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Over the past generation, historians of foreign relations, international history or transnational affairs have devoted substantial attention to the broad variety of ways in which nations and their peoples interact with one another beyond simply official communiqés and armed collisions. As even a cursory scan of the past year’s H-Diplo offerings will show, the breadth and depth of approaches has reached astonishing proportions. It has become rather obvious to say that it is increasingly difficult for even the most ambitious teacher and scholar to keep up with the kinds of scholarly works that would appeal to subscribers of H-Diplo. Amidst the excitement of these new perspectives and insights, however, lurks the danger that seemingly “old” or “outdated” topics as pure political-military affairs or international security no longer merit close attention from ambitious academic historians. Perhaps there is a presumption that the core narrative is correct and accurate, or perhaps such an approach is “old-fashioned” and therefore harmful to one’s career. Nonetheless, works from such perspectives help to form the backbone of our understanding about what nations and people do to each other (and why), and provide the underlying structure for the best possible recounting of international history in all of its rich dimensions. One such underappreciated approach is naval diplomacy, the role of naval officers aboard warships on distant stations as the front line of the political as well as cultural interaction between two or more countries, peoples and ways of life.¹

William R. Braisted, Professor Emeritus of history at the University of Texas, has long been the dean of historians of naval diplomacy. His Diplomats in Blue: U.S. Naval Officers in China, 1922-1933 is the long awaited sequel to his critical two volumes on the U.S. in the Pacific, The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1897-1909 and The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922.² Diplomats in Blue adds notably to our knowledge of U.S.-Chinese relations on the ground (or on the waterfront) in the critical decade after World War I while complementing Gerald Wheeler’s classic account of civil-military relations and the U.S. Navy’s concerns about Japan and East Asia in the 1920s, among others.³ What makes Braisted’s work distinct is this intense focus on the warships and commanding officers in the Asiatic Fleet and the Yangtze River Patrol Force. They were charged with protecting


the lives, property and rights of U.S. citizens in China, a nation in political turmoil but long of interest to the United States. In reading this work, one is struck by how difficult the task was. The cultural and linguistic differences for the U.S. officers were enormous. The limited resources available to the U.S. Navy on the Chinese coast and along the Yangtze river became even more strained amid post-World War I parsimony, the Washington Treaty system, and the onset of the Great Depression. Equally noteworthy is the U.S. interaction with the other great powers in China at this time, with whom the United States was not allied but nominally aligned as a result of the Open Door, the Boxer Protocol and the Nine Power Treaty (1922). Gradually it becomes clear to the reader that the circumstances governing the presence of the Americans in China and along Chinese waters were changing. As the Nationalists consolidated power, the changed circumstances raised the possibility that the old unequal treaties might be substantially revised. As Akira Iriye and others have chronicled, however, Japan’s attitudes towards China and the unrest there changed in the late 1920s and the earlier cooperation among the foreign powers deteriorated as Japan pursued its own path to stability there.  

It is hard to read the final chapters without recalling what the ultimate outcome of the Manchurian Incident would be: war between China and Japan by 1937, and a broader Pacific War in 1941. But neither that outcome nor the longer-term ejection of the U.S. from China by 1949 was apparent to naval officers in China at the time, who were far more focused on the immediate challenges, the limited resources, and their critical role on the leading edge of U.S. diplomacy in East Asia at this point.

William Braisted experienced some of what he has written about in this work first hand. Born in March 1918 into a naval family, he spent four formative years of his childhood in China and the Philippines: from age four to six (1922-1924) and fourteen to sixteen (1932-1934) while his father, Frank A. Braisted, commanded the destroyer *Hulbert* and then later served as executive officer aboard the cruiser *Rochester* and then commanded the gunboat *Sacramento*. He makes it clear in the introduction that this experience utterly shaped his lifelong interests in East Asian and naval history and his academic career. Professor Braisted was invited to participate in this roundtable, and we were pleased that he initially agreed to do so. However, due to his age and changing personal circumstances, he was unable to provide the response that we had hoped for. We understand through series editor Jim Bradford, who is close to Bill Braisted, that he very much appreciated the comments of these reviewers and their overwhelmingly positive assessments of his work. Consequently, though it is not customary, we are providing this roundtable review without the author’s response.

