

Naval War College Review

Volume 46
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 25

1993

The U.S. Navy, the Mediterranean, and the Cold War, 1945-1947

Michael Palmer

Edward J. Sheehy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Palmer, Michael and Sheehy, Edward J. (1993) "The U.S. Navy, the Mediterranean, and the Cold War, 1945-1947," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 46 : No. 4 , Article 25.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss4/25>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

soft-handed policymakers and politicians; it deals with men of action and gritty courage. . . .”

Those of us who labor daily in the mire of defense jargon can find relief here; good writing and clear understanding go together. Honan gives us a selection of the best in descriptive naval writing. We can learn much from it.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

Sheehy, Edward J. *The U.S. Navy, the Mediterranean, and the Cold War, 1945-1947* (Contributions in Military Studies, No. 126). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992. 191pp. \$45

Edward J. Sheehy has provided a history of American naval operations in the Mediterranean from the end of the war in the European theater in 1945 until the eve of the establishment of the Sixth Task Fleet in 1948. Sheehy, an assistant professor of history at La Salle University, in Philadelphia, has produced a detailed study that is well written and well researched. The sixty-five pages of notes and sources constitute 33 percent of the entire book.

Sheehy begins his study with a brief but useful review of what has been a long American connection with the Mediterranean, beginning with the corsairs of North Africa's Barbary coast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Throughout American history, the United States

has normally deployed naval forces in the Mediterranean, by my reckoning for about 150 of the last 200 years. Nevertheless, American policymakers did not plan to retain a naval presence in the Mediterranean after the end of the Second World War. Britain's Royal Navy would suffice to police the Middle Sea in an era of peace orchestrated by a still-functioning Grand Alliance. Unfortunately, as the war ended the alliance collapsed, and the hoped-for harmony gave way to confrontation, especially in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Sheehy's study well illustrates the difficult and confused transition in American foreign and naval policies that occurred as a result. Well into 1946, the U.S. Navy continued to demobilize, withdraw its forces from the Mediterranean, and close down its overseas shore bases. Only belatedly, as the Soviets pressured Iran and Turkey and generally threatened the peace of Europe, did the United States begin to strengthen its naval operating forces in the Mediterranean, often without a corresponding amplification of instructions regarding just how on-scene commanders were supposed to use such additional forces. Uncertainty on the part of American naval commanders in Europe led not only to confusion and the end of several promising careers but also to potential danger, given a delicate diplomatic situation in which the United States hoped to deter a possible Communist advance without provoking the very war that all hoped to avoid.

154 Naval War College Review

While Sheehy's account is excellent on the comings and goings of American men-of-war, such detail comes at the expense of in-depth discussions of national and, most important, naval strategy. The author provides little information on the U.S. Navy's strategic planning during these years. Nor does Sheehy tie events in the Mediterranean to that developing strategy. The Mediterranean was, after all, the premier theater in the U.S. Navy's strategy for a war with the Soviet Union, and the outlines of that strategy were apparent, as Sheehy indicates, by early 1947.

Nor does the author make any attempt to quantify the enormous amount of data he obviously collected during his research. For example, there is little information on the rate and scale of the increase of American naval forces deployed to the Mediterranean. Of the innumerable ports that U.S. Navy warships visited, which of them received the most attention? Did the patterns of visitation change to reflect developing policy? And what types of operations and exercises (other than port visits) was the U.S. Navy conducting or not conducting as its warfighting strategy changed?

Despite these weaknesses, Sheehy has produced an important work. His detailed treatment of port visits, while far less glamorous than examinations of policy and strategy, needed to be done. But perhaps most important, Sheehy, by documenting the confusion that reigned in the Mediterranean, has further undermined the

United States hell-bent on confrontation with the Soviet Union. For the gradual and confused evolution of the policy of containment is evident in the pages of Sheehy's work.

MICHAEL PALMER
East Carolina University

Taylor, Alan R. *The Superpowers and the Middle East*. New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1991. 198pp. \$34.95

In the aftermath of the Cold War and the Gulf War, this work might appear outdated. Such is not the case. In his fifth book on the politics of the region, American University professor Alan R. Taylor presents a concise, readable, and provocative survey of superpower competition and its continuing legacy for the politics of today's Middle East.

The author's major premise is that the superpowers' Cold War preoccupation with gaining global advantage shaped their dealings with regional clients to the detriment of all concerned. He begins his exploration of this point with a survey of the historical legacies of colonialism. While the U.S. was never an imperial power in the Middle East and the Soviets renounced the venality (but not the fruits) of czarist imperialism, the superpowers inherited the problems created by their predecessors. Western colonialism, says Taylor, was driven by a belief that the ineptitude and decay of Eastern civilization opened the door to rightful