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If Mahan Ran the Great Pacific War: An Analysis of World War II Naval Strategy

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invasion. The swiftness with which Germany implemented a scorched-earth policy designed to eliminate all traces of Polish society is truly breathtaking. Evans convincingly argues that the “final solution” was well under way by the time the notorious Wannsee Conference convened in January 1942.

Wannsee was merely an attempt to eliminate bureaucratic infighting and reinforce the authority of Hitler’s point man, Reinhard Heydrich, for the Holocaust.

Evans has written the kind of book to which all scholars aspire. It is a volume in which a lifetime of research and writing comes together in a powerful, and at times moving, manner. It is a book that is sure to become a classic.

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Adams, John A. *If Mahan Ran the Great Pacific War: An Analysis of World War II Naval Strategy*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008. 472pp. \$34.95

It is said of Secretary of War Henry Stimson that in World War II he “frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy was the only true Church.” Now we can judge the validity of that comment, thanks to John Adams’s *If Mahan Ran the Great Pacific War*. Adams grades both the U.S. force and its opponent, the Imperial Japanese Navy (another service professing Mahanian orthodoxy), according to their respective adherence to the sacred text. The result is a lively, interesting exercise in

counterfactual history, one that deals both with what occurred and what might have occurred had the high commands of both navies been more true to what one might call “the revealed Word.”

Counterfactual history is suspect to many historians, who feel they have enough problems figuring out what actually happened, let alone considering what could have happened. However, the Strategy and Policy course at the Naval War College thinks differently, seeking a host of alternatives. Adams essentially agrees, possibly because he is a business executive and not a professional historian; he has written this excellent book as an avocation (more power to him). “War is too important to be left to the generals,” said Clemenceau in World War I. History is too important to be left to historians, if they will not write about counterfactual contingencies.

My reservations about this book are slight but do exist. Excuse my sacrilege, but having taught for twenty years at the U.S. Army Staff College, I cannot help thinking that there might be occasions when Mahan’s precepts could be insufficient. Take his well known injunction, “Don’t divide the fleet.”

Admiral William F. Halsey took this to heart when he was in command of the Third Fleet at the largest naval battle in human history—Leyte Gulf, in late October 1944. As all readers of this journal know, Halsey took his entire force with him to chase down a decoy rather than divide it and provide a blocking force of battleships and escort carriers to prevent a Japanese exit from the San Bernardino Strait. Since Mahan, presumably, cannot be wrong, the blame must fall to Halsey, for not realizing

that his fleet was so powerful that he could divide it and still sustain local superiority. However, because Mahan never considered a situation such as this, one must judge him inadequate as a guide in the last year of the great Pacific War.

“No plan survives first major contact with the enemy,” wrote Helmut von Moltke the Elder, chief of the German General Staff in the mid-nineteenth century. If this be true of plans, which are far less abstract than theories, should one expect that Mahan provides adequate direction through all the contingencies that a warrior might face?

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Parkinson, Roger. *The Late Victorian Navy: The Pre-dreadnought Era and the Origins of the First World War*. New York: Boydell, 2008. 323pp. \$145

Roger Parkinson's study of the Royal Navy from 1878 to the 1890s provides a useful overview of a period in British naval history that is sometimes seen as a neglected "Dark Age." He takes issue with the standard work of the period, Arthur Marder's first book, *British Naval Policy, 1880–1905: The Anatomy of British Sea-Power* (1940). In this published version of his University of Exeter doctoral thesis completed under Dr. Michael Duffy, Parkinson expands on the insights of Oscar Parkes, Bryan Ranft, Donald M. Schurman, Paul M. Kennedy, N. A. M. Rodger, Jon T. Sumida, and John Beeler with his own detailed research work in parliamentary papers, the Admiralty and Cabinet

Office files at the National Archives, Kew, and the private papers of Lord Salisbury, Britain's prime minister in 1885, 1886–92, 1895–1902, at Hatfield House.

Parkinson's central focus is on the background and the effect of Britain's Naval Defence Act of 1889 in the period that has come to be called—and even dismissed as—the “pre-*Dreadnought*” era. He is reported to be preparing a follow-up work that will focus on the era of HMS *Dreadnought* from 1906 onward. In the volume at hand, Parkinson argues that most historians of the period have accepted too easily Arthur Marder's picture of Britain's relative naval weakness in comparison with other European naval powers. In particular, Parkinson shows that Britain was not by any means a weak naval power and that W. T. Stead's famous articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 1884 were based on a gross exaggeration of the actual state of affairs. The key consideration, he points out, was maintaining a naval force that was equal to that of the next two largest naval powers, France and Russia. The effort to maintain that margin of supremacy in terms of naval expenditures, tonnage, and warship numbers resulted in the Naval Defense Act in 1889. Parkinson maintains this was the spark that ignited the naval race that lasted until the Washington naval arms-limitation treaty of 1922. As a result, Britain's strategic situation changed from one that was a relatively stable balance between Britain facing France and Russia up to the 1880s to one of the late 1890s and early twentieth century that became a “strategic melting pot with not three but eight major naval powers—Britain, France, Russia, America, Germany, Japan, Italy,