

***THE FATEFUL TRIANGLE:
THE UNITED STATES, GREAT BRITAIN, GERMANY AND THE RIVALRY THAT
FORGED THE AMERICAN CENTURY***

By

Gregory Mitrovich

Birth of the American Age

It was early morning on May 7th, 1945 when Colonel General Alfred Jodl, Chief of Staff of the Germany Army, arrived at Allied Headquarters in Reims, France to sign the instruments of surrender that would end World War II in Europe. The headquarters, located at Reims' *Ecole Professionnelle*, was painfully familiar to Jodl and his subordinates—it had once been the military headquarters for the German occupation army in France. Following Reims' liberation, it became the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and now, finally, the location of the German Army's surrender.¹

Jodl and his staff entered the building shortly after 2 a.m. and were quickly shuffled into a large classroom. Awaiting them were senior officers from the American, British, French, and Soviet armies who presented the Germans with the terms of surrender. Jodl signed the papers at 2:41 a.m., then rising from his seat, sheepishly addressed the victors. "General, with this

¹ [Boyd Lewis, "German Surrender Scene Described," *United Press International* May 7, 1945](https://www.upi.com/Archives/1945/05/07/German-surrender-scene-described/1123163084011/)
<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1945/05/07/German-surrender-scene-described/1123163084011/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

signature the German people and the German armed forces are for the better or worse delivered into the victor's hands . . . I express the hope the victor will treat them with generosity.”²

Moments later Jodl was escorted to the office of the Supreme Allied Commander, the U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had refused to meet with his vanquished foe until the surrender agreements had been signed. As Jodl entered, Eisenhower rose from his chair, coldly glared at his defeated enemy and issued his final orders. “Do you understand all the provisions of the document you have just signed?” he asked tersely. Jodl answered with a single yes.

Eisenhower then warned “You will, officially and personally, be held responsible if the terms of this surrender are violated . . . That is all.” With that brusque dismissal, Jodl saluted, clicked his heels, and departed. Moments later Eisenhower dispatched a message to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall writing simply “the Mission of this Allied Force was fulfilled at 0241, local time, May 7th, 1945.”³

History has relegated the Eisenhower-Jodl meeting to a mere footnote, the final crossing of a “T” and the dot of an “I” at the end to the most disastrous conflict in human history. Though this meeting may have meant little to the history of World War II, it powerfully symbolized the changing of the international guard at the war's end: Great Britain's loss of global supremacy, the destruction of Germany and the end of its hegemonic aspirations, and the emergence of the United States as the world's most powerful nation.

To fathom just how dramatic a shift in the global balance of power this represented we need only compare Eisenhower's routine exercise of command that May of 1945 with America's insignificance just seven years earlier during the 1938 Munich negotiations. There the leaders of

² Ibid.

³ [As quoted in Paul Herbert “Remembering Victory in Europe: V-E Day 1945](https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20150508/news/150509185/)
<https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20150508/news/150509185/> (accessed Oct 10, 2018).

Britain, France, Germany, and Italy met to resolve the Sudeten crisis that had brought Europe to the brink of war, a war that would obviously have enormous global ramifications. Yet, notwithstanding that meeting's historic importance, no United States representative attended, nor was this absence considered noteworthy; despite its economic power and influence, the U.S. remained a nation that existed largely on Europe's periphery. Fast forward a mere seven years and hardly a single issue that has affected the European continent escaped America's scrutiny.

The tale of how President Franklin Roosevelt stirred America to end its historic isolationism, enter World War II, and assume the responsibilities of global leadership is enshrined in history; the creation of what we call the American Century. That beginning, however, was the flip side of another equally important drama: the conclusion of a complex power struggle between the United States, Great Britain, and eventually Germany for global supremacy. This rivalry began peacefully, with early America's political and cultural challenge to Europe's system of monarchies and hereditary aristocracies, until the rise of Germany during the last half of the 19th century changed everything.

America, according to Thomas Jefferson, was to be a shining "City on a Hill" that would inspire old Europe to do away with their royal families, adopt America's new republican system of government, and abandon traditional European balance of power politics that he blamed for Europe's countless wars over the previous centuries. If they adopted America's vision, Europeans had the opportunity to witness a new age of peace and prosperity.

Since the new American republic would reject power politics as the basis of its foreign and security policies, Jefferson and his followers reasoned there was little use for large, peacetime professional armies and navies, which many believed had posed threats to past

republican governments.⁴ Instead, America would concentrate on growing its economy and nurturing its revolutionary society while spurning European militarism. Consequently, for nearly the entirety of the 19th century, America's peacetime military capability barely exceeded ten thousand soldiers and a few dozen warships, leaving the United States practically defenseless against attack from a well-armed European nation—not quite the characteristics often associated with a rising power.⁵ While the United States expanded across the continent and its economy grew by leaps and bounds, its military power stagnated, arising only briefly during the Civil War before returning back to its meager peacetime dimensions. Indeed, by the middle of the 19th century breakthroughs in continental military technology, particularly the use of steam, steel, long-range naval guns, and exploding shells—advances that the United States hadn't fully employed until the creation of the "New Navy" in the late 1880s—meant that American "hard power" was in a perennial state of decline throughout the century.

Considering Europe's historic lust for empire and long-held fascination with South America this made for both an unexpected and perilous strategy. In 1823 President James Monroe had committed the United States to forestalling European colonization of South America following the collapse of the Spanish Empire, yet America's peacetime military capability left

⁴ On this point, see Robert Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 3-25.