The four reviewers here collectively identify several themes to draw from the book. One in particular is the very real relevance of this account for present day diplomats, officers and other decision-makers concerned about stability operations and peacekeeping in areas like Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. Another is an awareness of just how challenging the

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‘impossible’ tasks assigned to the Asiatic Fleet were, particularly the requirement of protecting American interests while remaining outside of the intense and shifting turmoil of China’s social and political revolution. All of this occurred over a vast geographic area of responsibility. A third is the importance of understanding how essential the U.S. Navy’s diplomatic role in Chinese waters was, and the noteworthy juxtaposition of the cautious U.S. Navy officers with the often more bellicose State Department officials. One concludes that the naval officers, mindful of the very real consequences of using force in an era of budgetary parsimony and allied hesitancy, were restrained, cautious and ultimately more successful in carrying out the defense of American lives, property and rights in China than the State Department. A fourth theme that emerges from these reviews is a degree of disappointment that Braisted, while working through a massive quantity of material, limited himself to China rather than covering the entire Pacific in the fashion of his two earlier works, however impossible that task may really have been. Finally, the reviewers also implicitly remind us that there remains much work to be done on the other actors in the diplomatic game of 1920s East Asia, international political-military affairs, and the context of the early 20th century more broadly. More can be done on the Pacific Islands, which Braisted did not address. More also can be done to explore the biographies and significance of the leading naval diplomatists Braisted discusses. In particular, there needs to be a proper scholarly treatment of Admiral Mark Bristol, whose role both as high commissioner in Turkey after World War I and as Asiatic Squadron commander in the later 1920s was significant if largely overlooked by historians.

Thus, William Braisted’s work and the comments of the reviewers reminds us of just how much more there is to be done on the interwar years. By extension, it also warns us that regardless of academic fashion those who will write about the current decades will need to factor naval diplomacy into those accounts as well. While naval actions like the rescue of the captain of the MV Maersk Alabama in 2009 get the headlines, naval leaders today are very mindful of the role of naval diplomacy. They are carefully developing long-term ties to local naval and coast guard forces in Africa, South America and elsewhere through a series of so-called regional partnership stations. The diplomatic and strategic implications of using ‘soft power’ naval assets for rapid humanitarian assistance and disaster response (such as in Haiti and Pakistan) are sufficiently important as to be imitated by other powers. And senior naval officers have been put in charge of the unified commands (such as Pacific Command, Central Command, and European Command) with diplomatic responsibilities that rival those of the State Department. Parallels to each of these appear in Braisted’s work, and will continue for the foreseeable future.5

5 Key documents identifying the connections between naval power and diplomacy in the 21st century include the Department of Defense papers Cooperative Strategy for 21 Century Seapower (October 2007), the National Defense Strategy (June 2008), the Quadrennial Defense Review (February 2010), and the Naval Operations Concept 2010: Implementing the Maritime Strategy (May 2010). For one particular view of how to
Participants:

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Captain Craig Felker, USN graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1981. A naval aviator and helicopter pilot, he served in a variety of operational and staff assignments, the most notable of which included Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1991, and as the director of the President’s Emergency Operations Center in the White House from 1995 to 1997. In 2000 Captain Felker was selected for the Naval Academy’s Permanent Military Professorship Program. He returned to USNA after receiving his Ph.D. from Duke in May 2004. In 2007 Texas A&M University Press published his book, Testing American Sea Power: The U.S. Navy Fleet Problems, 1923-1940, which examined the ways in which warfare simulation tested the Navy’s Mahanian vision, and provided a means of adapting the vision to include new technologies.

Bernard D. Cole (Captain, USN, Ret.) is Professor of International History at the National War College in Washington, D.C., where he concentrates on the Chinese military and Asian energy issues. He previously served 30 years as a Surface Warfare Officer in the Navy, all in the Pacific, during which he commanded USS RATHBURN (FF1057) and Destroyer Squadron 35; he also served as a Naval Gunfire Liaison Officer in Vietnam with the THIRD Marine Division. Dr. Cole has written numerous articles and five books, most recently Sea Lanes and Pipelines: Energy Security in Asia, published in April 2008. The second edition of The Great Wall at Sea will be published in December 2010. Dr. Cole earned an A.B. in History from the University of North Carolina, an M.P.A. (National Security Affairs) from the University of Washington, and a Ph.D. in History from Auburn University.

