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Introduction by Katherine C. Epstein

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Introduction by Katherine C. Epstein, Rutgers University-Camden

It is a curious fact that interpreting World War I-era British naval history constitutes a national-security issue for the United States today. Largely to meet the rise of China, the Pentagon has been developing a concept known as AirSea Battle. To justify their ideas, planners frequently resort to historical analogies between America's armed forces vis-à-vis China, and the British navy vis-à-vis Germany before World War I. In what may be a first for a major doctrinal study, the introduction to a report on the AirSea Battle concept by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in 2010 quoted a historical primary source followed by a historiographical gloss: a famous 1907 memorandum by the Foreign Office official Eyre Crowe on the growing threat from Germany, and then the standard interpretation of it.¹ We have here a classic example of the 'lessons of history' informing—or deforming—contemporary national-security policy.

The historiographical landscape of World War I-era British naval history is a difficult one to navigate. The first key scholarly work was Arthur Marder's *The Anatomy of British Sea Power, 1880–1904*, published in 1940, which established the core elements of an interpretation that continues to hold broad scholarly and popular appeal.² *Anatomy* emerged from Marder's dissertation research at Harvard, where his advisor was the great European diplomatic historian William Langer; understandably, Marder tended to depict the Royal Navy as a straightforward instrument of British foreign policy. Around 1900, he argued, Britain, and especially its navy, began to wake up to the emerging threat from Germany alone (as distinct from Germany in coalition with France and/or Russia—a key distinction for understanding British strategy). Although Kaiser Wilhelm II aspired to global empire, the German threat was centered on its growing battle fleet in the North Sea. The British Navy, under the dynamic leadership of Admiral Sir John "Jacky" Fisher, responded in two main ways: first, it abandoned imperial defense in order to concentrate on the German threat in home waters; and second, it built HMS *Dreadnought*, inaugurating the 'dreadnought revolution' and intensifying a naval arms race with Germany. Marder thus defined the Navy's response in relatively narrow operational (as distinct from strategic) terms.

Nevertheless, his account fitted with broader existing interpretations of the period. It was consistent with depictions of Britain as no longer able to sustain simultaneously its imperial commitments and home defense. It was a favorite example (analogous to Rome's recall of the legions) in debates from the 1980s onward as to whether the United States could remain a global superpower or would need to pull back. It also supported the

¹ Jan Van Tol et al., "Air Sea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept" (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), 4. Available at <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2010/05/airsea-battle-concept>.

² For our purposes, the most important of Marder's subsequent publications was the first volume, covering the years 1904–1914, of his five-volume *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* (Oxford University Press, 1961–1970).

standard declinist narrative of British diplomatic history, in which Britain abandoned splendid isolation and global hegemony to make a series of power-sharing alliances with Japan (1902), France (1904), and Russia (1907) and to concentrate on Germany.³ This broader interpretation of British history in turn shaped policy discussions about the strategic dilemmas confronting the United States, largely through the influence of Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, first published in 1987.⁴

In relying on Marder, historians could not have known the sharp limits of his archival base. Marder enjoyed a reputation for having gained privileged access to Admiralty records, especially those in the Admiralty Record Office (as distinct from the Admiralty Library). In the preface to *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, Marder wrote that "it has been my good fortune to be permitted to see various unpublished materials of the first importance. These materials have never before been utilized in any published work."⁵ Discerning readers of *Anatomy* might have noticed that Marder occasionally resorted to the citation "Admiralty mss.," which was so vague as to make it impossible for any scholar to track the source. Nevertheless, praise of Marder's archival research gushed forth, such as the judgment of John Keegan that Marder's "standards of archival research... defy betterment."⁶

We now know that they are easy to better. In researching *Anatomy*, Marder, at a time without digital cameras and xerox machines for copying documents, was permitted to spend less than a month in the Admiralty Record Office. He was not free to define his own research agenda but was required to submit a list of questions to the Admiralty Record Office, whose staff then decided what documents to show him.⁷ Thus he was unable to

³ For examples of how Marder's interpretations have influenced broader studies of British history, see George Monger, *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy, 1900–1907* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 176, 201, 206–7, 311–313, 335; Samuel Williamson, *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 15–18, 43–46, 50–51, 68–69, 103–9, 194–95, 238–40, 361–62; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), 251–52, 260, 272, 279, 444, 451–52; Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, *To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16, 17–18, 375–97.

⁴ For Marder's influence on Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989; first edn. 1987), see especially pp. 213, 224–232, 250–256 and the accompanying notes. Kennedy's earlier works cited in those pages also relied heavily on Marder.

⁵ Arthur Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880–1905* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1964; first ed. 1940), v.

⁶ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 27. For similar praise, see John Horsfield, "Marder, Arthur Jacob (1910–1980)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁷ For Marder's arrival and departure dates at the Record office, see SecAdm to Marder, Friday, 2 September 1938, M4576/38, and Record Office stamp dated 4 October 1938 on the front cover, Docket "Professor A. J. Marder, University of Oregon, U.S.A. Request for access to Admiralty Records to obtain material for historical work on British Navy, 1938," ADM 178/207, The National Archives, Kew, England. For the limits on what Marder was permitted to see at the Admiralty Record Office, see SecAdm to Marder, 25

develop new questions in light of new evidence and then to investigate them at leisure. To the extent that broader interpretations of British history in the World War I-era, along with discussions of the United States' current strategic dilemmas, ultimately rely on his work—and it is a broad extent, as we have seen—they rest on weak evidentiary foundations.

Historians began to probe these weaknesses and to identify additional ones in the 1970s. Although their work is usually described as 'revisionist,' it should in fact be regarded as the first orthodox draft of history that was based on adequate archival research. Ruddock Mackay's *Fisher of Kilverstone*, published in 1973 and based on unprecedented access to Admiral Sir John Fisher's papers, fired a succession of ranging shots at Marder's interpretations.⁸ Decisive engagement commenced in 1989 with Jon Sumida's *In Defence of Naval Supremacy*.⁹ Sumida demonstrated that the single most important problem confronting the Royal Navy at the turn of the century was not Germany (foreign-political) but budgets (financial and domestic-political), and that the impetus behind the Royal Navy's rising demands for money was not German battleship construction but Franco-Russian cruiser construction. Fisher was brought into office not to meet the German threat but to trim naval expenditures. Sumida's conclusions rested on a command of the archives superior to Marder's and Mackay's in both breadth and depth. He did not show all of the ways in which Marder was wrong, but he showed that on crucial points, Marder could not have been right.

That brings us to Nicholas Lambert, whose most recent book is the subject of this roundtable. In his 1999 work, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, Lambert completed the work of demolition begun by Mackay and Sumida while offering a fuller alternative to Marder's synthesis.¹⁰ Taking Sumida's insights on financial limitation as his starting point, Lambert argued that Fisher aimed at a revolutionary technological-strategic synthesis that would permit the Royal Navy to keep its global commitments while appeasing domestic-political pressures to control its expenditures, and at the same time counter the emerging German threat in home waters. Rather than building a 'one-hub' navy optimized to fight Germany, Fisher sought to build a balanced navy with flexible capabilities that could respond to a range of threats in a dynamic geopolitical environment.

Lambert's recovery of this story had broad implications. Just as Marder's interpretation had conformed to an older diplomatic history emphasizing the primacy of the German threat in the North Sea, so Lambert's account complemented the newer diplomatic history

August 1938; Marder to SecAdm, 26 August 1938; minute by Ellmers, 1 September 1938; Phillips to Baddeley, 3 October 1938, *ibid*.