⁵ This point was made very strongly by two important 19th century military studies comparing American military preparedness with European capabilities. See the report by Major Richard Delafield "the Art of War in Europe, 1854, 1855, and 1856." Downloaded from the Internet <https://archive.org/details/reportonartofwar00unit/page/n5>. Based on his studies of the Crimean Wars, Delafield warned that Europe had the ability to rapidly transport tens of thousands of battle-hardened troops across the Atlantic and "cripple" America's war fighting potential. Similar arguments were made by Navy Chief Engineer J. W. King in his 1877 report "European Ships of War and Their Armaments." King quotes John Ericson, the designer of the U.S.S. Monitor, warning that the latest British steel battleships could sail into New York Harbor and issue terms for surrender leaving America with little recourse but to submit. As the American navy possessed only a few dozen wooden warships and a handful only obsolete Monitors, this was no exaggeration. The King report can be located on Google Books. https://books.google.com/books/about/Report_of_Chief_Engineer_J_W_King_United.html?id=CMJCAAAAYAAJ

the nation woefully ill prepared to meet the objectives of the Monroe Doctrine. However, Monroe made his declaration knowing that the British government had already committed itself to preventing any of its European rivals from exploiting South America should the Spanish and Portuguese empire's collapse.⁶ The Royal Navy would prevent any European rival from challenging Britain's commercial and political dominance in the Western Hemisphere, and thus protect America's shores as well. As long as the Royal Navy retained its ability to control the world's oceans, and—equally important—the United States avoided inciting Great Britain's wrath by challenging vital interests such as Canada and the West Indies or its commercial ties to the Western Hemisphere, America would remain secure from either British or foreign attack. Foreign powers would loath engaging in a trans-Atlantic display of power without Britain's tacit approval.⁷ Despite the notorious pride of the American people, this dependence appealed to the nation's republican sensibilities as it would keep America secure without it having to build a permanent peacetime military or dirty its hands in global power politics. America could enjoy its historic isolation behind the powerful fleets of the Royal Navy.

The unification of Germany in 1871 and its subsequent domination of central Europe forced Britain to refocus its attention to Europe, recall its fleets to home waters, and abandon *Pax Britannica*, effectively ending America's strategic dependence on the British Empire and forcing it to fend for itself. Germany's growing power set in motion a cascade of events that would forever transform America's relations with London and Berlin launching a decades-long rivalry

⁶ J. Fred Rippy "The Struggle for Latin America," *World Affairs* 103/1 (March, 1940) pp. 51-55.

⁷ Only once was this policy breached, in 1861 when the French convinced the British to occupy the Mexican port city of Vera Cruz in an effort to force Mexico to repay overdue debts. The French dispatched an army that proceeded to install Austrian Archduke Maximilian as Emperor of Mexico. Consumed with the American Civil War, among other global crises, Britain chose not to confront France at that time. In 1867, with the end of the American Civil War France was forced to withdraw its support and Maximilian was overthrown, captured, and executed. Ephraim Douglas Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, (Project Gutenberg E-book), loc. cit. 4728

between the three countries that would exhaust Britain, lead to Germany's destruction, and set American on the road to becoming the military superpower long feared by Thomas Jefferson.

The Shifting Balances of Power

With Napoleon's defeat in 1815, and the restoration of the European balance of power system during the Congress of Vienna, Great Britain stood alone as the world's dominant global power. The Royal Navy controlled the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans and provided stability for the world's burgeoning international trade—the epicenter of which was Great Britain. One of its many fleets, the North American and West Indies Squadron, enveloped much of the Western Hemisphere protecting Britain's dominant commercial interests in the North and South America while preventing European rivals France and Russia from establishing new colonies, or Spain from recovering its collapsing empire.⁸ That powerful fleet also served as a constant reminder to the United States and the rest of the continent's new republics that at any moment Great Britain could attack their coastal cities or disrupt their global trade should it have reason to do so. This was a lesson the United States repeatedly learned throughout the French revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 when the British decimated U.S. foreign trade with a blockade of the American coastline, impressed thousands of American sailors, and eventually occupied and burned Washington D.C.⁹ That same threat would hang over the United States for decades to come.

⁸ The British supported the North American station with smaller squadrons based out of the Falklands in South America and Vancouver in the Pacific Northwest.

⁹ According to PBS special, *History of the British Navy* between 1793-1815 over 15,000 U.S. sailors were impressed into British service. <http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/british-navy-impressment/>. This was enough to man 30 British battleships.

Prussia's victory over France in the war of 1870-71 overturned the European balance of power system, forcing Great Britain to increasingly refocus its attention to the European theater.¹⁰ Under the wise and restrained leadership of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, Berlin was able to stabilize the continent once again by creating a new balance of power centered on Germany that kept the French and Russians divided and avoided any significant confrontations with the British.

By the late 1880s a new generation of German leaders had emerged, led by the boisterous Emperor Wilhelm II, who viewed Bismarck as an impediment to their ambition of making Germany a true world power. Bismarck resigned in 1890, and immediately thereafter the new German leadership launched a grand strategy, *Weltpolitik*, designed to raise Germany's status to that of an equal rival to Great Britain. This sparked a domino effect that would reorder the global balance of power and result in two catastrophic wars.

Responding to Germany's growing ambitions, and with the hope of challenging British dominance, in 1894 France and Russia concluded the Dual Alliance, a set of commercial treaties and security agreements which bound the nations economically along with a mutual defense treaty aimed largely at Germany but with eyes on Britain as well. The goal was to deter German aggression by ensuring Bismarck's greatest fear—a two-front war in Europe. However, it also realized Britain's century-old nightmare, an alliance between its two historic arch-rivals, uniting the world's second and third largest navies whose combined strength could threaten British supremacy.¹¹

¹⁰ See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin Random House: 2017) pp. 203-237.

¹¹ On British attitudes towards the possibility of war with France and Russia, see Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, Penguin Books, 1998) p. 45.

