

Naval War College Review

Volume 35
Number 2 *March-April*

Article 15

1982

The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism

John J. Mearsheimer

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

Recommended Citation

Mearsheimer, John J. (1982) "The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 35 : No. 2 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol35/iss2/15>

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.

"command of the sea," nuclear technology, and a world vastly different from that which Mahan or anyone could have envisioned in 1914.

Livezey, writing in the aftermath of World War II, originally concluded that the doctrines of conflict and force propounded by Mahan were no longer sound as a basis for international action. "The atomic age has shown conclusively that the only guarantee of civilization is a society of nations." He assessed Mahan's doctrines of naval warfare as applicable, though modified by the tremendous impact of the carrier, submarine, and land-based aircraft, and concluded "there is little to justify the belief that naval strategy as enunciated by Mahan will be basically altered."

Writing again in 1980, he significantly revises his original conclusion: "It seems safe to conclude that the impact of technology . . . has so altered naval warfare from the days of Mahan that the erstwhile dean of naval strategy . . . is no longer the leading authority in current naval strategic thinking." He bases this argument on the concept of command of the sea, claiming that as overall command is no longer attainable, local sea control and denial are the more useful and obtainable objectives. With this view I must disagree and argue that though more difficult and at much greater risk and cost, a nation which by geographic and economic circumstances is dependent on the sea must, ultimately, be able to command the sea or, in the final analysis, lose its position of world leadership.

Overall, Professor Livezey's final chapter provides us with an update of U.S. and, to a lesser degree, Soviet thought on the use of navies and sea power. His carefully documented and annotated pages show thorough study of the authors who write and study the international scene, evaluate the use and importance of sea power and attempt to predict its importance for the future. No

serious student of military history and the influence of Alfred Thayer Mahan on U.S. naval thought past and present should be without this study.

T.A. FITZGERALD
Captain, U.S. Navy

Kennedy, Paul M. *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914*. Winchester, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1980. 604pp. \$60

As the author of the superb book, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (1976), Paul Kennedy is no stranger to readers of this journal. Kennedy is, without a doubt, one of the world's most highly regarded historians and one of the leading, if not the leading expert on the subject of Anglo-German relations. Thus, the publication of *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, which is the fruit of more than ten years of concentrated research, is a major event.

The title notwithstanding, this is a book about the origins of World War I. Ultimately, Kennedy wants to determine why Britain and Germany went to war against each other in 1914. There are two well-known explanations with which Kennedy wrestles, each of which points to Germany as the *bête noire* and interestingly, each of which has the same root cause. The first is the domestic structure or primacy of domestic politics argument. Industrialization came late to Germany; and when it arrived with all its fury, it turned what had been an agrarian society on its head. Unlike the British case, modernization was not a gradual process in Germany. This wholesale disruption led to significant domestic instability, which ultimately manifested itself in an adventurous foreign policy. The outbreak of the war can be best explained by focusing on the domestic sources of conflict. Since the appearance

72 Naval War College Review

of Fritz Fischer's *Germany's Aims In The First World War* in 1961, the primacy of domestic politics explanation has been the more influential of the two explanations. (It should be noted that there are important differences among the members of this school of thought.)

The second explanation is the balance of power or primacy of foreign policy argument. Again, at the root of the matter is the industrial revolution. As a consequence of differences in the timing and the nature of the industrialization process in Britain and Germany, there was a significant change in the balance of power between these two countries during the period from 1860-1914. Britain was clearly the dominant European power in the mid-19th century. By 1914, Germany had the military might (which, for Kennedy, is largely synonymous with economic strength) to challenge Britain. Germany, like France under Napoleon and others before that, then set out to gain a position in the international system that was commensurate with her strength. In other words, World War I was a classic struggle for European hegemony.

No historian would deny that there are elements of truth in both of these explanations. The central question, however, is, which is the more important one? Forced to choose between them, Kennedy opts for the balance of power argument. He writes, "The decisive elements in the Anglo-German relationship, and the causes of the rising antagonism, are to be found . . . in the cold world of *Machtpolitik*, in the perception of clashes of interest between the two nations." What makes this book so important is that this conclusion challenges the primacy of domestic politics argument which has held the high ground for the past two decades. Forced to choose between Ranke and Marx, Kennedy chooses Ranke.

Although Kennedy adheres to the balance of power argument, he gives

considerable credence to the arguments of Fritz Fischer and his disciples—an indication of the great influence these historians have had. One of the real strengths of this book is that Kennedy has tried, as much as possible, to synthesize the primacy of foreign policy and primacy of domestic politics explanations. Thus, his book covers virtually every aspect of Anglo-German relations. In the end, however, he recognized that it would be necessary to choose between these explanations.

It is not Kennedy's choice which is troubling, but how he made that choice. There is no weighing of the two arguments, no explanation as to why one is more important than the other. One wants to know: what criteria did he use to judge the validity of each argument? If one is going to choose between competing explanations as Kennedy did, and moreover, if one is going to challenge the prevailing wisdom on a subject, then it is necessary to explain why your argument is more persuasive than the other one. Kennedy does not do this. Instead, he simply states, after a detailed exploration of virtually every aspect of the Anglo-German rivalry, that balance of power considerations are of primary importance. The reader is left waiting for the other shoe to drop.

As an encyclopedia of the many aspects of the Anglo-German rivalry, this book is a *tour de force*. One comes away from it with a thorough understanding of all the dimensions of the problem. For this reason, as well as the fact that the central conclusion is a revisionist one (at least at this juncture), the book is very important. However, because of its important shortcoming in dealing with the issue of ultimate causes, it does not measure up to what one expects from an author of Kennedy's stature.

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER
Center for International Affairs
Harvard University