



**Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy: The U.S. Navy and the Birth of the American Century**

By Henry J. Hendrix

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Reviewed by

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Henry J. Hendrix has found a fascinating topic for historians and senior military officers with *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy*. The book explores the intersections among policymaking, diplomacy, military force, and technological development. At the center of it all stands Roosevelt, and in effect the book as a biography focuses on the essential role naval power played in Roosevelt's life, thinking, and political career.

Roosevelt's interest in naval affairs began early in his life, sitting at the knees of two uncles as they told stories of their service in the Confederate navy during the Civil War. His budding interest only grew in adulthood when he became a careful scholar of naval history and author of *The Naval War of 1812*, a book that still ranks among the most important on the topic. In the course of his

studies, Roosevelt anticipated and agreed with the arguments of Alfred Thayer Mahan. Both believed that history showed that maritime power was essential to national security and prosperity, and when Roosevelt moved into positions of influence and power, he rigorously and coherently put those ideas into practice. As Hendrix points out, from early on, Roosevelt recognized the inextricable link between what he wanted the Navy to do and what the Navy actually could do. He knew that without a sufficient number of ships and the appropriate level of naval technology, all the intentions in the world did not matter. So as he ascended from Assistant Secretary of the Navy to Vice President to President, Roosevelt pushed for the expansion and development of naval forces and technology.

More importantly, Roosevelt used the available ships and technology to great effect, as Hendrix shows in several examples. The first instance came prior to the actual outbreak of war with Spain in 1898, when Assistant Secretary Roosevelt sent the squadron under Commodore George Dewey into a position to attack the Spanish fleet in Manila, allowing the United States to expand its influence in the Pacific. Interestingly, as Hendrix argues, that war would end up being about the only example of the actual employment of force in Roosevelt's use of naval power. Most of the time, the judicious application of the threat of force did the job, and Roosevelt made good use of the Navy in support of his diplomatic agenda. Hendrix's second example, the Venezuelan crisis of 1902-1903, saw Germany (and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain) trying to insert itself into the Western Hemisphere under the guise of collecting outstanding debts from Venezuela. Roosevelt demanded that the Germans

accept arbitration on the issue, and when the Kaiser ignored the demand, Roosevelt gathered the squadrons along the Atlantic into a single fleet under the command of Admiral Dewey and had them run exercises in the Caribbean. The demand became an ultimatum, and the Germans acquiesced. The year 1903 provided another example of Roosevelt's use of naval diplomacy, this time as the Panamanians declared independence from Colombia. With an eye toward building and running the Panama Canal, the American President sent ships and Marines, including the commandant of the Marine Corps himself, to deter the Colombians from using military force to quell the rebellion.

Roosevelt had to be more circumspect when a bandit in Morocco kidnapped an American citizen for ransom. Even then, the threat of assault from the sea, either to coerce the Moroccan government or to launch a punitive raid directed at the bandit, played a key role in resolving the dilemma. Likewise, applied naval force had little to do with Roosevelt helping to negotiate the peace at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, between Russia and Japan, but his acute understanding of the link between diplomatic leverage and military power gave him great insight in his Nobel Peace Prize-winning efforts. His final major national security gesture as President became his most famous use of naval forces to support American national power. The sailing of the Great White Fleet around the world was largely symbolic, but it was a powerful symbol and a perfect capstone to a career dedicated to the belief that national security and prosperity were derived from maritime power.

Hendrix provides a concise, readable, and analytically astute narrative of Roosevelt's remarkable career. He is less successful

in his somewhat rushed conclusion in linking these events to current affairs, but that has little effect on the overall value of the book to historians and military professionals. All too often, we discuss leveraging the diplomatic, information, military, and economic elements of national power as if those elements were somehow independent and equal in peacetime policymaking and wartime strategy-making. It is exceedingly useful to have an example of a historical policymaker who pursued policies that intertwined diplomacy and the threat of military force with an eye toward security and economic implications. Equally important and telling was the military's role in all of this: by preparing for war, not debating policy decisions, the U.S. Navy gave the President options and made clear when some options were not feasible. For telling this story, Henry Hendrix is to be applauded. **JFQ**

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