



Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents

Douglas Carl Peifer

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Throughout US history, presidents have had vastly different reactions to naval incidents. Though some incidents have been resolved diplomatically, others have escalated to outright war. What factors influence the outcome of a naval incident, especially when calls for retribution mingle with recommendations for restraint? Given the rise of long range anti-ship and anti-air missile systems, coupled with tensions in East Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Black and Baltic Seas, the question is more relevant than ever for US naval diplomacy.

In *Choosing War*, Douglas Carl Peifer compares the ways in which different presidential administrations have responded when American lives were lost at sea. He examines in depth three cases: the *Maine* incident (1898), which led to war in the short term; the *Lusitania* crisis (1915), which set the trajectory for intervention; and the Panay incident (1937), which was settled diplomatically. While evaluating Presidents William McKinley, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's responses to these incidents, Peifer lucidly reflects on the options they had available and the policies they ultimately selected. The case studies illuminate how leadership, memory, and shifting domestic policy shape presidential decisions, providing significant insights into the connections between naval incidents, war, and their historical contexts. Rich in dramatic narrative and historical perspective, *Choosing War* offers an essential tool for confronting future naval crises.

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