Faced with potentially hostile Russian, German, and French fleets within a relatively short distance from the British Isles, Great Britain's leaders realized it was time to abandon *Pax Britannica*. This in turn forced the British admiralty to commence with a strategic recall of the Royal Navy to the European theater, a retreat that would accelerate with Germany's decision only a few years later to challenge British naval superiority.¹² As Great Britain retreated, the Kaiser and his aids eagerly embraced *Weltpolitik* and Germany's desire for its "place in the sun" to quote his Chancellor Bernhard von Bulow.¹³ The Germans were especially interested in expanding their influence in South America, not just commercially but territorially as well, and vigorously challenged America's cherished Monroe Doctrine, what even Bismarck had contemptuously dismissed as "an insolent dogma" and "a species of arrogance peculiarly American and inexcusable."¹⁴

By the late 1890s the United States faced two unpalatable realities: British retrenchment and German expansion, which forced U.S. political leaders to rethink their military posture and the nation's previous abhorrence to balance of power politics. American military planners interpreted Britain's retreat as a declaration that the U.S. could no longer assume British intervention should Germany challenge the Monroe Doctrine, soberly concluding that: "The United States is therefore isolated and can count upon no active friend in Europe whose interests coincide with hers."¹⁵ Lacking potential allies, the only recourse for the U.S. was a rapid expansion of its naval power and the acquisition of a global system of military bases to project

¹² Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare, 1815-1914* (New York: Routledge 2001) Kindle Edition, Loc. 4310. Samuel F. Wells, "British Strategic Withdrawal from the Western Hemisphere, 1904-1906," *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 49/No. 4 pp. 335-356.

¹³ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p. 214.

¹⁴ Holger Herwig, *The Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1914* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976) p. 72.

¹⁵ Warner Schilling, "Admirals and Foreign Policy, 1913-1919" Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1953, p. 20, 23.

that power around the world—what many historians have christened the beginning of the American empire.

From 1895, with the deployment of the USS *Texas*, America’s first steel battleship, until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the United States battleship fleet grew to a grand total of thirty-four ships, including ten new *Dreadnought* class warships, and a Navy totaling 224 vessels, making it the third largest naval power in the world.¹⁶ The U.S Navy was still but a fraction of the size of the Royal Navy, which in 1914 totaled 532 ships, including thirty-four dreadnoughts either deployed or nearing completion in addition to the existing fleet of fifty-one pre-dreadnought battleships—with hundreds of new warships under construction.¹⁷

America’s entry into the global political arena created a convoluted rivalry between the three powers as they jockeyed for supremacy at the turn of the 20th century, with each nation considering the other two either potential enemies or possible allies. Towards the end of the 19th century, a rapprochement increasingly developed between the United States and Great Britain, with elites on both sides reemphasizing both nation’s common “Anglo-Saxon” roots, commercial ties, and potentially converging national security interests.¹⁸ America’s rise, however, also triggered deep resentments in a Britain that found its world supremacy increasingly under challenge by growing German military and industrial power and the spread of what today we might call the “American model” of business, politics, and society.¹⁹

¹⁶ U.S. Ship Force Levels, 1886-Present; <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#1898>

¹⁷ The Royal Navy Encyclopedia; <https://www.naval-encyclopedia.com/ww1/royal-navy-1914>

¹⁸ Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement* (New York: Antheneum, 1968). See also Andrew Carnegie, “The Reunion of Britain and America: A Look Ahead.” 1893. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60214531>; W.T. Stead *Americanization of the World*. 1902

¹⁹ See Paul Kennedy’s discussion about the decline in British manufacturing dominance in *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin, 2017 Kindle Edition) pp. 203-237. For British reactions to America’s rise, see F. A. McKenzie *The American Invaders*. 1902.

Though World War I would align the interests of the United States and Great Britain, American bitterness towards the British blockade of Germany and its impact on American trade as a neutral nation—reminiscent of British heavy-handedness before the War of 1812—caused many Americans, including President Woodrow Wilson, to demand the creation of a “navy second to none.” Furthermore, U.S. naval strategists increasingly feared that America’s growing commercial challenge to British economic supremacy could trigger a sharp confrontation with the Empire. They warned:

Four great powers have arisen in the world to compete with Great Britain for commercial supremacy on the seas—Spain, Holland, France, Germany. Each of these Great Powers (sic) in succession have been defeated by Great Britain and her fugitive Allies (sic). A fifth commercial Power (sic), the greatest one yet, is now arising to compete for at least commercial equality with Great Britain. Already the signs of jealousy are visible. Historical precedent warns us to watch closely the moves we make or permit to be made.²⁰

Fears of a postwar rivalry with the British were surprisingly widespread. The idea that economic competition and closed economic systems are causes of war had grown since the turn of the century and would become important considerations even decades later during the reconstruction of the post-World War II economy. In 1919 these concerns led to the Washington Naval Conference and the arms limitation treaties which froze capital ship construction to prevent a new arms race between the U.S., Great Britain, and Japan. What the treaty did not cover were cruisers, warships under 10,000 tons that were fast enough to hunt down enemy shipping. This would spark a naval arms race of fast cruisers though one hamstrung by the financial straits caused by the Great Depression.²¹

²⁰ Schilling p. 230.

²¹ Brian McKercher, *Transition of Power: Britain’s Loss of Global Preeminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006). Donald J. Lisio, *British Naval Supremacy and Anglo-American Antagonisms, 1914-1930*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

The rise of Hitler and the devastation of World War II drew the two nation's together once more. Entering the war after France's stunning collapse, with Britain hanging by a thread, and Germany on the verge of complete victory, the United States finally mobilized its enormous resources to turn the tide of the war. Already the world's "arsenal of democracy" the United States would also build a vast military complex—and a "navy second to none"—that supplanted the Royal Navy as the dominant power at sea after three centuries of British supremacy. In the European theater, British generals would, for the first time, report to an American commander, General Dwight Eisenhower.

World War II finally ended the German threat in Europe. However, it also sapped Great Britain of the strength to remain the world's supreme power. The United States, forced to mobilize its resources for total war, would at long last assume Britain's mantle. The three rivalries ended with Jodl's signature on the documents of surrender followed by Germany's dissolution as a nation one month later, and with the recognition by Great Britain's leaders that their nation was now America's junior partner and mentor; or as future Prime Minister Harold MacMillan reasoned, "our Greece to their Rome."

America's Rise and Implications for Today

The story of America's rise to power has garnered increasing interest over the past few years as policy analysts try to grapple with the rise of China, unquestionably one of the most important issues today facing the world community. Are we on the cusp of a new age of Chinese dominance?²² Will China's rise inevitably lead to war with the United States?²³ Or will China

²² Arvind Subramanian *Eclipse: Living in the Shadow of China's Economic Dominance* (Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics), 2011.