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with a degree in Systems Engineering. He has published numerous articles, reviews, editorials, and two books—*Agents of Innovation* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008) and *Eyewitness Pacific Theater* (with Dennis Giangreco; Sterling Publishing, 2008). He most recently lectured at the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group in October 2009.

Jonathan Reed Winkler is Associate Professor of History at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. He is a historian of U.S. diplomatic, military and naval history, and international affairs in the modern era. He is the author of *Nexus: Strategic Communications and American Security in World War I* (Harvard, 2008), winner of the Roosevelt Prize in Naval History (2008) and Ohio Academy of History Outstanding Book Award (2009). Winkler is a graduate of Yale University (Ph.D 2004). He serves on the Executive Council of the Ohio Academy of History and is an editor-at-large for H-Diplo. In 2010-2011 he holds a Junior Faculty Research Fellowship in International Security from the Smith Richardson Foundation to work on his current project, an examination of U.S. national security policy and international communications technology across the 20th century.
William Braisted’s long-awaited third volume to his trilogy on the U.S. Navy in the Pacific and East Asia in the early 20th Century is finally here. It is a wonderful work, though I do have one major and a couple of minor criticisms that I will relate in more detail later in this review.

Braisted interestingly begins the book by outlining his own attachment to this subject, namely, being the son of a naval officer who served significant periods of time in East Asia in this period. While Braisted’s personal connection to the subject may bring some criticism by historians who see our profession as needing to be entirely "objective," the personal connection instead relates the flavor for the adventure and fear of being Caucasian and American in China at this time. Moreover, Braisted’s personal connection does not prevent him from communicating to the reader the Chinese moral outrage at not having complete control of their sovereignty, an outrage that helped make this such a violent time as China was flexing its nationalist muscles.

I do admit some disappointment that he focused exclusively on the Navy in China as opposed to the rest of the Pacific, such as Micronesia. His earlier works, especially his second book, were hallmarks in that they studied in great detail forgotten naval rivalries of the "tiny islands" that took on tremendous importance between 1918 and 1941 in the context of Great Power naval rivalry. There has been some work on interwar Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia, so I was expecting a more detailed treatment of U.S.-Japan suspicions over fortification and basing issues in these island groups since they played such
a significant part in the coming of Pearl Harbor.\textsuperscript{1} Still, the decision to limit the scope was wise on Braisted’s part, not only for logistical reasons of manageability, but also because it was, at least to a great extent, the U.S. defense of Open Door concepts and policies in China and Japanese willingness to violate the Open Door that largely led to the U.S.-Japan war in 1941.

Braisted’s work is impeccably researched in all of the primary sources we would expect, both naval and diplomatic, from the National Archives, the now-Naval History & Heritage Command, the Library of Congress, the Marine Corps Research Center, the \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)} series, and personal memoirs and accounts from those directly involved. This research interestingly reveals that it was often the naval officers who were most serious about their mission of naval support for diplomacy. These officers were so serious about that mission, in fact, that they many times exercised greater caution about the use of force than many of the U.S. diplomats on the spot. In fact, the number of times that American diplomats were more willing to use military force in this period illustrates that this is one case where the stereotype of senior military officers ready to go to war and held back by sensible diplomats has to be reversed.

I do think that Braisted could have done more with analyzing U.S. actions in a context of Great Power imperialism. Of course, imperialism is in the eye of the beholder and is still a highly controversial subject in the history of U.S. foreign relations and U.S. military history,

but U.S. actions here do fit into the behavior of an imperialistic Great Power. In that vein, there really is nothing 'so-called' about the Unequal Treaties, as Braisted repeatedly refers to them. They were unequal and a fairly clear example of colonial behavior on the part of the U.S., albeit paling in comparison to what other imperial powers had done in China before the 1920s and definitely tame compared to what Japan would do between 1927 and 1945.