⁸ Ruddock Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

⁹ Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology, and British Naval Policy, 1889–1914* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

¹⁰ Nicholas Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

(associated chiefly with Keith Neilson and Keith Wilson) arguing that Russia had remained a more important threat to the empire for longer than had previously been realized.¹¹ Like this new diplomatic history, Lambert's account of prewar British naval policy emphasized the fluidity of the period as experienced by decision-makers at the time. More broadly, it implied that the entire 'origins of the war' literature (indeed the tendency to designate the period as 'prewar') was teleological, encouraging historians to read the past backwards through knowledge of an outcome that they possessed —i.e., an Anglo-German war with an important naval component—but that the people they were studying did not.

Lambert has now followed *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* with *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War*. He has again taken on a series of deeply entrenched interpretations. As Peter John Brobst emphasizes in his contribution to this roundtable, it is practically an article of faith, even for naval historians, that the centerpiece of British grand strategy in the run-up to World War I was the army's continental commitment, which was a conspicuous departure from the British tradition of dominating the oceans with its navy, conducting limited expeditionary operations, and subsidizing the large armies of continental allies. For historians, the logic of this counter-intuitive grand strategic shift depended in part upon the perception that the Royal Navy had offered Britain's political executive no plausible alternative to the Army's continental commitment to achieve rapid victory in a short war. All three elements of the Royal Navy's plans, as interpreted by Marder and others, appeared unpromising: battle was extremely risky when practically every major naval technology was changing; amphibious operations verged on suicidal in an age of mines, torpedo boats, and submarines; and blockade, which would have to move further away from an enemy's coast in order to blunt the threat from torpedo-armed flotilla craft, would be problematic on account of its distance from the enemy coast.¹²

In *Planning Armageddon*, Lambert argues that the Royal Navy did in fact offer the political executive a plan for quick victory in the expected short war; that this plan was at least as credible as the army's continental commitment; and that the political executive found this plan more palatable, adopting it rather than the continental commitment as the centerpiece of British grand strategy in the event of major war. Lambert notes that the short-war (and sometimes no-war) expectation derived in large part from perceptions about the universal dependence upon the global economic system. In perhaps the most famous formulation, Norman Angell reasoned that the inter-dependence of advanced industrial economies in a globalized world economy would make war so disruptive to

¹¹ See Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹² See, e.g., Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904–1919*, vol. 1, *The Road to War: 1904–1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 119, 367–94; Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Temple Smith, 1972), 44–55; Strachan, *To Arms*, 378–403.

economic life, and thus so expensive, that it would be irrational.¹³ While Angell's pacifistic spin on this inter-dependence was logical, so too, as Harold James observes in his contribution, was a militarized one. If shocks to the global economy would end a war quickly, could not the power (Britain) which dominated the infrastructure of globalization—communications, finance, and ocean-going merchant shipping—exploit its effective monopoly control to shock the system? Could it not, to borrow a modern term, 'weaponize' the infrastructure of globalization?

One important part of the appeal of exploiting this dominance, in Lambert's telling, was that it cleverly minimized the operational and international legal complications of applying maritime economic pressure to a far greater degree than did blockade, a point noted in both Brobst's and Justus Doenecke's reviews. As an operational and legal concept, blockade, which focused on the interdiction of individual cargoes, had developed during the early modern period, when the volume of international trade was smaller and its mechanics simpler than they became with the wave of globalization beginning around 1870. The exploding volume of international trade after 1870 caused a corresponding explosion in the volume of information about cargoes that had to be acquired, managed, and applied to make blockade work. At the same time, the increasing complexity of the day-to-day mechanics of international trade eroded the two legal pillars of blockade—known ownership and ultimate destination of cargoes. Weaponizing the British-owned infrastructure of international trade, rather than trying to interdict cargoes, offered a way around these thorny operational and legal problems.

It also exploited Britain's comparative strategic advantages, according to Lambert. Britain, like every other nation dependent on the smooth functioning of the global economy, was bound to suffer collateral damage from any accidental or deliberate disruption to the system, even one directed at an enemy. But while Britain could deny Germany access to the infrastructure of global trade while retaining access itself, the reverse was not true. In commercial and financial terms, therefore, Britain enjoyed key comparative advantages against Germany. It did not enjoy the same comparative advantage in economic terms. Since Germany's economic competitiveness would become increasingly important the longer a war dragged on, exploiting Britain's financial and commercial dominance to keep the war short had an appealing strategic logic, part of what Brobst calls "a distinctive challenge to the 'Continental commitment' thesis." The Panic of 1907, as James notes, confirmed for many observers of the global economy a core part of the reasoning on which the Admiralty's proposed weaponization of its infrastructure was based: that the system was already extremely sensitive to shock, and that the effects of shock would be rapid, far-reaching, and perhaps susceptible to being channeled.

Lambert argues that in 1912, the Admiralty was able to persuade the British "political executive" to adopt economic warfare—his term, as distinct from blockade, for the weaponization of the infrastructure of global trade—rather than the army's continental

¹³ Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage* (London: W. Heinemann, 1910).

commitment as the cornerstone of British strategy in the event of war. As Brobst notes, his evidence for top-level political commitment, aside from the presence of nine senior Cabinet ministers (including the prime minister) at the crucial meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, includes the political executive's subsequent action to pre-delegate authority to the Admiralty to take certain measures to implement economic warfare immediately upon the outbreak of war. Pre-delegation was an extraordinary constitutional innovation with huge implications for civil-military relations and enormous political risks for a Liberal government. Ideologically, the government was committed to free markets and free trade—yet it was authorizing the Admiralty to intervene aggressively in British economic life in the name of national security, and in so doing to harm the interests of its core business constituents.

When Britain entered the war in August 1914, the strategy of economic warfare thus automatically commenced. Within weeks, however, political support for the campaign began to crumble. Powerful domestic interest groups in Britain, including bankers and shippers who stood to make great profits by selling to Germany, pressed the Cabinet via the Board of Trade to relax economic warfare. At the same time, the Foreign Office, which had never been enthusiastic about the plan, funneled to the Cabinet the outraged protests of neutrals whose interests suffered collateral damage from measures directed against Germany. As James and Doenecke emphasize in their reviews, the most important angry neutral was the United States, whose Democratic president was confronted, three months before a midterm election, with a southern base that was suddenly unable to move its cotton crop to Europe, thanks to Britain's denial of access to ocean-going merchant shipping. Political dangers aside, the inability to move the cotton raised the prospect of mass financial default, since cotton growers had financed their crop and needed to sell it in order to pay off their debts. So desperate was President Wilson that, notwithstanding his supposed commitment to international law, he took the legally questionable step of trying to re-flag the German vessels that had fled to neutral American ports upon Britain's declaration of war so that they could carry American cargoes. In the face of mounting clamor, the British government quickly relented, and economic warfare was converted into a much more traditional blockade. The Admiralty's plan for quick victory barely got a trial.

Nevertheless, the predicted derangement of the global economy by the war continued, and world food prices began to spiral upwards. In Britain, the government, still smarting from the domestic backlash against its attempts to intervene in the economy for the sake of economic warfare, was loathe to take the domestic steps necessary to control prices. Compared to fixing prices or managing demand (i.e. rationing), it seemed politically easier to increase supply by forcing access to Russian grain through the Dardanelles. Departing significantly from the established story, Lambert argues that the Gallipoli operation was thus less an effort to relieve military pressure on the western front arising from trench warfare than to alleviate political pressure on the homefront arising from the destabilized global economy. Lambert ends his account in 1916, eighteen months into the war, with the government fundamentally re-evaluating its entire approach to economic warfare and blockade.