²³ John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?" *The National Interest* October 25, 2014.

become a true global partner.²⁴ The emerging consensus seems to favor a new “Chinese Century,” that “China Won”—to quote the cover of the November 2017 issue of *Time Magazine* with equally alarming implications.²⁵ Robert Fogel, the late Nobel Laureate in economics, argued in 2010 that by 2040 China’s GDP would reach \$123 trillion—40% of gross world product—and dominate the world economy as completely as did the United States after World War II.²⁶ The University of Chicago’s John Mearsheimer fears instead that China’s increasingly aggressive foreign policy is strikingly reminiscent of Imperial Germany’s policies prior to World War I and may be a prelude to war with the United States.²⁷

Given the options of a world under Chinese domination or global war, the foreign policy community has increasingly turned to historical examples for a third way, one demonstrating how great powers can peacefully emerge without triggering what specialists call “hegemonic wars”—a conflict for the domination of the world. The American example is one of the few historical cases where war did not break out between a rising power and the reigning hegemon and, not surprisingly, it has garnered increasing attention from policymakers in both China and the United States eager to understand how Great Britain and the United States managed the transition from *Pax Britannica* to the American Century.²⁸ For the American foreign policy community, the question is how to avoid hegemonic war. Chinese scholars, in contrast are

²⁴ Edward Steinfeld, *Playing our Game: Why China’s Rise Doesn’t Threaten the West*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁵ Ian Bremmer “China won,” *Time* magazine, November 13, 2017, <http://time.com/magazine/south-pacific/5007633/november-13th-2017-vol-190-no-20-asia-europe-middle-east-and-africa-south-pacific/> accessed 10/11/2018.

²⁶ Robert Fogel, “123,000,000,000,000; China’s estimated economy by the year 2040. Be Warned,” *Foreign Policy* Jan 4, 2010 [https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/01/04/1230000000000000/](https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/01/04/123000000000000/) accessed 10/11/2018.

²⁷ Mearsheimer, *Ibid.*

²⁸ Barry Buzan and Michael Cox, “China and the U.S.: Comparable Cases of ‘Peaceful Rise,’” *Chinese Journal of International politics*, Vol 6, 2013, pp. 109-132. Feng Yongping, “The Peaceful Transition of Power from the UK to the U.S.,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 1, 2006 pp. 83-108.

particularly intrigued by what they perceive to be Great Britain's willing descent to second tier status after nearly two centuries of global dominance, with the not so subtle subtext that America must now accept the new order with the same supposed grace and passivity.²⁹ However, scholars have become equally intrigued by the path taken by Germany, which many American academics and even a few Chinese scholars claim China is now taking and people fear will be a prelude to world war.³⁰

There are very powerful lessons that policy analysts can draw from recent international history that will help guide our current debate about China—and China's own debate about its future. However, these historic lessons need to be approached carefully and with recognition that each of these relationships need to be addressed with reference to the others: the U.S.-British relationship must be understood in context of the rise of Germany, and the American-German relationship as a function of the growing Anglo-German antagonism. When we do, we see there are two very different approaches that rising powers can take that offer radically different consequences.

These outcomes are not as apparent when we examine these cases as separate events: the U.S. versus Great Britain,³¹ Great Britain versus Germany,³² or the U.S. versus Germany.³³ Studies which do so often overlook the crucially important fact that these dyads acted in relation to each other, as legs of a triangle, so that by the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century there

²⁹ I thank noted China expert, Professor Victoria Hui for providing me with this insight.

³⁰ Xu Qiyu *Fragile Rise: Grand Strategy and the Fate of Imperial Germany, 1871-1914* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs) 2017.

³¹ David Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Kori Schake *Safe Passage: The Transition from British to American Hegemony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Graham Allison; *Destined for War: Can America and China escape the Thucydides Trap* (New York: Mariner Books, 2018).

³² Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980).

³³ Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning*.

existed a three-way rivalry for world supremacy between the world's dominant power, Great Britain, which was determined to hold on to its position, and its two equally ambitious rivals, Germany and America both of whom sought to usurp Britain and viewed the other as their chief impediment.

The first leg of this triangle was the challenge that the United States posed to Great Britain from the nation's birth in 1787 until the 1890s and the ever-present British threat to stem a rising America. After World War I, the American challenge would force the erstwhile allies to lock horns in a new rivalry for naval supremacy. The second leg—Great Britain and Germany—begins in 1871 with the rise of Imperial Germany and its victory over France, which shattered the stability of the European balance of power and transformed the continent's strategic relationships.³⁴ Eventually Germany would aim not just for European dominance but for its status as a world power, launching a massive naval buildup only several hundred miles from British home waters forcing the Empire to reluctantly accelerate the redeployment of the Royal Navy to the North Sea and English Channel.

The third leg was Germany's rivalry with the United States over South America. With Germany's increasing naval strength and mounting need for markets to fuel its expanding economy, the Kaiser looked to South America as Germany's greatest opportunity to export its finished products and for *Lebensraum*, living space for its rapidly growing population. Imperial Germany hoped to use immigration and the establishment of German colonies in key South American states such as Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil, to expand the nation's influence in the

³⁴ This story has been studied at length and therefore will not be addressed in this book. See in particular Paul Kennedy's *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (New York: Humanity Books, 1987).

region.³⁵ This led to a direct clash with the United States over Venezuela in 1902 and the first occasion when the U.S. deployed military force, fifty-four warships—nearly half the entire U.S. navy—to enforce the Monroe Doctrine.³⁶ The remaining bitterness between the Germans and Americans over that crisis would continue to spiral with Germany even making preparations for an attack against America’s Eastern Seaboard.³⁷ Within a decade the United States would break with its historic isolationism to fight in two world wars that would end Germany’s threat and Great Britain world’s dominance.

British Vulnerability and the Rise of American Power

One leg of this triangle, the United States and Great Britain, led to a rivalry but not warfare. The other two legs: Germany versus Britain and Germany versus the United States caused two world wars that shattered the Eurasian continent. What were the differences? How did the rise of the United States not threaten Britain sufficiently enough for it to intervene to prevent it, particularly when the British had two clear opportunities where it could have either blocked America’s expansion, as in the late 1840s, or facilitated the nation’s collapse in the Civil War? Why, on the other hand, did Germany’s rise so alarm Britain and the U.S. that it made war appear almost inevitable?

