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British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era 1866-1880

Tony Johnstone-Burt

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many will disagree with his conclusions and characterization, his thoughts deserve careful consideration. Shulman clearly places the development of the U.S. Navy in the 1880s and 1890s within a new and different context, leading us toward a deeper understanding of circumstances surrounding the climate that allowed its growth. He points out factors that, heretofore, have often been ignored by naval historians.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

Beeler, John F. *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era 1866-1880*.

Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997. 354pp. \$49.50

Now that the United Kingdom has emerged, battle scarred but wiser, from its Strategic Defence Review (the equivalent of the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review, or QDR), with aspirations for leaner, more expeditionary and joint armed forces, and a clear challenge to deliver its promises, Beeler's introduction will strike a chord—not only with officers in the Royal Navy but also with naval officers around the world. With its references to a period of changing political leadership; a revolution in technology; an expectation of a "peace dividend"; an increasing awareness of public opinion; the power of the press; and a drive to do more with less, better, faster, and cheaper, all of it superimposed on a changing geopolitical map, one could be forgiven

for having a very strong feeling of *déjà vu*.

However, John Beeler, currently assistant professor at the University of Alabama, cautions against drawing parallels too hastily between the past and present. He stresses the importance of acknowledging the uniqueness of each historical era and of assessing each period on its own terms. Covering the period between the mid-1860s and mid-1880s, Beeler has produced a classic work of scholarly historical analysis, one based on at least a decade of painstaking research. Most naval historians tend to view the latter half of the nineteenth century as a period of relative peace for Britain, marked by political vacillation and strategic myopia of British naval policy makers, who were in the midst of an expanding colonial empire and a surge in technological innovation. He points out that this notion of peace was compounded by those who viewed that period through a Mahanian lens, resulting in an analysis of "pre-Mahanian British naval policy in a post-Mahanian framework"—all of which has distorted the interpretation of a largely neglected period of history prior to the Naval Defence Act of 1889.

Beeler's alternative and broader view acts as a counter to this negative appraisal. His research goes far beyond, and to greater depth than, the work of most naval historians in penetrating the complex web of social and political forces at work beneath the highly visible flagship of technological revolution. He draws out the influence of the British domestic political scene, as well as of the media, in shaping government fiscal policy, the shortfalls of the Admiralty Board in

administrating the fleet, the disproportionate effect of individual personalities on national policy makers, and British perceptions of foreign governments and navies.

His thesis focuses on the fact that whilst the strategic planning and administration of the mid-Victorian navy may have been flawed and contradictory in retrospect, at the time—and when compared with those of Britain's naval rivals—its policies and strategy were deemed to be wholly adequate and no more flawed than what had previously passed as a coherent foreign and domestic policy. Beeler does not dispute that the lack of a sustained threat from abroad encouraged the Admiralty to experiment with ship design, often with mixed results (viz. the *Captain*, which ended in disaster and the loss of five hundred lives), which opened it to the criticism of having a “fleet of samples, the miscellaneous collection of bizarre and ill-assorted designs.” However, Beeler stresses the wider significance of their deterrent effect on Britain's rivals and their influence on shaping foreign policy—whatever the vessels' operational value in reality.

Readers of the *Naval War College Review*, especially students of the Naval War College's Strategy and Policy Department, will find useful how Beeler begins and ends his book with an extremely good analysis of the prevailing strategic perspective of the period. The first two chapters illustrate the strategic boundaries, constraints, and limitations within which British policy makers were operating. In the final chapters and epilogue, Beeler refutes the charges that the Admiralty's strategic naval planning received short shrift during

the period and that British strategic aims were poorly articulated. He argues that it was more a case of not being able to develop a coherent and practical strategy, given the incompatibility between the aims of the policy makers and the limitations of the technology at the time.

Where this book sets itself apart from others is in Beeler's in-depth analysis of the personalities of the admirals, senior civil servants, and politicians, and their influence on the policy-making process, often through political manoeuvring and manipulation of the media. One reference that I will never forget comes from the *United Services Gazette* in 1871: “The present Board of Admiralty may be described in one word—Chaos.” Consequently, the heart of his book lies between Chapters 5 and 7, which focus on the impact of the Liberal politician Hugh Childers's reforms of naval administration, the machinations and mutiny of the naval lords, the demise of Childers as a result, and the ascendance of his successor, George Goschen, as the First Lord.

This is an important piece of work, one that transcends a single readership group and deserves the attention of serving officers, naval historians, economists, and political scientists alike. It is a unique insight into a period of history when a great power was facing economic and geopolitical global changes and a rapidly transforming technology that was sweeping away previous experience and perceptions and demanding a new strategy underpinned by an innovative regime of tactics. Does this sound familiar? However, in this case the policy makers lacked a coherent vision of the future of naval

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warfare in the coming twentieth century. Is our vision penetrating enough for the twenty-first?

TONY JOHNSTONE-BURT, OBE
Captain, Royal Navy

Brown, David K. *Warrior to Dreadnought: Warship Development 1860-1905*. Annapolis, Md: NIP, 1997. 224pp. \$35

This large-format volume comprises a detailed textual and pictorial history of Royal Navy ship design and construction in the latter half of the nineteenth century. A number of dominant themes convey the author's purpose. First is the influence of innovative technology on hull design, armor, propulsion, guns, and projectiles. Second is the manner in which the ship design process evolved from experience-based, single-person artistry to a standards-based, scientific team effort. Third is the noteworthy progress made in the understanding and application of ship stability factors. Finally, each chapter offers fascinating insights concerning why and how design and construction decisions were made (dispelling certain historical myths in the process) and the forceful personalities involved.

Although the Royal Navy did not participate in a major conflict during the period addressed by this book, the author weaves his themes into a nonetheless dynamic, fast-paced story of warship development. The transformation begins with HMS *Warrior*, whose "ultimate technology of 1860" was represented by iron hull and soft armor,

broadside batteries of short-range guns, and dual propulsion of sail and box boilers to achieve a speed of fourteen knots. It concludes with HMS *Dreadnought*, whose all-steel construction, armored rotating turrets with guns that could "reach the horizon," and a steam turbine plant (twenty-one knots top speed) defined big-warship character and capabilities in advance of World War I.

The author documents meticulously the many influences that contributed to this transformation. Categories and examples (not exhaustive) of such influences are: science (the quest for stability principles, the introduction of modeling), technology (wood/iron/steel, engine design, guns, and projectiles), combat lessons (the U.S. Civil War and the Sino-Japanese, Spanish-American, and Russo-Japanese Wars), maritime commerce (availability of coaling stations, the telegraph's impact on trade routes), culture (the relationship between strategy, ship design, tactics, and armaments), national politics (defining the Royal Navy's role, budgets and funding, its search for "cheap wonder ships"), and geopolitical considerations (the two-power standard).

Trite as it may sound, this is truly an instance where an author brings significant experience and expertise to his subject. David K. Brown retired in 1988 as the Deputy Chief Naval Architect of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors, and he currently serves as vice president of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects and the World Ship Society. He is widely published, with more than 130 books, articles, and papers to his credit. *Warrior to Dreadnought* is the chronological companion to his