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Deterrence through Strength: British Naval Power and Foreign Policy under Pax Britannica

Angus K. Ross

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by their complete lack of regard for tradition and worthless theories.”

American wars along the Great War-path, Cohen reminds us, were parts of European wars. The Atlantic Ocean more linked us to Europe than it insulated us from it. Moreover, these wars exposed us to a full range of seventeenth-to-nineteenth-century European warfare, from set-piece battles to what could be called unconventional and secret warfare. They also brought the full horror of war to us. Cohen explodes the contemporary European notion that the United States did not become “the territory of war” or exposed to terror until 2001. Indeed, terror in the form of murderous raids on New York and New England villages marked much of its colonial period.

Among many other things, Cohen argues that the American appetite for the kind of unconditional surrender pursued by Franklin Roosevelt in World War II had its grounding in the eighteenth-century American intention to destroy the enemy polity that was Canada. More than that, America’s wars to attach Canada to itself were wars for the freedom of that polity. Cohen says, “If any countries have ever been ‘conquered into liberty,’ as the Continental Congress had written to the doubtful *habitants* of Canada in 1775, they were Germany, Italy, and Japan, occupied and transformed by armies that combined, in paradoxical degree, thoroughness in defeating an enemy and an unlimited, even naïve, commitment to liberating him.”

Cohen’s book is an astonishingly good read in addition to being highly thoughtful and often revelatory.

KEN JENSEN
McLean, Virginia



Matzke, Rebecca Berens. *Deterrence through Strength: British Naval Power and Foreign Policy under Pax Britannica*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2011. 320pp. \$45

Historians have long argued about the true mechanism behind a ninety-year period of relative peace in Europe, a period that began with the end of the Napoleonic wars and became known as the *Pax Britannica*. Over the years critics have questioned both aspects of this term—whether the period was actually as peaceful as its title suggests and whether that peace really was, in large part, due to Great Britain’s overwhelming and imposing commercial, industrial, financial, and naval might. Through a searching analysis of political decision making during three different crises within an eight-year period, Rebecca Matzke’s book, itself a developed and published version of the author’s Cornell University dissertation, seeks to add weight to the notion that Britain did indeed use the strength and versatility of the Royal Navy as an effective deterrent force during this time.

The author explains that on three separate occasions between 1838 and 1846 (Canadian trade and border disputes with the United States, 1838–42; the Syrian crisis, 1840–41; and the first Opium War of 1839–42), British politicians, in particular Lord Palmerston, were not afraid to threaten the use of, or to use, naval power to further discrete British interests on the world stage and to coerce and influence the activities of their main rivals in Europe. In each case, while the immediate aim was obviously to benefit British regional activities, each was undertaken with an eye to preserving the broader peace

and stability of the international order as a whole. In other words, Britain's defensive "status quo" policy was implemented by operationally offensive threats or means. Furthermore, Matzke clearly shows that the British politicians well understood that if they failed to respond to some of these lesser challenges (the Chinese opium war being a prime example), over time they risked weakening their ability to influence their major adversaries in the future, in situations where the stakes might be higher.

During the course of her analysis, Matzke takes issue with established scholarship holding that the relative inactivity of the Royal Navy during this period was indicative of its comparative weakness within Europe as a whole. On the contrary, she depicts an early Victorian navy that was well up to the task, possessing shipbuilding, logistics, and manpower support superior to that of any competitor. It was this depth of capability that represented its major coercive value, particularly to the European rivals, often allowing what she terms demonstrations of Thomas Schelling's "skillful nonuse of military force." Moreover, the British instinctively knew all this, giving them great confidence in their brinkmanship with rivals. The case of the successful coercion of France in the Egyptian/Syrian crisis is a notable example.

Matzke's work is meticulously researched, using a wide array of contemporary archival material that focuses on the collected thoughts and writings of the main players involved, material taken from their personal papers, letters, and diaries. The weakness in her work lies in the admittedly implicit assumption that this short period can

be taken as truly illustrative of the situation throughout the whole of the *Pax Britannica*. Arguably, Matzke has found a narrow historical period where thesis and facts align, but she is less convincing over the broader time frame, and more work would likely be necessary to settle this point decisively. Less important, but nonetheless still of concern, is her rather rosy picture of the reliability of the steamships of the day. As John Beeler has forcefully demonstrated, truly globally deployable, oceangoing steamers would have to wait until the late 1880s to be realized; their limitations until then, in terms of maintenance requirements and support while deployed, facts of which navies were only too well aware, do not come across well. That said, this is an important work that successfully advances the study of British naval policy into an earlier period. When taken together with the more established scholarship of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, it moves us closer to a more complete understanding of British efforts to wield naval power in support of a global free-trading system. As such, it has timeless relevance.

ANGUS K. ROSS
Naval War College



Kleinen, John, and Manon Osseweijer, eds. *Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Singapore and Leiden: ISEAS Press and International Institute for Asian Studies, 2010. 312pp. \$74

Liss, Carolin. *Oceans of Crime: Maritime Piracy and Transnational Security in Southeast Asia and Bangladesh*. Singapore and Leiden: ISEAS Press and International Institute for Asian Studies, 2011. 446pp. \$82.35