The answer lies in understanding the precarious foundations of Great Britain’s strategic dominance and its relation to the rise of both the United States and Germany. Though Great Britain was unquestionably the most powerful nation in the world, it was also a small island nation that had throughout its history been the subject of invasion from the continent, including

³⁵ Holger Herwig, *Germany’s Visions of Empire in Venezuela, 1871-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

³⁶ <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#1898>

³⁷ Herwig, *Politics of Frustration*, pp. 40-57; 93-113.

the Romans, the Angles and Saxons, the Vikings, and the Normans. In 1588 Spain dispatched a massive armada of warships to pave the way for the invasion of the continent; had the infant Royal Navy not defeated the fleet of Spanish galleons, heavily armed Spanish forces would have marched on London with little opposition. Britain's survival necessitated preserving its "absolute supremacy at sea."³⁸

However, by the mid 19th century new urgencies arose that dramatically magnified Britain's need for naval dominance: its growing population and adoption of free trade. Britain's decision to repeal the restrictive Corn Laws that imposed high tariffs on a wide range of imports greatly expanded its trade with the rest of the world. The impact was almost instantaneous as Britain's global trade revenues skyrocketed along with the lucrative insurance market on merchant shipping, further increasing its dominance of world commerce.³⁹ However, the influx of cheaper foodstuffs from huge American, Canadian, Argentinian, and Australian farms drove many indigenous British farmers out of existence. While this led to a welcome reduction in the cost of living for the general population it also meant that by 1846 Britain had become a net importer of food.⁴⁰ By the end of the century Britain would import two-thirds of its food supply.⁴¹

Britain's dependence on imported food heightened its already weighty concerns regarding the security of the seas surrounding the British Isles. The nation's survival depended on imports of raw materials to fuel its industrializing economy and food to feed its rapidly growing population, as well as military power to ensure the safety of a merchant fleet to export

³⁸ As quoted in Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 71.

³⁹ J. Holland; et.al, editor: "The Movement Towards Free Trade," *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Vol II* (Cambridge University Press, 1959); Greg Kennedy, "Maritime Strength and the British Economy, 1840-1850." *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord*, VII, No. 2 (April 1997), 51-69.

⁴⁰ Holland, *Ibid*.

⁴¹ Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) pp. 81-93.

finished British manufacturing products. British politicians became hypersensitive to the possibility that a foreign power (or powers) might one day develop the naval capabilities to cutoff British trade and food imports. Safeguarding Britain's naval mastery became the Empire's most important strategic goal, its loss would mean Armageddon. No challenge to Britain's naval dominance would be tolerated, resulting in the adoption of a "two-power standard" meaning that the British navy must be greater in size than the second and third largest navies combined. France hoped to rival British naval supremacy and remained a leader in naval technology until the latter 19th century. Consequently, for most of the 19th century the Royal Navy focused its attention on the French and Russian navies, their relations with Great Britain careened between crisis and war throughout the century.⁴²

The United States, on the other hand, maintained only a small fleet of warships to carry out basic tasks such as anti-smuggling operations and protecting American shipping against piracy. Indeed, the U.S. deliberately chose *not* to create a significant naval capability, an utterly counterintuitive decision given the history of ill will with Great Britain and the territorial aspirations of the European empires in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, it was a decision that more than anything else made the rise of the United States possible.

While the admirals of the Royal Navy respected the French navy and recognized the threat Russia posed if allied with France, it was the creation of an American navy that worried British leaders the most. American naval prowess during the War of 1812 had earned the nation great respect from the commanders of the Royal Navy. While the British could, grudgingly, dismiss the "frigate duels" given the size advantages of the *U.S.S Constitution* and the rest of

⁴² Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, pp. 39-45.

America's 44-gun frigate class, which the British characterized as "pocket battleships," there was no denying the capabilities demonstrated by the Americans on the Great Lakes where the nations engaged each other in two pivotal battles with fleets built from scratch. The American's won decisive victories in both battles, giving them command of the lakes and preventing a British invasion of New York. These victories kept Great Britain from achieving one of its chief war objectives, control of the Great Lakes to ensure Canada's security.

Consequently, the British watched America's postwar national security debates with great interest—and significant trepidation. If any nation were to challenge Britain as the world's chief naval power, British leaders believed it would be the U.S. "The great and favorite object of the policy of Britain for more than four centuries," warned British Prime Minister Lord Liverpool in 1824 "has been to foster and encourage our navigations, as the sure basis of our maritime power. In this branch of national industry the people of the United States are become more formidable rivals to us than any nation which has ever yet existed. The views and policy of the North Americans seem mainly directed toward supplanting us in navigation in every quarter of the globe . . ." ⁴³

After experiencing over two decades of British harassment of American shipping, impressment of American sailors, and the attacks against coastal cities including Washington D.C., Baltimore, and New Orleans there were many who contended that the United States needed a significant naval capability, a fleet comprising both dozens of battleships and frigates capable of breaking any British blockade and protecting America's coastline.

Had the United States built such a fleet, Great Britain would have identified the U.S. as a potential mortal threat, that in alliance with France might turn the Atlantic Ocean into a gauntlet

⁴³ As quoted in James Fred Rippy: *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America, 1808-1830*, (New York: Octagon Books 1972, first published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1929) p. 109-110.

for British shipping, one capable of interdicting British imports of food and raw materials and upsetting British trade around the world.⁴⁴ Given the consequences, Britain would almost certainly have had moved aggressively to weaken this emerging rival.

Throughout its history the British have shown little inhibition to crush opponents who threaten their interests, especially during the turbulent 19th century. In 1807 British forces attacked and occupied Copenhagen, seized control of its navy and everything of value from its ports because of concerns that neutral Denmark might be coerced into an alliance with Napoleon and deploy its powerful fleet against the British. After the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain allied with the Ottoman Empire in a series of conflicts to prevent Russian expansion into the Eastern Mediterranean and from threatening communication routes between Britain and India. In 1840, the British attacked and defeated the Pasha of Egypt who had invaded Palestine and Syria and threatened to destroy the Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, when faced with a cutoff of trade routes, Britain defeated China in the Opium Wars of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860, demonstrating Britain's amazing ability to engage in two wars over vast distances. Between 1853-1855 Britain cajoled France to join it in a war with Russia to support the Ottoman Empire.