All three reviewers make several points in common. First, they uniformly praise Lambert's command of the archives as both broad and deep. James applauds his "amazing range of documents," based on "complete mastery of the archival evidence of all the different parts of Britain's complex decision-making apparatus"; Brobst compliments his "impressive archival work and plenty of fresh evidence"; and Doenecke commends his research into "countless military documents and manuscript collections." Second, the reviewers regard the book as highly significant. Doenecke says that it "forces historians to rethink the nature of British strategic planning in the crucial years 1901–16"; Brobst calls it an "essential study on the naval and strategic side of globalization"; and James, perhaps most arrestingly of all, writes that Lambert "essentially has rewritten our understanding of what produced the Great War." Third, all of the reviewers characterize the book as methodologically ambitious and innovative. In James's words, Lambert's book combines two literatures—those on strategic history and on financial history—"that have normally been quite separated from each other"; Doenecke notes that *Planning Armageddon* challenges "traditional interpretations at every turn"; and Brobst sees the book as one that incorporates imperial, political, strategic, economic, financial, and intelligence history. They all heartily endorse Lambert's call to study naval history in broad economic and political context.

James and Brobst in particular are struck by potential historical analogies between Lambert's story and the present. James notes that 2014, the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, is not the only important centenary of the early twenty-first century. The year 2007 was the centenary of the Panic of 1907, and was marked all too appropriately by another global financial crisis. Given the close connection that Lambert demonstrates between 1907 and 1914, James worries that there may be a similar link between 2007 and, say, 2014. If the accidental Panic of 1907 suggested to British strategists that deliberately 'weaponizing' the infrastructure of global trade would produce as severe a shock as the Admiralty's planners of economic warfare had predicted, what might the accidental panic of 2007/2008 suggest to military planners around the world? Brobst highlights the implications of Lambert's study for thinking about the rise of China and cyber warfare today. The 'distant blockade' envisioned by the architects of AirSea Battle, Brobst suggests, is an operational concept, divorced from close understanding of the globalized world economy and thus not a true grand strategy like economic warfare. He thinks that cyber warfare offers a better analogy to economic warfare: cyber warfare would 'weaponize' a dual-use part of the global commons just as economic warfare sought to weaponize the dual-use infrastructure of international trade. Like economic warfare, cyber warfare would be part of what Brobst calls "the entwining of strategy and globalization."

In sum, *Planning Armageddon* puts forward at least two arguments of concern to many diplomatic historians. First, it makes methodological claims about the actors, themes, and sources that should be engaged in studying diplomatic, foreign-relations, trans-national, and/or strategic history. Second, it reframes the strategic choice then confronting Britain—and perhaps now confronting the United States—in unconventional ways. The choice, it seems, was not between "pulling back" into homeland defense versus "leaning forward" into global hegemony, as a recent pair of essays in *Foreign Affairs* framed the

American dilemma today.¹⁴ Rather, the choice was between alienating powerful domestic and foreign interests by exploiting the power derived from under-writing the global commons, and not alienating them. Brobst describes Lambert's book as offering "a salutary reminder that the pervasive notion of Britain's strategic 'overstretch' in the early twentieth century must be carefully qualified." Given how frequently World War I-era Britain is employed today as a historical analogy, diplomatic historians have more than an academic interest in this history—and in representing it as accurately as possible.

Participants:

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Harold James is Professor of History and International Affairs and the Claude and Lore Kelly Professor of European Studies at Princeton University, and author of books that

¹⁴ Barry R. Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January/February 2013): 116-128; and Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Lean Forward: In Defense of American Engagement," *Ibid.*, 130-142.

include *The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression* (2001), *The Creation and Destruction of Value: The Globalization Cycle* (2009) and *Making the European Monetary Union* (2012).

Review by Peter John Brobst, Ohio University

Nearly ten years ago, as the bicentennial of Britain's celebrated 1805 naval victory at Trafalgar approached, N. A. M. Rodger published the second volume in his acclaimed *Naval History of Britain*. Rodger explained that his purpose in writing *The Command of the Ocean*, which covers the period from Oliver Cromwell to Napoleon Bonaparte, was "to put naval affairs back into the history of Britain ... to link naval warfare to the many other aspects of history in which it was involved."¹ Nicholas Lambert strikes a similar chord in *Planning Armageddon*. This cogent and stimulating reassessment of British sea power and plans for economic warfare in World War I demonstrates the navy's centrality and remarkably modern relevance well over a century beyond the battle of Trafalgar. Lambert argues, on the basis of impressive archival work and plenty of fresh evidence, that historians have largely misapprehended the strategic framework in which British decision-makers took their country to war in 1914. This represents a significant contribution in its own right. But much of the importance of *Planning Armageddon* lies in the book's wider applicability to imperial and international history—especially as an essential study on the naval and strategic side of globalization.

Lambert opens with Basil Liddell Hart's acid complaint that Britain had in World War I, for the "first time in [its] history," made its navy, and the exercise of economic pressure against the enemy, a "subsidiary weapon" to "the glittering sword of Continental manufacture" (1). The story that Lambert unfolds does not exactly vindicate the unceasingly controversial strategic theorist, but it does throw down a distinctive challenge to the 'Continental commitment' thesis. That narrative emphasizes Britain's transition over the twentieth century from a globally-minded conception of national defense, based on sea power and the Empire, to a closer-in strategy focused on Europe. The evolution culminated in the permanent basing of major British forces in Germany after World War II, and by extension in Britain's accession to the Common Market. Historians trace the turn of mind to the commitment of the British Expeditionary Force to France in 1914. Some go so far as to suggest that the 'Continental commitment' was nothing new to the twentieth century, and that Liddell Hart's 'blue water' version of British history was always chimerical.² But Lambert maintains that sending the army to France in 1914 reflected neither an imperative strategy nor a preordained one, as often believed. Historians have underestimated the lethality that British authorities attached to their country's sea power in 1914. Moreover, as Lambert makes startlingly clear, Britain's 'command of the ocean' was more extensive than ever on the eve of World War I.

The *offensive* potential of British sea power in the early twentieth century involved much more than naval supremacy and slow-acting strategies of blockade based on the age the

¹ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. lxiii.

² For a recent and formidable example, Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714-1783* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

sail. Britain's 'ocean power', to use Brian Tunstall's evocative phrase, had come to entail something approximating governance over the circulatory and central nervous systems of global trade.³ In the years around 1900, Britain's merchant fleet was the world's largest, and British shipping carried the overwhelming majority of the world's seaborne cargo. The others depended on a financial network of telecommunication, insurance, and credit which converged on the City of London. In theory, the British state was uniquely poised to disrupt the system, causing it to seize up and producing rapid victory in a war against Germany. Lambert shows how British naval authorities developed an accurate and sophisticated understanding of a globalizing economy over the first decade of the twentieth century. On the basis of that picture, and on the impetus of John 'Jacky' Fisher, Britain's inimitable naval chief between 1904 and 1910, the Admiralty devised a ruthless and thorough-going plan to paralyze European trade and quickly force the putative German enemy to terms. The plan combined enforcement by the navy of a 'distant', oceanic blockade (in contrast to a 'close', coastal one) with intervention in the City by other arms of the state. In December 1912, the Committee of Imperial Defense, under Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, endorsed this 'national strategy' as Britain's 'predelegated' course of action on the outbreak of hostilities with Germany.