These criticisms aside, Braisted has done an excellent job of demonstrating the intersection of military and diplomatic power, and making clear the need for more of these "politico-military" studies. Also, as James Bradford points out in the book's Foreword, this is a work that does relate to the Global War on Terrorism, or at least the attempted occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Scholars should be careful about becoming too focused on the current war and trying to read past conflicts into it. Still, China in the 1920s was as much a traumatized and corrupt society as many nations in Asia and Africa are today and this book makes me question U.S. logic about intervening in these types of conflicts, then or now. As I read Braisted's book and noted the confusion and violence of the situations on the ground, the at-times inability of U.S. forces to intervene effectively, the absolute lack of clear policy guidance from Washington, D.C., and the problems created even when there was policy guidance and forceful intervention, I could not but think about the U.S. in the present-day Middle East and the proverbial bull in a china shop (no pun intended). Does non-intervention really create a greater cost than intervention? I think it is the opposite and that discretion is often the greater part of valor, but I do have to admit to not having a firm answer to the question. As I study and learn more, however, the question of "proper" U.S. foreign policy conduct becomes murkier to me and Dr. Braisted's book has made that "murkier conviction" more firm.
Although established in 1775 to provide for the maritime defense of the American provinces, the United States Navy (USN) found itself after independence as the principal tool of U.S. diplomatic and commercial engagement with the world. For most of the early 19th century USN warships plied foreign waters establishing trading agreements, transporting diplomats, and occasionally applying naval power to protect American commercial and diplomatic interests. By the turn of the century U.S. foreign policy had matured beyond the Monroe Doctrine to the intricate and complex game of imperial expansion. America looked to the Pacific, and particularly to China as an opportunity for an expansion of U.S. commercial interests that could not be easily impeded by European competitors. Acquisition of Guam and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War strengthened the U.S. foothold in the western Pacific. The U.S. Navy East Indies Squadron was subsequently renamed the Asiatic Squadron and then the Asiatic Fleet to add symbolic leverage to America’s claim as a Pacific power. But both diplomats and, particularly, their counterparts in navy blue soon discovered the limits of naval power in the region.

There is perhaps no greater authority on the U.S. Navy in the Pacific than William Reynolds Braisted. The Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Texas has dedicated his scholarly life to explaining the navy’s contribution to American foreign policy in Asia. Two earlier volumes explored the navy’s role in the Pacific from 1897 to 1922. *Diplomats in Blue* continues the narrative by examining the U.S. Navy as an instrument of diplomacy in China. Inspired by his own experiences in China during his father’s tour of duty in the Asiatic Fleet, and drawing from a wealth of official records and personal papers, Braisted offers an intriguing contribution to the history of the navy during the interwar years, as well as a an important commentary on the relevance of cultural awareness to members of the profession of arms.

Though the U.S. Navy was not the first maritime service to be used as an instrument of foreign policy, Braisted offers the intriguing historical problem of how that tool has been effectively utilized when geography and means limit its physical power. The “Open Door” policy theoretically leveled the diplomatic and commercial playing field in China amongst U.S., European, and emerging Japanese interests. A Nine-Power Treaty, signed as part of the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference in 1922, legitimated continued intrusion in China. What 19th century U.S. diplomats did not anticipate were the serious challenges that emerged in the ensuing decades. The first was the prospect that China might become politically unified to the extent that it could challenge foreign intrusion. A corollary issue was the American public’s increasing affinity with the cause of Chinese independence. A second problem was the geographic vastness of the country and the logistical problems that this posed to U.S. naval forces tasked to protect American citizens and commercial interests both in the coast and the interior. A third issue lay with the quantity and quality of the naval forces themselves. Despite the symbolism of its designation, the Asiatic Fleet’s lone cruiser, destroyers, submarines, and gunboats simply could not respond to every crisis
in China, particularly when the direct application of force increasingly appeared the most undesirable option.

Though U.S. foreign policy had successfully opened the door to economic and diplomatic influence in China, its practitioners found themselves in the same quandary as their European and Japanese counterparts. Braisted argues that the solution to the China problem lay not in force but diplomacy. From the top admiral down to ship commanders, U.S. naval officers in the Asiatic Fleet demonstrated a geopolitical and cultural awareness that allowed them to convey an accurate picture of the changing diplomatic situation in China, while applying their limited resources to deal with crises. Though educated in the art and science of naval warfare, line officers proved adept diplomats, and effectively protected U.S. interests, even as American policy moved towards disengagement.

