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# War Diaries: Politics and War in the Mediterranean

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Anglo-German naval arms race of 1898-1914, is treated in two essays dealing with its strategic aspects, and on Admirals Fisher and Tirpitz. He makes good use of newly released documents to show how poor a strategist Tirpitz was. Having misinterpreted Mahan, Tirpitz did not appreciate the need to control trade routes rather than "the sea" in general. He reveals how Tirpitz actually believed he could build a larger fleet of capital ships than Britain's—a fallacy which befell Napoleon, too, and which gives one pause over the current Soviet foray into carrier construction.

Juxtaposing Mahan and Mackinder, Kennedy argues in favor of the latter's continental theory that control of the European Heartland is superior to Mahan's claims for maritime supremacy in the twentieth century. This essay is the most arguable one in the book, for it confuses the basic agricultural character of central Russia with industrial resources. He sees overland transport as superior to over-water movement and air power to naval blockade and amphibious operations. But he is primarily a Europeanist who ignores the strategic mix of seaborne air power, naval blockade, and seaborne assault which decided the war in the Pacific. In his essay on Japanese strategy in that conflict, Kennedy fails to see Japan as a continental power even though he blames the army for the ultimate defeat and even concludes that the above naval mix brought Japan to her knees.

Much of Kennedy's book has many

obvious inferences for the United States today, though some are buried between the lines. One key to the British imperial success, however, deserves imitation by American policymakers: Kennedy quotes a British statesman who in 1907 admired British national policy for being harmonized "with the general desires and ideals common to mankind, and more particularly . . . is closely identified with the primary and vital interests of the majority . . . of the other nations."

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Charleston, South Carolina

Macmillan, Harold. *War Diaries: Politics and War in the Mediterranean*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1984. 804pp. \$29.95

From January 1943 until May 1945 Harold Macmillan was the British Minister Resident in the Mediterranean, first at Algiers and later in Italy and Greece. In the American order of things he would have been called Political Adviser, but with a difference and it is that difference that makes these diaries fascinating to read 40 years later. For Macmillan was a political animal beholden directly to Churchill and, at times, to the Conservative Party. As such he had far more power than any American political adviser would, as his American opposite number, Robert Murphy, would have been the first to admit. The British were amazed constantly during World War II (and appalled in Korea) at the wide latitude for independent decision given American theater commanders. British army commanders as distinguished as Sir

Henry Maitland Wilson (Supreme Allied Commander in the Med) and General Sir Harold Alexander (Commander Eighth Army) found themselves tethered by Macmillan. Appeals over his head to Churchill were fruitless. The difference in the American and British approaches is clearly in the difference between Presidential and Parliamentary governments. If a political leader has to face questions in the Commons almost daily, with the threat of a no-confidence vote always present, then military actions and decisions must be politically sound.

These diaries (as distinct from Macmillan's book on the period, *The Blast of War*) are highly personal and remarkably revealing.

We have Macmillan, the classicist, visiting ruins, recalling long-gone Roman victories, comparing a Churchill-Roosevelt meeting to one of East and West emperors—it was Macmillan, after all, who prophesied (rather condescendingly) that the British would be the Greeks of the postwar world guiding the stronger but not very bright American Romans.

Then, there is Macmillan, the publisher. The diaries are filled with entries such as: "Stayed in bed all day, reading Richardson's *Pamela*." His reading is wide: Austen and Trollope (of course) Johnson, Gibbon, Dickens, Kipling and just about anything he could get hold of: "I have found a most delicious book called *Stanley's Eastern Churches* (1862) . . . fascinating . . . admirably printed."

Next, we have Macmillan, the ablutionist. Churchill once said of Scandinavians that they were "always whoring after the sun." His lieutenant in the Med couldn't stay away from the water. Over one stretch the diaries record fourteen swims in eight pages (he calls them "bathing").

We also have Macmillan, the eccentric dresser. To his wife (the daughter of the Duke of Devonshire), "I wonder if you could send out to me an old pair of grey flannel trousers (with stripes) . . . very old and dirty . . ."

Finally, Macmillan, the insouciant, (this was the Macmillan that infuriated Labor MPs) in the last entry of the diaries: "The Cabinet appointments are out and I am to be Secretary of State for Air. How odd!"

But as one reads through this book, replete with names half-forgotten (all identified properly by a first-rate editor) and battles half-remembered, the overall impressions aside from an instinctive liking of the author even when it is putting down the Americans—and not always accurately—is the dominance of politics both domestic and foreign. One sees in these diaries the prime minister-to-be. Perhaps not the "Supermac" of Tory propaganda but certainly a man who knew how to exercise power in the British system. It didn't always work that well in the international arena, but "after all, old boy, they are foreigners, ain't they?"

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