Of course, just as the tired axiom holds, this strategy failed in the event to survive contact with the enemy. The study of war plans can reveal much about institutional outlook and, as in this case, geopolitical structure. But the subject can all-too-often have a disconnected quality to it. *Planning Armageddon* stands in marked contrast on this score. Lambert is concerned as much with politics as planning. He usefully devotes around two-thirds of his book to explaining how the Admiralty's concept for economic warfare broke down in practice. He details a depressingly predictable tragicomedy of inter-service rivalry and bureaucratic infighting among key departments of state; of low tolerances in the City and even less in Parliament for the collateral effects on Britain's own economy; and of the resulting procrastination and dithering by the Prime Minister. Lambert also emphasizes that Britain's economic offensive against Germany depended on a degree of cooperation from neutral governments, not least from a less than benevolently neutral United States. So although the economic theories of Norman Angell, Ivan Bloch, and Robert Giffen, along with the strategic ones of Liddell Hart, A. T. Mahan, and Julian Corbett, resonate throughout much of his study, it is Clausewitz to whom Lambert appropriately gives the last word—on the "political conditions of war" (504).⁴

³ Brian Tunstall, *Ocean Power Wins* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1944).

⁴ For the economic ideas, see Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage* (London: Heinemann, 1909); Ivan Stanislavovic Bloch, *Is War Now Impossible?* (London: Grant Richards, 1899) as cited in Lambert, p. 509, n. 2; and Robert Giffen, "The Necessity of a War Chest in the Country, or a Greatly Increased Gold Reserve," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, July-December 1908, as cited in Lambert, p. 535, n. 40. For the essential statement of Liddell Hart's 'blue water' view, see Basil Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932). The relevant works by Mahan and Corbett are too numerous list, but three books provide convenient points of departure for their ideas: James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf (editors), *Mahan Is Not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1993); Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson

That said, *Planning Armageddon* provides a salutary reminder that the pervasive notion of Britain's strategic 'overstretch' in the early twentieth century must be carefully qualified. Lambert's findings testify to the objective strength of Britain's position in the globalizing power balance of the early twentieth century. A singular feature of Lambert's book is its engagement with work by economic and financial historians such as Barry Eichengreen, Ronald Findlay, Kevin O'Rourke, and Jeffrey Williamson, underscoring the value of such works to naval and strategic historians.⁵ Lambert's narrative also links up nicely with studies on the American side by Jonathan Winkler and William Silber.⁶ As a study in the entwining of strategy and globalization, *Planning Armageddon* can and should be seen as a major contribution to the ever-growing literature on the latter as much as the former. I asked graduate students to read it in tandem with Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson's handy monograph on *Empire and Globalization*, and I think with good effect.⁷ More than twenty years ago, Avner Offer anticipated some of Lambert's themes in his own path-breaking study, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation*. Despite its rather bleak title, Offer's book invited readers to cast a strategic eye over the predominantly economic and cultural landscape of writing on globalization.⁸ Lambert's book sharpens and reissues that invitation for today's generation of imperial and international historians.

Still another way to read *Planning Armageddon* is as a timely contribution to intelligence history. The Admiralty's Naval Intelligence Division (NID) embraced the essential concepts behind buzzwords like 'information dominance' and 'fusion centers' a century before they cluttered up PowerPoint slides in the Pentagon. At least one prominent authority, relying on Lambert's previous scholarship, has traced the beginnings of 'network-centric warfare' to the NID and the development of the Royal Navy's 'War Room' system during the Fisherera.⁹ Operationalizing the offensive advantage of the British Empire for economic warfare

Center Press, 1997) and J. J. Widen, *Theorist of Maritime Strategy: Sir Julian Corbett and His Contribution to Military and Naval Thought* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

⁵ Barry Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Ronald Findlay and Kevin O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999).

⁶ Jonathan Reed Winkler, *Nexus: Strategic Communications and American Security in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and William Silber, *When Washington Shut Down Wall Street: The Great Financial Crisis of 1914 and the Origins of American Economic Supremacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁷ Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalization: Networks of People, Goods, and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁸ Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁹ Norman Friedman, *Network Centric Warfare: How Navies Learned to Fight Smarter through Three World Wars* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), pp. 3-12; and Nicholas Lambert, "Strategic Command and

presented a massive intelligence challenge, especially in terms of managing the sheer volume of data—from general statistics on trade to the itineraries of specific ships. The new complexity of information compounded the difficulty. The combination of steam propulsion and trans-oceanic telegraphy conferred unprecedented flexibility on shippers to adjust schedules, destinations, and buyers at different points along any given voyage. Tracking cargoes as opposed to ships became all but impossible. Lambert is particularly interesting on how the NID grappled with this problem by cultivating an intimate relationship with Lloyd's of London, the great insurance syndicate behind much of the world's maritime commerce, and on how the navy continued to leverage expert talent in the City during the war itself.

In fleshing out Fisher's brains trust in the NID, Lambert sketches several marvelous pen portraits. He puts Maurice Hankey in his place, neither diminishing the importance of the later Cabinet secretary nor exaggerating his role in the early formulation of British plans for economic warfare against Germany; he is critical of Edmond Slade, but detailed in his reasons; and he is at his best in describing the seminal influence of Charles Ottley, who served as Director of the NID between 1905 to 1907 and subsequently preceded Hankey as secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defense. Lambert is also very good on the entirely unfamiliar story of wartime recruits into naval intelligence from the City: Robert Brand from the merchant bank of Lazard Brothers; Frederick Leverton Harris, a marine underwriter connected with Lloyd's; and Edward Hilton Young, a corporate lawyer and Liberal MP, who fleet commander Admiral John Jellicoe brought on board in 1915 to head his own specialized economic staff and help reinvigorate the navy's discombobulated blockade against Germany. Then there is George Alexander Ballard, a brilliant and high-flying officer, who was Ottley's principal assistant in the NID and his heir apparent. In 1911, however, Winston Churchill, as the new civilian head of the navy, appointed Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge to lead the NID in place of Ballard. Disparaging Churchill's decision, one insider declared that Ballard had "more brains in his little finger than Troubridge has in his great woolly head" (38).

Ballard turned to writing history after the war, authoring three acute and stylish books on world sea power: one on Japan in the Pacific, the next on America in the Atlantic, and the last on the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ The importance of geography as a foundation of sea power was Ballard's connecting theme. Geography similarly looms large as a factor in Lambert's account. Fisher described the British Isles as a "sort of huge breakwater against German commerce, which must all come either one side of the breakwater through the Straits of Dover, or the other side of the breakwater north of Scotland" (66). From his later vantage in the 1920s, Ballard worried that the continuing rise of large, modern navies outside

Control for Maneuver Warfare: The Creation of the Royal Navy's 'War Room' System, 1905-1915," *Journal of Military History*, v. 69, n. 2, April 2005.

¹⁰ G. A. Ballard, *The Influence of the Sea on the Political History of Japan* (London: Duckworth, 1921); *America and the Atlantic* (London: Duckworth, 1923); and *Rulers of the Indian Ocean* (London: Duckworth, 1927).

