime security (Chapter Two), followed by one of its most valuable contributions: a proposed set of analytical frameworks (Chapter Three) that help make sense of an otherwise diffuse field. Chapters Four and Five turn to the global challenges confronting maritime security. The former addresses so-called “traditional” threats, including grey-zone tactics in the South China Sea. The latter is especially noteworthy for its focus on “blue crimes”, a concept the authors define as “serious organised crimes or offences that take place in, on, or across the maritime domain and which have the potential to inflict significant harms” (p. 87). Indeed, one of the book’s most important contributions is to offer a useful taxonomy of blue crimes, which the authors organize into three broad categories: crimes against mobility; illicit flows; and environment crimes. Typically, “blue crimes” are referred to as “non-traditional maritime security challenges”, yet Bueger and Edmunds move beyond the generic to empathize the multidimensional nature of these issues, encompassing not just political and socioeconomic but also a criminology dimension. Thus, *Understanding Maritime Security* succeeds in offering readers a more nuanced view of these day-to-day maritime problems, many of which defy conventional categorization or resolution.

As a guidebook for navigating this evolving terrain, the book would be incomplete without discussing the practical tools for addressing

maritime threats. Thus, Chapters Six and Seven offer another notable contribution from Bueger and Edmunds. While nation-states remain central to maritime security responses—whether acting unilaterally or as part of regional or international efforts—the authors also explore the often-overlooked role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Traditionally sidelined or stereotyped as “disruptive” to government efforts (p. 150), NGOs are shown here to be capable of performing state-like functions, even if that may put themselves at odds with those concerned governments’ political priorities. In today’s interconnected world, the role of NGOs in advancing “blue justice” (p. 150), particularly through public mobilization against crimes like illegal fishing, cannot be overstated. Importantly, Bueger and Edmunds highlight these organizations’ contributions to community resilience, policy innovation and international awareness, making this one of the book’s most important interventions.

The final chapter looks ahead to emerging maritime security challenges. It focuses on issues such as cyber threats and the increasingly critical issue of undersea infrastructure protection. In particular, Bueger and Edmunds take a forward-looking approach by thoughtfully asking whether the world is on the throes of “fifth wave” (pp. 212–15) of maritime security which, unlike the previous waves, could see an interesting amalgamation of those emerging maritime issues (such as cyber threats) and the return to prominence of competitive geopolitics. I believe this is an essential question. Indeed, are the varied actors in the maritime community ready to cope with this possible fifth wave given an uncertain geopolitical, domestic and fiscal environment? As governments and, especially, state maritime security actors increasingly have to do more with less, addressing this question takes on heightened policy significance. Preparing for this potential new wave will likely require adaptive policies, reoriented priorities and reconfigured resource allocation.

Overall, *Understanding Maritime Security* is a highly useful and accessible one-stop reference for a diverse audience, not just academics but practitioners in government, civil society and the commercial maritime sector. While readers wanting deep-dive analyses into specific issues may find the coverage broad rather than detailed, this breadth appears intentional. Indeed, the book’s core aim is not to provide exhaustive case studies but to offer a structured and policy-relevant framework for understanding a

complex, interdisciplinary field. In this sense, *Understanding Maritime Security* is more than a handbook—it is a seminal contribution to the maritime security discourse. It speaks to, and for, the global maritime community. As maritime security continues to evolve, Bueger and Edmunds have offered a timely and significant resource for navigating its next chapter.

COLLIN KOH is Senior Fellow at the Institute of Defence & Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Postal address: Nanyang Technological University, Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798; email: ISCollinKoh@ntu.edu.sg.