Given this litany of mid-19th century military actions, it is hard to imagine that had the United States begun construction of a navy that could have threatened British primacy it would have been immune to military intervention. Especially when one considers that the U.S. bordered two vital British territories, Canada and the West Indies, and given the importance of Britain's commercial ties with South America. An American naval buildup would have set in motion a series of British countermoves, including a possible preemptive strike to destroy the new fleet

⁴⁴ Britain feared such an alliance during its negotiations with the United States over the Maine and Oregon borders in the 1840s and initiated a significant military buildup in North America as a warning to both sides. See Rebecca Berens Matzke, *Deterrence Through Strength: British Naval Power and Foreign Policy Under Pax Britannica* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011) loc. cit. 776-836

while under construction, an alliance with Mexico to turn that nation into a bulwark against American expansion on the continent, and likely intervention in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy to ensure the division of the U.S.

America's Grand Strategy

Instead of challenging Great Britain, the United States chose a strategy to avoid international conflict at all costs, an extreme version of what we today might call restraint: drastically limiting its military capabilities, ceding control of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Seas to the Royal Navy, concentrating its few naval forces on protecting American merchant ships from North African and Caribbean pirates, and displaying the American flag around the world.

American restraint was the perfect antidote to Britain's hypersensitivity—but so too was British restraint when it came to the Western Hemisphere. As determined as the United States was to prevent European colonization in the aftermath of the collapse of Spain's empire, so too were the British, who instead considered South America a key part of Britain's commercial empire and viewed rival European colonization as a threat to those interests. Equally important, the British had no interest in empire-building in South America, therefore not risking a confrontation with the U.S. under the Monroe Doctrine. Seldom has there existed such a synchronicity of national interests between rival powers. However, had the United States decided to challenge British hegemony, several opportunities existed for decisive British action.

Preemption: The Copenhagen Complex

The attack on Copenhagen in 1807 demonstrated Great Britain's ruthless determination to eliminate possible naval threats. When the Danes refused to surrender their navy, the British dispatched a fleet of 70 warships including 36 battleships accompanied by transports carrying 25,000 troops to attack the city. After a devastating three-day bombardment that caused nearly a thousand civilian casualties, Danish leaders sued for peace. British troops seized control of 50 Danish warships including 17 battleships and equal number of frigates, many of which were incorporated into the Royal Navy. The attack sent shockwaves across the Atlantic and the Americans took special notice of the British action. The attack quickly became a verb—"to be Copenhagenized"—meaning to suffer a preemptive attack by the British.⁴⁵ What American officials didn't realize was at roughly that same moment, Admiral Sir George Cranfield Berkeley, Commander in Chief of the North America Station, was arguing for precisely that type of assault against New York City due to the heightened tensions caused by the attack of the British frigate H.M.S *Leopard* on the U.S.S. *Chesapeake*. Berkeley requested permission to take his fleet into New York harbor and "compel them (the U.S.) to any treaty."⁴⁶ Hoping to maintain American neutrality, the British government rejected Berkeley's request, indeed they even reassigned him to a different command.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, war broke out only five years later and the admiralty's rejection of Berkeley's attack may have cost Britain the opportunity of preempting its America problem.

⁴⁵ Craig L. Symonds, "Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States, 1785-1827" Doctoral Dissertation, University of Florida, 1976, p. 182. The term "Copenhagenized" was also used.

⁴⁶ Andrew Lambert, *The Challenge: Britain Against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2012) Kindle Edition, Loc. 263.

⁴⁷ Bradford Perkins, "George Canning, Great Britain, and the United States, 1807-1809," *The American Historical Review* 63/1, October 1957, pp. 1-22.

For the remainder of the century the memory of Copenhagen would haunt not only the United States, but all nations contemplating on a naval buildup. Even after ninety years its memory still reverberated. For Kaiser Wilhelm II, the word “Kopenhagen” meant something far more than the city. It symbolized an overwhelming fear that “one day, on a peaceful, sunny afternoon as in the autumn of 1807, a British fleet would suddenly appear off of Wilhelmshaven or Kiel and without warning attack the beautiful new ships of the Imperial Navy.”⁴⁸ While Britain never launched that surprise attack, the growing German fleet decisively influenced British threat perceptions playing an important role in the path towards World War I. How the United States and Germany dealt with their respective “Copenhagen Complexes” would define 19th and early 20th century international affairs.

The Mexican American War

During the 1840s British diplomats watched with trepidation as the United States began its expansion across the continent.⁴⁹ While British and American negotiators were able to resolve border disputes in Maine and between what is now Washington State and Canada, Britain engaged in extensive efforts to prevent America’s spread throughout the southwest. Its leaders sought to avoid conflict, nevertheless, they were quite willing to threaten use of their significant naval advantage to attack America’s east coast cities should tensions escalate into conflict.⁵⁰ In addition, they were prepared to signal their disfavor at American activities and to show America

⁴⁸ Jonathan Steinberg, “The Copenhagen Complex,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1966) pp. 23-46. See also, Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, Penguin Books, 1998) p. 84.

⁴⁹ David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (University of Missouri Press, 1973).

⁵⁰ David L Dykstra *The Shifting Balance of Power: American-British Diplomacy in North America, 1842-1848* (New York: University Press of America, 1999.)