Though the narrative spans barely a decade, the period was politically tumultuous. The story begins in 1922 with China in a state of political disorder. Tensions between Chinese Nationalists, warlords, and communists all tested the mettle of Asiatic Fleet officers responsible for protecting Americans lives and property and also the Open Door policy. By the late 1920s naval officers were becoming increasingly convinced that both policies could not be supported, and that “gunboat diplomacy” was no longer viable. As a consequence, naval officers began to focus efforts more on protecting American lives and property, and less on direct intrusion in Chinese affairs. The path to disengagement continued. Complementing Nationalist-fueled anti-foreign attitudes in the late 1920s were American political and public sentiments sympathetic to China’s independence. Asiatic Fleet commander Admiral Mark Bristol adroitly recognized both his commander-in-chief’s pacifist inclinations and the geopolitical realities. He took a more conciliatory posture with the Nationalists and decreased his fleet’s presence in Chinese waters. Bristol predicted that an increasingly united China would compel the complete withdrawal of naval forces from China. He was correct but for the cause. In September 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria. Within four months violence erupted in Shanghai between Nationalist and Japanese soldiers, prefacing a second Sino-Japanese war that eventually engulfed all of the Pacific nations. Diplomacy eventually quelled the violence, but left uncertain the future of the Asiatic Fleet as a curb to Japanese ambitions in China. The end of the Shanghai Incident brings Diplomats in Blue to a close. That Braisted chose to end the narrative in 1933 is instructive. U.S. naval officers increasingly focused their efforts on resolving the problems of their war plan with Japan. Interestingly, the only viable response that War Plan Orange envisioned for the Asiatic Fleet was for its surface combatants to run and join the westward-bound U.S. Fleet.

In contrast to characterizations of the interwar U.S. Navy as hidebound to Mahanian traditions of great sea battles and battleships, Braisted demonstrates how intellectually adept many of its officers were. The Asiatic Fleet was the only credible source of U.S. power in the western Pacific. And yet, its senior officers managed to navigate U.S. policy through the challenges of Chinese political unification and competing foreign and business interests, with only the minimal use of force. Diplomats in Blue offers an important examination of the interaction between diplomacy, naval policy, and naval operations. As a scholarly resource the book should appeal to both military and diplomatic historians interested in
interwar diplomacy and USN policy. But the book resonates well beyond its time period, as contemporary operations in Afghanistan and Iraq reflect important similarities. The rifled naval gun had as little effect on resolving crises in Nanking or Shanghai as laser-guided bombs have had creating stability and security in Afghanistan and Iraq. More often than not, solutions required officers with an understanding of the cultural and historical underpinnings of the people with whom they were dealing. How Asiatic fleet officers became so adroit poses an interesting question for further study. But the answer could no doubt be a valuable means of broadening current Professional Military Education to develop officers capable of solving problems that lie beyond the reach of technology.
It is a rare treat to have the opportunity to review a book by William Braisted, one of the giants of American naval historiography. First, truth in advertising: when I was writing my doctoral dissertation in the mid-1970s I made extensive use of Braisted’s two major works on the U.S. Navy in Asia, which together covered the period from 1897 to 1922.1 I further benefited from meeting the author at, appropriately, the Naval Historical Center in Washington.2 His assistance to an aspiring student was remarkable, as is this volume of his continuing study of U.S. naval activities. It was only later that I discovered that he had witnessed some of the events of which he wrote at first hand, when his father commanded a destroyer in the Asiatic Fleet in the 1920s.

Significantly, Braisted’s work focuses on an area of great current, as well as historical, importance. After turning from economic Marxism in the early 1980s, China’s remarkable economic modernization has depended increasingly on maritime trade, especially for the energy imports that underlie that modernization. In near-Mahanian terms, that increasing dependence on maritime trade has been accompanied by a moderate but steady growth and modernization of the Chinese Navy, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). So, while written as a work of history, Braisted’s latest work has very real application to current and future developments in Asia.

Naval officers have historically filled both diplomatic as well as military roles, perhaps never so consistently as in China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps the most unusual and interesting research document that I have ever used is the “Log of Glenn Howell,” a multi-volume diary written (some of it in a private code) by a U.S. naval officer who served three tours in the Asiatic Fleet. Braisted also uses this source, rich in observations and conclusions that reflect both Howell’s personal life and professional appreciations. This “log” is but one of the primary sources the author uses; his work is original and well-written, consistent with the long record of scholarship he has established.

