

1995

A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II

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Recommended Citation

Weigley, Russell F. and Weinberg, Gerhard L. (1995) "A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 48 : No. 4 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol48/iss4/13>

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— WORLD WAR II — 50 YEARS ASTERN

**“The Threat to Civilized Life,
Posed by the Axis Powers with Values so
Completely Monstrous,
Was Why the Second World War Was
Worth Fighting.”**

Weinberg, Gerhard L. *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994. 1,178pp. \$34.95

NO STUDENT OF WORLD WAR II should dismiss this book simply because it is a survey history. It is a blockbuster of a survey, grounded, to a remarkable extent for so large a work, in primary sources and also in an evident mastery of the secondary literature. It is a joy to read: lively, vigorous, and opinionated (often to the point of being caustic) but altogether a stylistic gem of the sort that professional historians write all too rarely.

Weinberg's opinionated quality can be found in his willingness to identify good and evil as just what they are without succumbing to the historical relativism that is so unwilling to make judgments that it portrays both black and white as gray. He reminds us that the threat to civilized life, posed by the Axis powers with values so completely monstrous, was why the Second World War was worth fighting. Thus there is no shilly-shallying pretense that a separate British peace with Germany would not have been unreasonable following the fall of France. It was peace feelers extended by Germany to Great Britain that encouraged the notion that because of Hitler's love-hate relationship with the British and his admiration of the British Empire, he allegedly would have allowed the empire to remain essentially intact in exchange for acknowledgment of his hegemony

in Europe. However, what Hitler actually had in mind for the British, who if treated leniently might have threatened again his long-term domination, was death for the leadership groups, exile to scattered locations for many, and subjugation to the German master race for the rest.

Yet Hitler's intentions toward the United States were not so well defined. Weinberg helps us to clearly understand Hitler's maritime ambitions. Ultimately the Führer intended that Germany become not only the dominant land and air power but the preeminent maritime power as well. His *Kriegsmarine* was to include not only the world's mightiest submarine fleet but also a formidable surface force of large battleships and carriers able to overcome the Anglo-Saxon powers in their own element. The outbreak of war in 1939 caused a postponement, which Hitler believed to be only temporary, of the surface fleet buildup. But construction was interrupted twice again, in the autumn of 1940 during the intensive preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union and in late 1941, when it became evident that the land war in the East would not be won quickly. Thereafter the opportunity to resume the big-navy project never returned.

Weinberg dispels the belief that Hitler never cared about sea power (except for submarines) when he argues that one of the principal reasons for solidifying his relationship with Japan was the suspension of plans for a major German surface fleet. When Germany entered into the Tripartite Pact on 27 September 1940, it was hoping to make use of the Imperial Japanese Navy against the navies of the United States and Great Britain, thereby offering a stopgap for the eventual German fleet. Unfortunately for Hitler, the Japanese navy suffered from fatal deficiencies of its own: the failure of the Axis to create a combined naval strategy, coupled with Japan's lack of industrial strength to conduct a warship-building competition against the United States. Fortunately for the Allies, the Axis proved incompetent in global strategic planning, as Weinberg details in his assessment of Japanese purposes: "Japanese forces invaded Thailand, beginning what they called freeing Asia from European control by seizing Southeast Asia's only independent country." He is especially effective in his discussion of the missed opportunity by the Axis to exploit the Japanese naval penetration of the Indian Ocean in 1942, not only to threaten India but also to constrict the Western Allies' lines of communication to both North African and Soviet theaters of war.

However, even more impressive is the author's equally clear-eyed recognition of cynicism in the policies of certain non-Axis countries. For example, Weinberg tears to shreds the rationalization that the Soviet Union's Nonaggression Pact with Germany of 23 August 1939 was a justifiable or at least understandable effort to buy time and a buffer zone. Far from benefiting the Soviets, the pact did much to ensure that they would begin their own war against Germany without a second front in the West, for which they were to plead so desperately; meanwhile they were eagerly complicitous in German aggression, notably by providing a base at Zapadnaya

Litsa near Murmansk to assist in the assault on Narvik, Norway. Less immoral perhaps but deserving of Weinberg's acrid remarks are the later self-righteous lecturers to the world on international morality: the Swedes. Geography obviously gave them plenty of reason to fear Hitler, but they went well out of their way to cooperate with him even after the tide of war had turned and the cause for fear had diminished.

Thus *A World at Arms* offers refreshingly forthright judgments on every major aspect of World War II strategy and policy. Moreover, while even so large a book cannot deal in detail with most of the campaigns, Weinberg has crammed an impressive quantity of information and his customary candid opinions into the sections on military operations, including the United States Navy's war in both the Atlantic and Pacific.

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Smith, Bradley F. *The Codebreakers' War: The Ultra-Magic Deals and the Most Secret Special Relationship, 1940-1946*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1993. 229pp. \$24.95

Bradley F. Smith's *The Codebreakers' War* chronicles the developing cooperation between the United States and Great Britain aimed at sharing secret wartime cryptanalytic information. Smith sets the scene for that cooperation by establishing the Anglo-American diplomatic background and introducing the intelligence organizations of both nations. Here, of course, the U.S. was notably deficient. Its intelligence capability was severely underdeveloped, suffered from significant interservice rivalries, and had a troublingly cavalier attitude toward security—all characteristics calculated to retard the development of an intelligence partnership. The product of

thorough research in collections and archives, and heavily although often confusingly footnoted, Smith's work fills in many of the blanks in the bureaucratic "courtship" of the two countries that resulted in an agreement of unprecedented proportion in the realm of secret communications.

Proceeding in fits and starts, the nations started down the path to a comprehensive agreement as early as August 1940. Much of the early British inducement toward cooperation stemmed from their overestimation of U.S. accomplishments, while American interest was piqued by the very real technical advances that the British were able to demonstrate. Smith goes to great lengths to point out the laissez-faire attitude taken by the Roosevelt administration toward intelligence matters and repeatedly castigates both Army and Navy cryptanalytic organizations