“who was boss.”⁵¹ During an especially difficult moment in negotiations for the Oregon Boundary treaty the British dispatched the 80-gun battleship *Collingwood* to “make a friendly visit . . . to the mouth of the Columbia River,” followed soon after by the 50-gun frigate *America* and the 18-gun sloop *Modeste* to the Oregon coast as a further show of force.⁵²

Given Britain’s vast global concerns, British leaders in 1840s didn’t consider the American annexation of Texas or expansion into Mexican territory a vital challenge to their interests, and certainly not of equal importance to resolving the border dispute between the U.S. and Canada. Twenty years earlier, however, before America’s adoption of strategic restraint, British leaders gave every appearance of concern. In 1824 Foreign Minister George Canning grew worried that the Monroe Doctrine might enable the United States to take leadership over the newly independent states in South America, forming a league that would lead to “the ascendancy of the United States of America” which would be “inconvenient” in time of peace and “formidable in case of war.” His answer was straight out of balance of power politics: An alliance with Mexico.

I believe we now have the opportunity (but it may not last long) of opposing a powerful barrier to the influence of the United States by an amicable connection with Mexico, which from its position must be either subservient to or jealous of the United States. In point of population and resources it is at least equal to all the rest of the Spanish colonies; and may naturally expect to take the lead in its connections with the powers of Europe. I by no means think it at present necessary to go beyond the mere relations of amity and commercial intercourse; but if we hesitate much longer . . . all the new states will be led to conclude that we regret their friendship upon principle, as of a dangerous and revolutionary character, and will be driven to throw themselves under the protection of the United States, as the only means of security.⁵³

⁵¹ Matzke, *Deterrence Through Strength*, Loc. 763.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ H.W.V Temperely, “The Later American Policy of George Canning,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 11, (July 1906) p. 781.

Considering Great Britain's wars with China and Syria during the 1840s, its demonstration of resolve in negotiations over the northern boundary with United States, and its wars against Russia to defend the Ottoman Empire, it seems reasonable to believe that had the United States posed a significant military threat, an alliance with the Mexicans would at the very least have been considered. The objective would have been to use the country as a bulwark against American expansion as Britain used the Ottomans to deter Russian expansion. Were such an alliance created, war against Mexico could have proven disastrous for the United States. The British fleet could have disrupted crucial American naval activities that played an important part in the U.S. victory in the Mexican American War, such as its blockade of the Mexican coastline, and especially, the amphibious landing of Winfield Scott's army at Vera Cruz which enabled his attack on Mexico City only weeks later. Indeed, even the mere possibility of British attack had already alarmed cities along the American Eastern Seaboard.

Conversely, had the United States annexed the entirety of Mexico itself, as many proponents of Manifest Destiny aspired, it likely would have forced Britain's hand as it would have demonstrated unbridled American ambitions in North America ultimately threatening the future of British North America and quite possibly British interests in South America.⁵⁴ Therefore, while America's expansion was significant, it was also restrained, as it was done in a manner that didn't threaten British strategic interests and focused on a region of the continent not vital to British dominance of the hemisphere. War was not worth the risks involved, especially given the overall strategic threat the U.S. posed in relation to Britain's many global concerns.

⁵⁴ See Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, (Harvard University Press Reprint, 1995) for a discussion of the "All of Mexico Movement."

The Civil War

In his final months as Great Britain's Prime Minister, an ailing Lord Salisbury wrote his son lamenting that Great Britain never capitalized on its golden opportunity to have crushed the upstart United States before it had the strength to challenge the British Empire. "It is very sad," Salisbury wrote in March of 1902, "but I am afraid America is bound to forge ahead and nothing can restore the equality between us. If we had interfered in the Confederate War it was then possible for us to reduce the power of the United States to manageable proportions. But *two* such chances are not given to a nation in the course of its career."⁵⁵ Such laments were not unique to Salisbury as only months later his rival German Emperor Wilhelm II privately condemned Europe's inaction during the Civil War that could have prevented America's rise to power and its opposition to German interests in South America. As for the French, they had mourned this "missed opportunity" since the 1880s, at least.⁵⁶

While turn-of-the-century statesmen may have, in retrospect, believed the success of a European intervention obvious, the complications surrounding a potential entry into the war were much more serious to British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston and his Foreign Secretary John Russell in the 1860s than it seemed decades later. Great Britain would only intervene militarily if joined by France, yet both nations had only recently stepped back from their own war scare, one that had occurred due to France's latest technological leap forward in naval shipbuilding, the ironclad, which sparked a new arms race between the two nations.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Phoenix Press, 1999) p. 50

⁵⁶ Herwig, *The Politics of Frustration*, p. 50; Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005) pp. 90-91.

⁵⁷ Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare, 1815-1914* Kindle loc. 1952-2007.

Second, Britain feared that America would retaliate by invading and devastating Canada.⁵⁸ Britain had failed during The War of 1812 to secure a border that would have allowed for the defense of Canada against the United States and during the Civil War British politicians remained concerned that the reinforcements sent after the war's outbreak would be insufficient to defend against a Union invasion. Given the war's terrible bloodletting, Palmerston and Russell shuddered to think what might happen to Canada should it to be attacked. Indeed, Palmerston's government believed the Union so intent on conquering Canada that it might "at once make peace with the South and pour 100,000 men into Canada where they can easily compensate themselves for the losses of the Confederate states, and England be perfectly unable to prevent it."⁵⁹

Third, the Anglo-French naval arms race sparked a technological revolution: from wood, sail, cannon, and solid shot to iron, steam, long-range rifled guns, and exploding shells.⁶⁰ The advent of steam represented a tremendous advance in propulsion. Whereas an Atlantic crossing with sail required on average 4-6 weeks, steam cut that time to only two weeks by the 1830s, then to ten days by mid-century.⁶¹ The problem with steam, however, was that it required coal to power the engines, making long distance travel dependent on a ship's ability to secure sufficient supplies. The result, to the great dismay of many Europeans, was that five hundred years of naval operations had become obsolete practically overnight, turning what were once mundane

⁵⁸ Amanda Foreman, *A World On Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York, Random House, 2010) Kindle Edition, loc. cit, 365-426; Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (Amazon Digital Services, 2018) Kindle Edition, loc. 3970; Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (University of California Press, 1967) Kindle Edition Loc. 4943

⁵⁹ Foreman, *A World on Fire* loc. cit 410.

⁶⁰ Robert Gardiner, ed. *Steam, Steel, and Shellfire: The Steam Warship 1815-1905*, (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992).

