



American Sea Power in the Old World: The United States Navy in European Waters and Near Eastern Waters, 1865–1917 by William N. Still Jr.

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Published in 2006, naval historian William N. Still Jr.'s *Crisis at Sea*, a monumental history of American naval operations in Europe in 1917–18,¹ instantly became the touchstone for any future scholarship on the subject. The Naval Institute Press has now reissued that book's prequel—*American Sea Power in the Old World*,² a highly competent, well-regarded survey of US naval cruising in an important region of the world at the dawn of the so-called American Century. It remains, over thirty-five years on, among the best broader histories of the peacetime deployment of US naval vessels in the long nineteenth century.³

Based on extensive research in naval records and personal papers, the book's eleven (more or less) chronologically organized chapters offer "primarily an operational study, narrating the history of American naval forces in a distant part of the world" (ix) between the end of the Civil War and the United States' formal entry into World War I in April 1917. The emphasis is on naval deployments, their courses, rationales, and contexts, as well as on the people directing them. The author keeps a sharp eye on logistics and interstate diplomacy, extending to the US Navy's broader interest (or lack thereof) in establishing bases and coaling stations. By contrast, the analysis touches only lightly on inter-military observation, exchange, and intelligence gathering as an important aspect of the tasks of US naval forces and officers dispatched to Europe. Throughout, Still is preoccupied with the role of commanding officers. He argues that, regardless of the coming of the telegraph, they wielded considerable power on the spot: they interacted, usually amicably, with US diplomats as coequal representatives of the American state, and offered their advice on flag-showing and coercive naval action (often favoring restraint over outright intervention).

The book's principal thesis is that US projections of maritime force in European and Near Eastern waters were exceptions to the rule and mostly not driven by the pursuit of gunboat diplomacy under commercialist auspices, which motivated American naval cruising elsewhere in the world. While the author recognizes that, by the early 1900s, US interests in North Africa were primarily economic, he argues that the primary responsibility of American naval forces was to protect US citizens abroad—from businessmen and missionaries to tourists, educators, and expatriates. In addition, they sought to advance various diplomatic interests, such as ensuring good relations with other big powers. During the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, the

1. Subtitle: *The United States Navy in European Waters in World War I* (Gainesville: U Pr of Florida, 2006).

2. This is an unchanged republication of the 1980 edition, with no new introductory remarks or afterword.

3. Others include Robert Erwin Johnson, *Thence round Cape Horn: The Story of United States Naval Forces on Pacific Station, 1818–1923* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 1963); James A. Field Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776–1882* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1969); Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Gunboat Diplomacy and the Old Navy, 1877–1889* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr, 1973); John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829–1861* (id., 1985).

Navy's tasks came to include full-blown participation in the pageantry of transatlantic, inter-imperial naval reviews and visits.

Still emphasizes the special importance of American missionaries abroad, especially in the Ottoman Empire. The (publicly expressed) expectation that the Navy would protect them and their flocks was brought into acute focus during the diplomatic crisis over the Turkish massacres of Armenians in the mid-1890s. Ever-increasing demands that the Navy show the flag to protect missionaries were not always welcome to naval officers. After the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, missionary protection was folded into the broader work of relief, refugee aid, and evacuation that the Navy undertook in Near Eastern waters, usually in cooperation with Turkish authorities.

American Sea Power in the Old World remains an admirable operational study of US naval deployments in Europe and the Near East. Unsuperseded by more recent scholarship, it is still an effective counterpart to its author's sequel on the American navy's operations in Europe in 1917–18, when the actual conduct of war was, for the first time since the Civil War, the Navy's primary objective "over there." It is a testament to the cogency of William Still's analyses that his book can even in 2018 provide a foundation for other inquiries into the history of the Navy and its personnel from social, cultural, gender, and international perspectives, as well as for investigations of broader issues like humanitarianism, the morality of empire(s), and American engagements with Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor in general.