Europe had eroded the advantage: neither American nor Japanese fleets had to transit Europe's narrow seas to reach the open ocean. Other observers worried about the competitive advantage that Eurasian land power might achieve over the long-term through the expansion of mechanized transport. But, in the Fisher era at least, naval enthusiasts had considerable reason to be optimistic. The Admiralty's statistical picture of world trade indicated that the autarkic potential of some 'Mackinderan' super-state—whether German or Russian—was overrated. In particular, the huge granary formed by the Ukraine and Russia's southern steppe depended primarily on sea routes through the Black Sea and Mediterranean to reach its major European markets, including Germany. Movement by railroad and river was no adequate substitute—a fact, as Lambert points out, that did not escape Admiral Fisher.

Readers interested in present day concerns over access in the 'global commons' will find much to contemplate in Lambert's study. Perhaps the most obvious analogy is to American maritime strategy in the context of China's growing power. Numerous observers have made the comparison to the Anglo-German antagonism of the early twentieth century, and many have speculated about the utility of blockading China in the event of hostilities with the United States. Some have even mooted the potential of a 'distant blockade' in the Indian Ocean to exploit China's increased dependence on minerals and hydrocarbons from Africa and the Persian Gulf.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Pentagon's evolving doctrine of 'Air-Sea Battle' to force access in China's near seas (and in an Iranian context to the Gulf) seems somewhat redolent of the Baltic projects imagined by the Fisher-era Admiralty. But these are operational concepts, and hardly constitute 'national strategy.'¹² Perhaps the more salient analogies and lessons, if any, are those that relate to cyber warfare. Lambert's conceptual themes certainly seem to pertain: the interlinking of strategy, technology, information, and the economy; the capacity to mount offensive operations for systemic effect; the ambivalent partnership between business and the military; and as the current controversy over the National Security Agency makes plain, the complicating pressures of law, diplomacy, and domestic politics.

By way of conclusion, it should be stated that however far the implications and versatility of *Planning Armageddon* may go, the book is neither didactic nor 'presentist' in either its substance or tone. Lambert has written a historian's history of British grand strategy in the era of World War I. And he vigorously prosecutes his case. Such a book cannot help but to provoke disputation by specialists. But *Planning Armageddon* sets a benchmark in its integrated approach to global economic history and strategic affairs: Lambert's book is the one for the seminar room, in addition to comprehensive reading lists and essential reference. It is scholarship to be widely read, pondered, and debated—well beyond its

¹¹ See, in particular, Douglas C. Peifer, "China, the German Analogy, and the New Air-Sea Operational Concept," *Orbis*, v. 55, n. 1, 2011, which offers a convenient overview of the current debate as well as a detailed discussion of 'distant blockade' in relation to China (pp. 125-129).

¹² On this point, see Geoffrey Till, *Asia's Naval Expansion* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), p. 83.

ostensible niche. What stronger endorsement can there be?

By contributing a book that forces historians to rethink the nature of British strategic planning in the crucial years 1901-16, Nicholas A. Lambert put us all in his debt. Lambert, associate fellow of the Royal United Service Institute, Whitehall, London, is no stranger to this topic, having written a study of Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord from 1904 to 1910 and again in 1914-15. He has delved into countless military documents and manuscript collections, some used for the first time, to offer a definitive account of Britain's economic strategy. Not surprisingly, his narrative is highly revisionist, with the author challenging leading historians and traditional interpretations at every turn.

Several years before World War I broke out, as Lambert shows, the Admiralty advocated total *economic warfare*, a policy seeking "to precipitate the rapid collapse of an enemy's financial systems and so disorganize its economy as to produce total military paralysis" (1). As one Admiralty memo noted in 1908, Germany would face "unemployment, distress, &c., and eventually bankruptcy" (124). Fisher, no hidebound sea dog, understood the relationship between naval power and the Empire's commercial lifeblood far more than did most civilian leaders. He believed that economic war, if used effectively, would render unnecessary any decisive dreadnought battle on the North Sea. Nor would there be any need to send divisions to the continent.

Similarly, in 1912 a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, headed by the Fifth Earl of Desart, concluded that such a program would force Germany to sue for peace quickly. To be concrete, Britain would deny Germany access to essential shipping, communications, and financial service, crippling the German economy while fostering social upheaval. By promising rapid victory at low cost, the strategy could be seen as Britain's counterpart to the Schlieffen plan.

Britain entered the war early in August 1914 with economic warfare the cornerstone of its grand strategy, its cabinet and Admiralty issuing royal proclamations and orders-in-council to implement this policy. Within weeks, however, pressure from neutral powers and various agencies within its bureaucracy caused the embryonic system to break down. As the scheme involved unprecedented violations of Britain's *laissez-faire* tradition, particularly in the realms of shipping, finance, and communication, it met with strong resistance from many business leaders, who found a powerful voice in the Board of Trade. As the system inhibited the commerce of such powerful neutrals as the United States, the Foreign Office continually sought its modification.

By the end of August, Britain first relaxed, then virtually abandoned such total economic war. The reason: it endangered an already weakened global trading system. By the end of the year it replaced such wide-sweeping pressure with the more orthodox tactic of *blockade*, a measure that it had used effectively since the mid-eighteenth century. Here Britain sought to regulate trade between continental Europe at what Lambert calls a 'micro level,' that is, regimenting individual suppliers and consumers. The introduction of the submarine, however, made this old-style blockade tactic obsolete. So, too, did the

revolution in banking, communications, and credit, which created difficulties in determining legal ownership and the ultimate destination of any cargo (known as “continuous voyage”). What Lambert calls “vigorous indecision” (in the title to Chapter eight) followed, as elements of the British bureaucracy worked at cross-purposes. Hence, for at least eighteen months, the blockade was usually ineffectual, so much so that ministers seriously considered abandoning it. Noting the great rise in trade between the United States and the Scandinavian nations during the winter of 1914, Lambert posits that such contraband traffic, financed by the City of London (i.e., the financial district) and transported in British ships, might be the greatest untold scandal of the war. Only early in 1916 did Britain engage in serious reappraisal.

Some observations are particularly fascinating. At the turn of the century the Admiralty focused not on war against Germany but between France and Britain. During the crisis of summer 1914 Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, forever vacillating between lethargy and recklessness, may have suffered some sort of nervous breakdown. When that August the Germans forced the retreat of [or pushed back] the British Expeditionary Force at Mons, War Minister Horatio Kitchener told the cabinet, “We are going through 1870,” a reference to France’s debacle in its war against Prussia (232). British naval intelligence was reading American diplomatic traffic during the entire war, not simply-- as scholars have suggested-- from its midpoint onward. In October 1914 the Wilson administration was less concerned with legal prerogatives than with the war’s impact on the American economy. Livestock, copper, petroleum, and especially cotton interests greatly feared loss of German markets. In February 1915 First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill hoped to entice ships flying the American flag into the war zone, where German U-boats might torpedo them and thereby precipitate a major crisis.

As the volume unfolds, Lambert questions one traditional interpretation after another. Fisher and Churchill did not simply quarrel over the Dardanelles fiasco. Their strategies always differed, particularly as Fisher saw the North Sea as the more important theater. Lambert questions Grey’s claim, published in his memoirs, that British dependence on American resources caused him in 1915 to “secure the margin of blockade that could be enforced without a rupture with the United States. (374). Historians have been wrong to take the foreign secretary at face value: at that time the British still hoped to meet all Allied needs, not just their own, through domestic arms production; Grey was still unconvinced that Britain must prepare for a long war; as yet no one in the government believed that the Allies were dependent upon the United States.