Braisted continues the story of his earlier two volumes, which is the U.S. entry into the world of international trade, diplomacy, and military force in China as that great empire was driven to a state of near-dissolution by domestic ineptitude and corruption, as well as by the imperialist onslaught of many foreign nations. The United States was not an originator of this economic and religious invasion, but it was a willing participant. American diplomats and military forces, led by the naval forces of which Braisted writes, were present in China throughout the period that the Celestial Kingdom was beset, and only permanently expelled in 1949-1950 with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.


2 Renamed in 2009 the Naval History and Heritage Command.
Braisted offers a straightforward account, but is notable for often including Chinese views of the events he describes. U.S. government officials, both civilian and military, frequently endeavored to protect American interests in China without interfering in the course of events generated by the Chinese revolution, which may be delineated as lasting from at least 1911 to 1949. That was impossible, given the widespread presence of U.S. citizens in China’s fabric during that revolutionary period. Hence, a primary tasking for the U.S. naval ships and personnel that formed the Asiatic Fleet—itself formally organized in 1902 and operating until largely it was destroyed by the Imperial Japanese Navy in 1942—was defending American personnel and property amid chaos and frequent military campaigns by aspirants to power in Beijing.

While Steve McQueen does not appear in Braisted’s narrative, the author demonstrates the authentic and even dramatic elements in that enjoyable novel and later movie *Sand Pebbles* about a U.S. sailor on the Yangtze River Patrol in the 1920s. The drama, action, and uncertainties of revolution are all in Braisted’s work, backed by historical factual reference, but no less the dramatic, because of the author’s skill as historian and as writer.

The twenty-one chapters of *Diplomats in Blue* are organized chronologically, with three sections titled “The U.S. Navy and Contending Warlords,” “The U.S. Navy and the Rise of the Nationalists,” and “The U.S. Navy and the Confrontation between China and Japan.” Braisted provides definitive descriptions of the revolutionary events he describes. The volume’s pictures are numerous and well-selected. No work is perfect, of course, and I find the presentation—two columns of text on each page—annoying to the eye. This is not the author’s responsibility, of course, and neither is the less than perfect editing of the volume.

Of particular interest is Braisted’s description of Admiral Mark Bristol’s tenure as Asiatic Fleet commander. Bristol came to China following notable political and military successes in Turkey; his time in Asian waters was marked by a superb sense of diplomacy, fairness, but also a degree of hypocrisy. His performance as fleet commander was notable for his empathy with the revolutionary events then underway in China, but may be fairly characterized as no more effective in defending the U.S. interests of the day than any of his predecessors or successors in that billet.

*Diplomats in Blue* stands tall as William Braisted’s capstone work. It is equally commendable as both naval and diplomatic history, but should also be viewed as an important part of the history of modern China during the period that dissolute empire struggled to emerge as a twentieth century nation. The author has further embellished his well-deserved reputation as the doyen of American naval historians.
William Braisted’s latest study on the U.S. Navy completes a three-volume set covering that institution’s involvement in the foreign policy of the United States in the Pacific beginning in 1897. The previous two volumes, first published in 1958 and 1971 respectively, covered a period of vast institutional and organizational change in the United States Navy, from its “rebirth” under Theodore Roosevelt through the trauma of the Washington Naval Treaty in 1922. This work continues precisely where the second volume left off—after Washington and heading to China. Braisted remains a pioneer in analyzing this topic, not only through the lens of a professional diplomatic historian, but also with an especial emphasis on institutional and organizational dynamics. As such, his previous work, and especially the second volume, mined under-utilized (and recently de-classified) archival sources such as the studies and hearings of the General Board of the Navy, Secretary of the Navy Correspondence, as well as the papers of some of naval history’s most neglected personalities—peacetime American admirals prior to World War II. Braisted’s work is an excellent example of using ‘levels of analysis’ to probe complex historical issues successfully.\(^1\)

