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A Response by John W. Coogan to Nicholas A.

Lambert. *Planning Armageddon: British Economic*

Warfare and the First World War. Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780674061491
(hardcover, \$47.50/£35.95/€43.00).

—With a response from **Nicholas Lambert**

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XV-18-Coogan.pdf>

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Response by John W. Coogan, Michigan State University

I am currently preparing an extended analysis of Nicholas Lambert's *Planning Armageddon* for another venue. Since my book was the object of a considerable amount of comment in the H-Diplo roundtable, a response on H-Diplo seems appropriate.

My remarks are focused on certain points raised in Justus Doenecke's review and in Lambert's response. First, Doenecke reports that Lambert argues that "Wilson's bid to buy German merchant ships clearly violated international law codified in the 1909 Declaration of London." In fact the Declaration of London was never ratified.¹ For Lambert to have cited it as a binding code of international law during World War I rather than the relevant British and American case law is thus misleading. Doenecke also notes the book's misidentification of Joseph Hodges Choate as "Augustus Choate." He does not mention the misidentification of Chandler Anderson as "chief counsel for the cotton growers" in July 1915.² Anderson was in fact senior assistant to the secretary of state rather than attorney for a private interest during the cotton negotiations with the British embassy. Readers can determine for themselves the degree to which such basic errors undermine the book's overall credibility.

Doenecke's review goes on to note--all too accurately--that Lambert is "particularly critical" of my work. *Planning Armageddon* asserts that "Coogan errs considerably in his analysis: British [sic] did not 'seize' U.S. contraband."³ (In his paraphrase of this statement, Doenecke omits the "U.S." and adds that Lambert's argument "needs to be more finely honed.") In fact, during the 1915 trial of U.S. meat captured by the Royal Navy on the *Kim*

¹ John W. Coogan, *End of Neutrality* (Cornell University Press, 1981), 125-36.

² Lambert, 444. Anderson was equivalent to a modern acting undersecretary of state, though the position did not yet exist in 1915.

³ Lambert, 598, fn 127.

H-Diplo Roundtables

and three other neutral ships, packer counsel Sir Robert Finlay asked the prize court to award compensation for “the losses which the claimants had suffered by reason of the seizure” of their property. The trial judge, Sir Samuel Evans, referred to “the goods seized” when he condemned them as “conditional contraband.”⁴ The British Treasury realized approximately \$4,000,000 from the Admiralty Marshal’s forced London auction of the meat on these four ships alone, about half the sum the British government offered in a pre-trial settlement proposal the packers rejected.⁵ Attorney General Sir Edward Carson stated during the trial that “38 other ships” carrying packer meat were “also in Court” as of July 12, 1915.⁶ If one accepts the British offer of about \$8,000,000 as fair market value for the packer goods on these four ships and assumes the other 38 packer shipments were of equivalent average value, in less than a year of war Britain had captured and placed in court \$84,000,000 worth of “U.S. contraband” from these six corporations alone. Yet Lambert asserts that Britain “did not `seize’ U.S. contraband” while ignoring the contrary statements of the attorney general and the trial judge.

Packer meat represented only a fraction of the American property the British government seized during World War I. The U.S. consul general in London warned the secretary of state in April 1915 that “hundreds” of American ships and cargoes had been detained in British ports. In June 1916 a State Department official reported that he had reviewed “thousands” of such cases.⁷ Lambert offers no explanation of how the British authorities captured, tried, condemned and sold millions of dollars worth of packer meat without seizing it. He also fails to cite in his bibliography the State Department archives which document the “thousands” of similar cases. His statement that “British did not `seize’ U.S. contraband” alone is sufficient to demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of both British economic warfare and U.S. neutrality.

Lambert states in his response to the H-Diplo reviews that he subjects “John Coogan to more sustained scholarly fire.”⁸ I fear I must contest the adjective ‘scholarly.’ “Scholarly

⁴ John B. Aspinall, ed., *Lloyd’s Reports of Prize Cases* (10 vols.; Lloyd’s, 1915-24), 3:231 & 324-7.