Lambert’s references to anxieties over social upheaval are most compelling. In late July 1914, Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George feared that entering the war would produce “violence and tumult” in the coming winter (192). John Morley, Lord President of the Council, foresaw his nation experiencing a situation “verging on the humour of [18]48” (ibid.) On August 3, Lord Esher, a prominent military reformer, wrote that the ministers feared above all “the inevitable pressure of want of employment and starvation upon the operatives in the North and midlands,” which “may lead to a highly dangerous condition of affairs” (199). Such anxieties caused the cabinet to retain two divisions at home, sending only four to France.

Lambert challenges the arguments of John W. Coogan and Robert W. Tucker,¹ both of whom accused the Wilson administration of being flagrantly unneutral from the outset of the conflict. Certainly such figures as Woodrow Wilson and Colonel Edward M. House were far from encouraging systematic British violations of neutral rights. To Lambert the American government did not display a benevolent neutrality towards the British. Rather, it ruthlessly acted to foster its own trade. In so doing, it secured such far-reaching concessions that it rendered economic coercion ineffective. Profit-minded Dutch and Scandinavian merchants enthusiastically cooperated with American firms in expediting food shipments that were ultimately destined for Germany.

Not surprisingly, Lambert confronts American historians on specific points. He finds Ernest R. May² wrong in his treatment of British opposition to the American purchases of German liners. The British did not fear that Germany would use the money to buy strategic materials; rather they feared that the ships would be added to the American registry, thereby being able to transport more American goods to Germany. Furthermore, writes Lambert, Wilson's bid to buy German merchant ships clearly violated international law codified in the 1909 Declaration of London. Arthur S. Link, in his *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*, errs in interpreting the Anglo-American dispute of fall 1914 primarily through diplomatic and political lenses, not fully grasping the effect that certain major changes in the infrastructure of global trade exerted on the negotiations.³

Lambert is particularly critical of Coogan's work. He argues that by focusing entirely on legal issues, Coogan neglects Wilson's desire to bypass such matters in favor of a more private accommodation. Challenging Coogan's claims, Lambert posits that the British were not intimidated by State Department Counselor Robert Lansing's protest of December 26, 1914. Britain, Lambert argues, did not 'seize' contraband (an argument that needs to be more finely honed). Sowing mines on the high seas was not illegal.

Coogan argues that had Wilson ordered warships to escort American merchantmen, Britain could not have retaliated, for its navy was already strained in fighting Germany. Lambert differs, suggesting that had the United States used force to defend its supposed 'rights,' the Allied navies would have held their own in any maritime conflict, substantially damaging the American economy in the process.

Early in 1915, so Lambert posits, Wilson probably did not-- contrary to Coogan's claims-- resist calls for firmness because of Allied sympathies. The earlier orders-in-council had

¹ John W. Coogan *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915*, (NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering American Neutrality, 1914-1917*, (Charlottesville, VA; University of Virginia Press, 2007).

² Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation*, (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 1959)

³ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

been expressed in quite general terms, containing a public assurance that 'legitimate' tasks could continue unfettered. When it became apparent that Britain sought to regulate all European trade, Wilson planned to take strong diplomatic action, only being stopped by the *Lusitania* sinking.

The book could use minor improvement. The subtitle *British Economic Warfare and the First World War* promises more than the book delivers. *Planning Armageddon* does not cover the entire span of the Great War, for well over half the conflict was still to come. The work only takes the story down to February 1916, when the cabinet established the Ministry of Blockade under Lord Robert Cecil. In a sense, the reader is left suspended in midair, having read close to five hundred pages only to reach a rather abrupt ending. Joseph Hodges Choate, not "Augustus Choate," was America's chief delegate to the Second Hague Conference (76). Occasionally the author will refer in the text to "historians" who take a particular position but the endnote cites only one individual.⁴ A bibliography would have been helpful. The index is far too brief, covering only major historical actors. Even historians specifically mentioned in the text itself are not included.

Such quibbles aside, Lambert has produced a formidable work, essential to any understanding of politics and strategy in the Great War. Even this lengthy review by no means does justice to the subtleties of his arguments or the thoroughness of his research.

⁴ Examples include 134, note 145; 136, note 57; 257, note 188.

The imminent hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War has already produced an outburst of books that reinterpret the conflict that defined the twentieth century, or what George Kennan memorably called “*the great seminal catastrophe of this century.*”¹ Most recent interpretations move away from the orthodoxy as formulated in the 1960s by Fritz Fischer and others that held Germany to be primarily responsible for the catastrophe: they emphasize instead, as the title of Christopher Clark’s excellent study has it, how the European political leaders were “sleepwalkers” into disaster.² But no modern book has changed the terms of the discussion of the character of the conflict as decisively as that written by Nicholas Lambert.

The central argument of the Fischer thesis rested on the extensive planning, both before and after the outbreak of the conflict, that appeared to establish a primarily German culpability. The September 9, 1914, memorandum of Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg sketched out a plan for annexations of some territories, but also a vision of a postwar economic and monetary order. That view was also propagated by center-left politicians, notably the liberal thinker Friedrich Naumann, who published in the middle of the War a programmatic book entitled “Central Europe” (*Mitteleuropa*). Point 4 of the memorandum envisaged: “a central European economic association constructed through common customs agreements, to comprise France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Austria-Hungary, Poland and possibly Italy, Sweden, and Norway. This association will probably have no common constitutional head and will provide for ostensible equality among its members, although it will in fact be under German leadership; it must stabilize Germany’s economic predominance in central Europe.”³

Almost every book about planning for war inevitably centers on military strategy. But it should have been clear that an essential part of the debate about the relationship of all the different plans and scenarios is centered on the question of the economic capacity to fight wars.

Nicholas Lambert has uncovered a whole new version of planning for war, and essentially has rewritten our understanding of what produced the Great War. He puts together an amazing range of documents, as part of an exercise in rediscovering a history that was deliberately obfuscated in official histories after the War. The book rests on a mastery of

¹ George Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck’s Order: Franco-Russian Relations 1875-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

² Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012).

³ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht; die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914/18* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961), pp. 116-118; there is an English translation of the September memorandum available as: http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=980

two sorts of literature that have normally been quite separated from each other. Lambert gives a powerful and convincing demonstration of the insights that can be achieved by setting the history of grand strategy in a larger framework of analysis. The book should also be a model of how much financial historians should learn from analysts of the international system.

Lambert starts off by asking a very simple but fundamental question: what did the navy mean for Great Britain? In the initial pages of the book, he brilliantly shows how Britons saw the Royal Navy fundamentally as an insurance for British economic and commercial life. They reasoned about it on actuarial terms. Later in the book, he demonstrates how Lloyds of London functioned as an auxiliary to British naval intelligence.

Great Britain had a naval preponderance, and was also the world's financial superpower. The idea of the novel British strategy at the beginning of the twentieth century was to link both these elements of hegemony: Britain effectively controlled the infrastructure of the world commercial system as well as having supremacy of the seas. Not only was a large part of the world's commercial shipping in British hands; Britain also controlled the insurance business; and most trade – even for products produced and bought by third parties – was financed through bills drawn on the City of London, accepted by London acceptance houses (mostly merchant banks), using the financial resources of the giant new commercial banks (so-called clearing banks). The cables that transmitted the information about commercial transactions were also British. Britain could thus control the nerve centers of the international order.