Braisted limits the scope in the final volume to the U.S. Navy in China during the turbulent period of revolution, warlords, and civil war. He divides the study into three sections based on Chinese history—the warlord period (1922-26), the rise of the Nationalists (Guomindang) and Chang Kai-shek (1926-31), and finally confrontation between the U.S. Navy and Japan in North China and Shanghai as Japan accelerated her program of aggression and interference in Chinese affairs (1931-32). His motivation, outlined in an anecdotal preface, comes from a childhood spent in the Far East precisely during the period he writes about. It is therefore no accident that Braisted, son of a China Patrol naval officer, returns to one of the formative experiences of his life at the end of a very long career writing history. Braisted’s major thesis remains as it was in his other two books, that the U.S. Navy’s influence and impact on U.S. foreign policy in the Pacific was significant and profound. At the root of it all was the policy known to history as “the Open Door,” an American concept for free trade in commerce and ideas that other nations and the Chinese did not always respect. Here the focus is primarily on the influence of Navy officers in executing the Open Door policy in China.

The other major argument, subordinate to the first, is that 1932 marks a clear milestone. Prior to that year, naval officer leadership in the Asiatic Fleet in China had found more cooperation than conflict with their counterparts in the Imperial Japanese Navy. For example, when warlord conflict threatened to spill into the treaty-protected areas of Shanghai in 1924, the local Japanese expatriates welcomed the U.S. Navy landing party as protectors. (33) However, with the invasion and conquest of Manchuria, and especially with the Imperial Japanese Navy’s aggressive actions in 1931-1932 in Shanghai (always the

\(^1\) Thomas Hone, Jr., Mark Mandeles, and Norman Friedman, *British and American Aircraft Carrier Development, 1919-1941* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 5-6.
locus of significant events), that rapprochement ended. More and more the Japanese naval officers and their American counterparts in the Asiatic Fleet saw each other as adversaries. To Braisted’s credit he does not overstate the significance of these events; he acknowledges that the process was gradual and even cordial, but certainly 1932 marks a year of change in the trajectory. (341-342, 350) At the same time, the Navy’s Asiatic Fleet leadership moved more and more into alignment and empathy with China’s nominal Guomindang government.

Readers unfamiliar with the history of the U.S. Navy will no doubt be attracted to the book because it provides “the rest of the story” for the almost sacred novel (and movie) *The Sand Pebbles* by Richard McKenna about the Yangtze Patrol in 1926. For anyone who has seen the movie, its images will constantly come to mind when reading this narrative. Braisted does a marvelous job in addressing the complexities of this period of Chinese history. At times this makes the book a difficult read because of the unfamiliar names and places so important to the narrative of Chinese national awakening from the May 19th Movement through the warlords, Chang Kai-shek, and finally to the period of hot and cold war with Japan. This story is essential context and could easily have hijacked the narrative, and in a few instances it does. However, Braisted richly adds to that field of study in providing an American perspective through the telegrams, reports, and correspondences of the Navy’s leadership. As with his other two books, the use of the primary and archival sources is deft and comprehensive. Braisted is a master of all the pertinent record groups in the U.S. national archives as well as of much else.

The challenges of Security and Stability Operations (SASO), the name these operations go by in present day Iraq and Afghanistan, are clearly on display in this narrative and just as conflicting and confusing as they were to Navy officers in China (and the characters in McKenna’s novel). The account very much has an “interagency flavor” (in modern jargon) as the War and, especially, State Departments share center stage with the Navy. Another secondary thesis that Braisted emphasizes is the tact and good judgment of naval officers. He juxtaposes their actions in contrast with their War and State Department counterparts.

This study also offers the modern U.S. Navy considerable food for thought on the issue of the utility of naval forces—what the Navy refers to as “scalability.” Braisted emphasizes how U.S. diplomats and some naval officers thought the use of gunboats and destroyers less menacing or offensive to the Chinese because the United States’ official policy was often one of neutrality with respect to the extraterritoriality of the other imperial powers—especially Japan and Great Britain. Also, the Americans often assumed the moral high ground vis-à-vis the policy of the Open Door and the generally favorable opinion of missionaries and the American public opinion toward Chinese nationalism. On the rivers it was a different matter. These niceties and distinctions, as Braisted highlights so effectively in this book, often escaped the average Chinese and their transparency was all too obvious to many of the lower ranking (and some senior) naval officers of the river patrol squadrons. Although the Navy was an effective and frequently employed tool, the sailors were often placed in impossible situations by the stipulations of the two Washington Treaties that governed international political relations—the Four Power Pact and the Nine Power Pact. They had to balance protecting American lives and property while trying to
avoid open conflict with the various Chinese factions—especially Chang Kai-shek’s Guomindang.