⁵ Chandler Anderson (Chief U.S. Counsel for packers), diary, 12 Feb 16, Anderson Papers, 31, Library of Congress; see also other documents in same file and Treasury Solicitor 13/15B, UK National Archives. I will not attempt to convert 1915 into 2014 dollars, but the reader should be aware of the massive inflation in order to understand the scale of British seizures. An indeterminate fraction of the value of the U.S. property captured was later returned in order to secure future cooperation with British economic warfare measures.

⁶ Aspinall, 3:170-2.

⁷ Robert Skinner to WJ Bryan, telegram, 9 Apr 15, State Department microfilm 367/193, U.S. National Archives; FK Neilson to Cone Johnson (State Dept. solicitor) 29 Jun 16, Lester Woolsey Papers, 15, Library of Congress.

⁸His full statement is as follows: “It is true that I subject John Coogan to more sustained scholarly fire, – but I hope that my surface disagreement with his conclusions does not conceal my deeper agreement with him on the necessity to grapple with this particular historical problem. He has confronted the legal issues involved in the Anglo-American wartime relationship more directly than any other scholar.”

fire” requires scholarly documentation. When one asserts that Britain did not seize U.S. goods as contraband and that a colleague “errs considerably” by asserting that it did, one assumes a professional obligation to cite specific historical evidence to support one’s assertions. It is not sufficient to make an unsupported assertion, ignore the evidence the other scholar has cited, and move on to advance the equally undocumented assertion that the Allies could have defeated Germany while simultaneously holding “their own”⁹ in a military conflict against the United States. The Chancellor of the Exchequer described the prospect of a far more limited economic conflict with the United States in 1916 as “sheer lunacy.”¹⁰ Yet Lambert offers no explanation of how Britain could have survived, much less won, such a war. He simply asserts that once more “Coogan errs considerably.”¹¹

I could go on, but will save my extended critique for other venues. The flaws noted above seem significant in evaluating a book that begins with a claim to reveal “serious shortcomings in the current interpretation of Anglo-American relations”¹² and concludes that Charles Seymour, Ernest May, Arthur Link, Robert Divine, Keith Robbins, Robert Ferrell, Patrick Devlin, Kathleen Burk, John Milton Cooper, Robert Tucker, and all the other distinguished scholars who have written on the subject over the past century “have not fully appreciated the complexity of the Anglo-American dispute.”¹³ Lambert claims to have written the first full appreciation of this complexity, though his bibliography does not include the National Archives of the United States, the papers of Secretary of State Robert Lansing in the Library of Congress, or many other collections earlier scholars have considered essential to an understanding of the topic.

⁹ Doenecke, review

¹⁰ Reginald McKenna, quoted by C.P. Scott (editor, *Manchester Guardian*) diary, 4 Oct 16, Scott Papers, British Library Additional Manuscripts 50903.

¹¹ Lambert, 598, fn 127.

¹² Lambert, 6.

¹³ Lambert, 503

Response by Nicholas Lambert

In one endnote within *Planning Armageddon* I opined that Professor Coogan was not correct in his analysis of the British government's reaction to the demarche forwarded it by the US Department of State, dated 28 December 1914. I am sorry to have caused any offense but I adhere to my view.

Nowhere in my book do I suggest that the 1909 Declaration of London was ratified. Therein, moreover, prospective readers will find ample evidence to support my contention that from 28 August 1914, British policy (both in intent and mostly in fact) was not to "seize" and confiscate US cargoes, but rather to "detain" them while convincing the vendors to sell them in London at market price. Similarly, I in fact devote considerable space to discussing the significance of the landmark "Kim" case of July 1915, the direct consequence of failed negotiations between the British government and the Chicago 'meat packers'. Readers interested in learning more about this story, and the ultimate result, are referred to Marion Siney's outstanding article that appeared in the December 1951 issue of *The Journal of Modern History*.*

*Marion Siney, "British Negotiations with American Meat Packers, 1915-1917: A Study of Belligerent Trade Controls," *Journal of Modern History* 23, no. 4 (December 1951): 343-53.

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Lambert

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