In one influential interpretation, as popularized by Norman Angell, the interdependency of the increasingly complex global economy made war impossible.⁴ But a quite opposite conclusion was possible and equally plausible, that a clever twist to the control levers might make war easily winnable by the economic hegemon.

Between 1905 and 1908, the British Admiralty evolved the broad outlines of a plan for financial and economic warfare against Germany. The key figure initially was the director of naval intelligence, Captain Charles Ottley, a figure seemingly out of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, an officer whose path to promotion was hampered by his chronic seasickness so that he hardly ever went to sea (his last promotion had been as captain of a ship anchored off the shore at Constantinople to guard the British embassy, and he resigned after one day). His assistant Captain George Ballard had already in 1902 prepared a paper suggesting that the best way to deal with the new German naval threat was to cripple German overseas trade, so that "it might cause such loss to the enemy that the pressure of commercial influence – increasing in Germany – would end the war without further measures on our part" (39). The idea of economic warfare was taken up with boyish enthusiasm by First Sea Lord Admiral Sir John Fisher in a striking letter that is quoted by Lambert in full. Fisher wanted to use every resource, legal or illegal, to enforce a

⁴ Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: a Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage* (London: W. Heinemann, 1910).

blockade that would shorten the war. “MIGHT IS RIGHT” & when war comes we shall do just as we jolly well like! *No matter what your laws are!* We’ve got to win and we ain’t going to be such idiots as to keep one fist tied behind our back” (99).

The crucial report that embodied the new outlook was the work of a committee chaired by an Irish peer, Lord Desart, who had also once been a midshipman, but – as Lambert puts it – “naval service did not agree with him,” presumably because he suffered from the same sensitive stomach as Captain Ottley. (143) At the end of 1912, this report, arguing that economic warfare, if implemented in full, would wreck Germany’s financial system and force it out of any war. The report was discussed by the Committee of Imperial Defence, and a resolution accepting its key recommendation drafted personally by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. The key to a future conflict would lie in the control of Belgium and the Netherlands. A few seasick naval officers thus stumbled on a promising plan for world dominance.

In August 1914, after the German attack on Belgium and France, Britain started to implement the strategy. But it was never effectively realized, with the result that at least after the dramatic failure of the Dardanelles, there seemed no alternative to the massive and bloody deployment of armies on the Western Front. Lambert’s account, based as it is on a complete mastery of the archival evidence of all the different parts of Britain’s complex decision-making apparatus, mostly blames the failure to realize the war-shortening capacity of economic warfare on internal bureaucratic conflict. Fisher’s interpretation had never been universally accepted in the halls of Whitehall: as he put it, “these worms don’t understand it & looked at me as a wild lunatic.” For Lambert a particular villain in the story is Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, a man with a mediocre academic record (a third class Oxford degree in jurisprudence), no command of any foreign language and little foreign experience, and subject to mostly depressive mood swings.

There is another, alternative, explanation of the change in British strategy that is also laid out in the pages of Lambert’s masterly book. That is that the principal initial victims of the new policy were the neutral countries, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, but above all the United States. The clever naval boys hadn’t quite thought of that. In particular, it became clear that the primary casualty of the collapse of the global economy and of the financial system would be not Germany, but the United States. Unsold southern cotton piled up, prices fell, bills were protested, and the dollar plummeted against the pound. The collapse of cotton exports in the eyes of Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo meant that there was a risk that the U.S. would default on overseas debts because of a shortage of foreign exchange. Grey and Asquith pressed to give way, and modified the British campaign in the October 1914 order-in-council that allowed goods through to neutral ports. From those ports, the goods moved on to sustain Germany’s war effort. The surprise of the book is the extent of the Anglo-American antagonism produced by the war in 1914 – and the extent to which the arguments of America’s first post-independence war one century earlier, in 1812, came back. It was not at all obvious that the U.S. could be Britain’s ally.

The shift came about only late in the course of the war, when in 1917 Germany seemed to adopt some element of the earlier British thinking about the adoption of a smart strategy that would starve the enemy into submission: unconditional submarine warfare. It was the German U-boats that turned the course of the war, but in the unintended direction of bringing American power firmly behind France and Britain.

It is of course not news that British financial power translated into real geopolitical power. That point had indeed been made by the most famous work on practical economics in the nineteenth century, Walter Bagehot's *Lombard Street* (1873), which described the City of London as "the greatest combination of economic power and economic delicacy that the world has ever seen."⁵ The naval visionaries portrayed in this book realized the point about how power could work on delicacy when they had to confront a new naval power in the shape of the Kaiser's Germany.

But the discussion of the interlinkage of financial and strategic power became more commonly discussed – in more countries - after the frightening financial crisis of 1907. It was that shock that seemed to have been the trigger for a more widespread adoption of the new philosophy. In March 1908, Sir Robert Giffen delivered a paper to the Royal United Services Institute on war and finance, entitled "The Necessity of a War Chest in the Country, or a Greatly Increased Gold Reserve." He explained that he had been persuaded to think of financial power by the storm of 1907 that demonstrated serious weaknesses in the foundations of modern finance (111).

That financial storm encouraged the same kind of debate in other countries. Perhaps the appearance of this book will encourage the emergence of a literature on other countries that parallels Lambert's British investigation. The outlines of that story might already be clear. For the United States, the panic of 1907 showed the necessity of some sort of central bank analogous to the Bank of England. But it also convinced the American innovators that New York needed to develop its own commercial trading system that could handle bills in the same way as the London market. At this time, federal legislation actually prohibited trade acceptances as well as foreign banking activity.⁶ The central figure in pushing for the development of an American acceptance market was Paul Warburg, the immigrant younger brother of a great Hamburg banker who was the personal adviser of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who in 1910 presented to the U.S. National Monetary Commission a report on *The Discount System of Europe*.⁷ The brothers Warburg, Max and Paul, were in fact on both sides of the Atlantic energetically pushing for German-American institutions that would offer an

⁵ Walter Bagehot, *Lombard Street: A Description of the Money Market* (New York: Scribner Armstrong, 1873), 4.

⁶ See Barry Eichengreen and Marc Flandreau, "The Federal Reserve, the Bank of England and the rise of the dollar as an international currency, 1914-39," BIS Working Paper No 328, November 2010; and Marc Flandreau and Stefano Ugolini, "[Where it all began: lending of last resort and the Bank of England during the Overend-Gurney panic of 1866](#)," [Working Paper](#) 2011/03, Norges Bank.

⁷ Paul Warburg, *The Discount System of Europe* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910).

alternative to the British industrial and financial monopoly; and they were convinced that Germany and the United States were growing stronger year by year while British power would erode.⁸ For the moment, though, it was clear that Germany was vulnerable: thus, for instance, in 1911, during the Moroccan crisis, Germany had been crippled by a financial market collapse and needed to reach a humiliating diplomatic compromise. Financial shenanigans had become an instrument of Great Power rivalry.

In the wake of an epochal financial crisis that almost brought a complete global collapse, in 1907, several countries thus started to think of finance as primarily an instrument of raw power, that could and should be turned to national advantage. That kind of thinking brought war in 1914. A century later, in 2007-8, the world experienced an even greater financial shock. In its wake, many countries have begun to look at financial protectionism as a way of increasing their political leverage. Lambert's book is more than just very good history: it is a quite compelling and alarming cautionary tale for the present.

⁸ See Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York: Random House, 1993); also on the Hamburg family, Eduard Rosenbaum and A.J. Sherman, *M. M. Warburg & Co., 1798-1938, Merchant Bankers of Hamburg* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1979).