Braisted, as mentioned, brings in a number of previously neglected naval personalities, especially Admiral Mark Bristol, who had served as High Commissioner (and de facto ambassador) at the American embassy in Constantinople from 1918 to 1927 during a period of very turbulent change in Turkey. (161) Bristol seems to have been the “go-to guy” for difficult Open Door diplomatic assignments.\(^2\) We also become familiar with others, including a very positive portrait of later Admiral J.O. Richardson, whom Franklin Roosevelt relieved of his command for his diplomatic sensitivities regarding Pearl Harbor in 1940. This leads to my first criticism of the book. It missed a major opportunity to tell us more about the career paths of these officers. They did not just disappear from the scene (or return, as in Admiral Charles McVay’s case). The Navy valued their China experience. Bristol, in particular, went on to chair the strategic General Board of the Navy, using his experiences to try and mold and build the “Treaty Fleet” for the likely confrontation on the horizon with the fleet of Japan. The reader will find any number of other China admirals heading between the Asiatic Fleet and the General Board, including McVay, Joseph Strauss, and Thomas Hart.

This discussion leads to an even bigger complaint. Braisted’s previous volumes, in not limiting themselves so narrowly, managed to tackle some of the very big themes of the Navy in the Pacific. In limiting himself to China, Braisted leaves one with the impression that China policy and Navy Far East policy were synonymous. As Braisted well knows, it certainly was not. He missed a real opportunity in this work to build on his valuable discussions of Far East policy and how the Washington and London Naval Treaties influenced these admirals. Braisted has done pivotal work on the larger theme of the naval treaty system and the General Board, having written the definitive account of Admiral Hilary Jones’ critical diplomacy at the Geneva Naval Conference in 1927.\(^3\) The naval treaty system absolutely affected events in China. Although the political treaties get proper emphasis, the Washington Naval Treaty, and especially its “non-fortification clause” undermined the efforts of the Navy to execute foreign policy in the Pacific.\(^4\) From Admiral Joseph Strauss on, the correspondence of these men is filled with complaints about the limitations of Washington. By denying the development of further bases in the Philippines

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\(^4\) This usage is Braisted’s, see *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971), Chapter 39, “The Non-Fortification Squall,” passim.
or Guam, the non-fortification clause mandated that the Asiatic Fleet reposition seasonally due to the unbearable conditions aboard ships and submarines in the Philippines. Worse, this relocation was often to the coastal waters and anchorages in the increasingly unstable and inhospitable coastal and river cities of China. One might argue that the ships would have had to go there anyway, but there is no denying that the U.S. Navy was placed in an extremely tight spot.\(^5\) Simply put, because of the naval treaty system and the deteriorating situation in China, the Asiatic Fleet could no longer operate according to “business as usual.” This line of analysis would have added much value to the book and further buttressed its arguments. The various Washington treaties worked at cross purposes for the Navy in China and led, as Braisted shows, to the gradual breakdown in collective security in the Far East—the opposite of their intended effect. After almost forty years since the second volume came out this reader was expecting a bit more given Braisted’s mastery of the topic. Another minor criticism involves the maps, especially those of the environs of Shanghai, Tientsin, and Canton. The geographic scope is too limited and important river and coastal geography in the text is “off the map,” so to speak. Although authentic, the maps that are present are of limited value, especially for newcomers to the geography of China.

These flaws do nothing to lessen the importance of this book. As the culmination of a multi-volume work on the Navy in the Far East from 1897 to 1933, it will remain fundamental canon for some time to come. Of real value to diplomatic and naval historians, it deserves a much broader audience for its important and relevant themes vis-à-vis policy making and the limits of military power.

\(^5\) For examples see: National Archives and Records Administration Record Group 80, SECNAV Correspondence, Naval Attaché St. Clair Smith to ONI, 4 July 1923, Basing in Tsingtao instead of Chefoo; RG 80, First Endorsement of CINC ASIATIC Fleet, 23 August 1924 of report on Japanese complaints of Navy basing in Olongapo, Philippines to General Board of the Navy; Record Group 38, CINC ASIATIC Fleet to OPNAV, 18 April 1932, Record Message General, Subject, “Northern China Basing for Submarines in Hot Weather.”