An introduction that is equal to a commanding and comprehensive historiographical essay followed by the unequivocal endorsements of three distinguished scholars should prompt a short and grateful author's response. I am indebted to Professors Katherine Epstein, Harold James, Peter John Brobst, and Justus Doenecke for having taken the time to read *Planning Armageddon* so very closely. They all identified the central arguments therein and elucidated the implications of my findings for their respective fields. I thank them not only for their thoughtful comments and kind words, but also for their well-founded suggestions for improvement.

"A few seasick naval officers thus stumbled on a promising plan for world dominance." If ever a new edition of my book is printed, James's marvellous sentence will become the epigraph to the new introduction. Yet James, of course, provides much more. In the space of a few paragraphs, he pinpoints the heart of *Planning Armageddon* – the novel idea of marrying Britain's naval predominance to its financial hegemony to create a new and lethal form of strategic power. I am as relieved as I am honoured that such an eminent economist and historian should concur in the notion that in the globalized economic world as it existed in the decades prior to the First World War, this strategic innovation amounted to a weapon of mass economic destruction: the possibility of an Armageddon was very real.

In exploring some of the broader implications, James suggests that scholars need to look much more closely at events surrounding "the frightening financial crisis of 1907." I agree that the impact was of greater intensity and more broadly felt than I allowed. He points out that other observers, including some in Germany and in the United States, were shaken by the severity of the financial storm and, like Sir Robert Giffen, having noticed the weaknesses exposed in the foundations of modern finance, contemplated the strategic implications. While there are many fine books on this crisis, I share James's conviction that an aspect has been missed and there is more work to be done. In the same paragraph James chides me, very politely and gently, for not having paid closer attention to the 1911 Agadir Crisis. Again, he is quite right. During my research I did detect hints that the British (and perhaps French) attempted financially to humiliate Germany, but I was unsure whether those attempts were concerted and in any case failed to pursue this line as vigorously as I should have.

Turning now to Brobst's remarks. No appraisal could mean more to a scholar than for his work to be called "a historian's history." If, as Brobst believes, contemporary analysts should also draw useful analogies from my study of British economic warfare, that would be a welcome bonus. Yet truthfully my intent in writing this book was much more modest: to delineate British strategic intent during the period 1900-1914; to chart the development of strategy for economic warfare in that globalized age; to explain why, after the outbreak of hostilities, the pre-war plans were so quickly abandoned; and to show how the successor British strategy was formulated and the means improvised during the first eighteen months of the First World War.

I wholeheartedly agree with Brobst's observation that the "study of war plans" can "all-too-often have a disconnected quality to it." He highlights my conviction that historians of twentieth-century strategy must be far more rigorous in exploring the political and fiscal dimensions of the subject -- a point also noted by James. If I may amplify a little: since writing my last monograph more than a decade ago (!), I developed the sense that something important was missing from traditional accounts of pre-1914 British strategic outlook and war planning. The private papers of many contemporary policy-makers make clear their awareness that future warfare would be a far more complex business than ever before. More than uncertain about the kaleidoscopic nature of the strategic environment, they struck me as unsure about the very nature of strategy itself. The methodological implication was that 'strategy' cannot be treated as a stable category of historical analysis but must be historicized. I thus sought to create a framework for understanding the parameters of strategy at the beginning of the twentieth century, by identifying its drivers and constraints as they appeared to contemporary policy-makers. My point of departure was that the fundamental change in the structure of the world economic system that occurred during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which we now call 'globalization', transformed the British strategic environment in terms of both perception and reality.

It was a relief that Doenecke did not voice any fatal objections to my thoughts on Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy. While I do, as he says, "confront American historians on specific points," I relied heavily and gratefully upon their efforts. I should like here to express my particular admiration for Arthur Link for having so well laid the essential groundwork. While he did not quite grasp all the economic implications of certain policy dilemmas, perhaps because he did not have access to all the material now available to historians, especially on the British side, I think (and said) that he did immeasurably better on this score than any of his contemporaries and a good deal better than some of his successors. His 1957 article on cotton, written without full access to the U.S. archives and none to the British, is a masterful display of scholarly craft – the intelligent imagination of holes in the historical database (at that time) and how they might best be filled.¹ The same can be said of Ernest May.² 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.³ He has confronted the legal issues involved in the Anglo-American wartime relationship more directly than any other scholar. That said, though perhaps I give too much credit to Woodrow Wilson, I adhere to my view that he grasped the economic implications of the

¹ Arthur S. Link, "The Cotton Crisis, the South, and Anglo-American Diplomacy, 1914-1915" in J. Carlyle Sitterson (ed.) *Studies in Southern History* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1957) 122-138.

² Ernest May, *The World War and American Isolation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

³ John Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: the United States, Britain and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915*, (Cornell University press: Ithaca NY, 1981).

war better than historians have given him credit for, and thus that the charges often levelled against him—that either his Anglophilia or his idealistic commitment to international law caused him to act against the best interests of the United States—are unwarranted.

Doenecke's only serious "quibble" is that "*Planning Armageddon* does not cover the entire span of the Great War" and thus that the subtitle "promises more than the book delivers". I concede the point. I regret not having articulated more clearly in my conclusions my reasons for not taking the story beyond early 1916, and I wish to take the opportunity to do so now. The easiest way to do so is by way of an analogy. My aim, at the outset, was indeed to build a railway that would span the continent from coast to coast (1914 to 1918). I began in the east, and my company successfully laid continuous track to the far side of the Mississippi (February 1916). Additionally, the company surveyed the entire route ahead, and where the terrain was easy it completed the grading and even laid some track. The problem was that the survey also revealed many previously unknown major obstacles – mountains, rivers, canyons and gorges etc. - that could not be overcome using existing engineering methods at reasonable cost. (For one thing, my page count would certainly have exceeded the forbearance of my editor, Kathleen McDermott at Harvard.)

Turning now from the realm of analogy: there were two good reasons for stopping in early 1916. First, January saw the introduction of the conscription bill, and February the creation of the Ministry of Blockade, an emergency department with hitherto undreamt-of powers to overrule established departments of state. These decisions, pregnant with strategic, political and even constitutional implications, mark the boundary of epochal change. A new war began for Britain. Second, the more closely I looked at the road ahead, the more daunting appeared the scale of research necessary to traverse the period 1916-1919. I found that major work needs to be done on the following: the impact upon the British government in June/July 1916 of the twin catastrophes for British arms off Jutland (at sea) and on the Somme (on land); the reformation of the Ministry of Blockade in October 1916; the near-simultaneous realization of the British government that they faced bankruptcy; the ability of the government nevertheless to maintain their credit for another twelve months; the impact upon blockade administration and policy of the entry of the United States into the war as co-belligerent in April 1917; the British government's recognition of the necessity to 'conscript money' and British society's acceptance of the necessity; and the collapse of Russia and the emergence of the spectre of Bolshevism, which seemingly encouraged allied governments, international corporations, and societies to take measures that they had previously regarded as unthinkable. To tell the complete story of the 'blockade' from mid-1916 onward, these subjects must be addressed and with enormous research. Alas, the task was beyond me.

In *Planning Armageddon* I endeavoured to lay the foundations. It is rewarding to know that, after close inspection, Professors James, Brobst, and Doenecke find my construction sound. I hope that other historians will find it worth extending and building upon.

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