⁶¹ Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 165.

judgments such as whether to wage a long-range war, into a nightmarish decision whether to employ steam-powered warships reliant on coal given potential uncertainties about resupply.⁶² Hence came the need for a global system of coaling stations, which Britain was uniquely well placed to create. Even more important, both the French and British were concerned about naval tactics necessary to defeat ironclads. The Battle of Hamptons Road between the U.S.S. *Monitor* and the C.S.S. *Virginia* made it painfully clear that wooden warships were no match for ironclads. However, it also left the British and the French questioning just how well their own large, broadside ironclads would hold up against the powerful guns of the American monitor-class warships.⁶³

Fourth, there was the common belief that there was little, if any, chance the Union could win. The North's conscript armies and their mediocre generals had performed poorly during the first two years of the conflict, the European military considered them second-rate and incapable of conquering an area the size of the American south—a point punctuated by the seemingly endless string of Union defeats along the Potomac.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Europeans believed that that destruction of the confederacy risked a slave revolt that no one in the North could possibly want. Therefore, Great Britain viewed its role as that of a counselor, to help the North understand the dangers of continued fighting and to help it reconcile itself with the South's independence.

Finally, there had been a long-held belief within European political thought that republican governments have a better chance of succeeding when situated on smaller countries, not continental-sized nations as the United States had become. In the 18th century, the French

⁶² Howard Fuller, *Empire, Technology, and Seapower: Royal Navy Crisis in the Age of Palmerston* (London, Routledge, 2013) pp. 208-231

⁶³ Howard J. Fuller, *Clad in Iron: The American Civil War and the Challenge of British Naval Power* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008)

⁶⁴ Adams, *Ibid* loc. 3122-3635

philosopher Montesquieu argued that republics can best survive on small territories with limited population, such as the Italian city-states of Venice and Genoa. Larger areas required ever more authoritarian governments lest they collapse—such as the Roman republic and France’s first two republican efforts in the 19th century, both of which led to empire. America’s growth was stupendous leading many to doubt its survival either as a nation, or, should it remain intact, as a republic. Given American ambitions to build a great nation across the continent, it was important to refute this argument, inspiring James Madison to write the historic essay we know today as Federalist No. 10.

As the United States advanced, it was clear to European observers that the nation had grown increasingly regionalized—northern merchants, southern plantation owners, mid-western farmers—and that a break-up appeared imminent. The Civil War seemed to be final confirmation of Montesquieu’s warning and convinced the majority of Europeans that Lincoln’s great project to save the nation was doomed. It would not be until the fall of Savannah, Georgia in December of 1864 that British and French politicians finally realized the imminence of a northern victory and the survival of the American republic.⁶⁵

Regardless of Salisbury’s lamentations, European intervention in the American Civil War was fraught with both strategic and ideological uncertainties. Why intervene if you believe the North’s defeat inevitable? Or believe Canada’s loss imminent? Why risk your prized navy if you are unsure of the new naval technologies? However, had the United States positioned itself more aggressively vis-à-vis British interests in the decades before the war, become the threat that so many believed it ultimately would, the outbreak of the Civil War might have been too great of an opportunity to ignore. Seldom are nations foolish enough to miss opportunities to mortally

⁶⁵ Ibid, loc. 9925-10300.

wound a rival before it could become an overpowering threat—as a frustrated Salisbury would intimate that America had become by the turn of the 20th century. Had the United States been that same rival in the 1860s, British intervention in the American Civil War would have seemed for more likely. Instead, the United States survived because it deliberately avoided making itself an immediate threat. It also benefited from a series of strategic uncertainties caused by the intersection of several historic transformations: technological, strategic, social, as well as what can be called “wishful thinking” on the part of the Europeans that the Union was incapable of winning.

Had Britain considered the United States a greater threat, it might have taken the actions necessary to coerce the North into allowing Southern secession, including even early recognition of the confederacy. However, fifty years of an unthreatening American military posture may well have been the one consideration that tipped the decision in the direction of caution.

With the end of the American Civil War, Britain’s attention immediately refocused to the next great European crisis, the Wars of German Unification and the creation of the German Empire.

Germany: From Restrained Expansion to *Weltpolitik*

The dust from the American Civil War had barely settled when Europe was rocked by the Wars of German Unification between Germany and Denmark, Austria, and France that culminated in the creation of the German Empire and set in motion a chain of events that would fundamentally reshape the global landscape. King Wilhelm I of Prussia was crowned Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany in January of 1871 after his victory over France, a conflict that witnessed

the surrender of the French Emperor Napoleon III and the crushing of the Paris Commune. Stunned by its defeat, France aimed for revenge.

Initially, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck engaged in his own policy of restraint once he had accomplished his objective of uniting the German nation and making it a major European power. Bismarck's main focus from 1871 until his resignation in 1890 was to foster Germany's commercial expansion while preventing the possibility of facing a two-front war, he worked tirelessly to forestall a Franco-Russian alliance that would have achieved that goal. Upon his dismissal, German Emperor Wilhelm II and his Chancellor Bernhard von Bulow launched a new stage in German policy, aggressively insisting on Germany's "place in the sun," expanding its global reach, and challenging U.S. and British interests around the world. The Kaiser's more aggressive stand convinced France and Russia to form the Dual Alliance threatening Germany with the reality of a two-front war should it attack either nation.

The Dual Alliance greatly alarmed Great Britain by creating London's long feared strategic nightmare, a combined naval challenge to the Royal Navy.⁶⁶ This started the process that would inevitably lead to the recall of Britain's far flung naval squadrons and the end of *Pax Britannica*. Germany's decision to launch a massive naval buildup beginning in 1897 further cemented Britain's need to focus on its home waters. "The ominous word has gone forth," the *London Standard* wrote "we have called home the legions."⁶⁷

As Britain's forces began their withdrawal, the protection that had enabled American strategic restraint evaporated, just as Germany's challenge to Latin America climaxed. In the late 1880s the United States made the decision to build a modern navy, its first fleet of steel, decades

⁶⁶ Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. 45.

⁶⁷ As quoted in Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p. 205.

after many other nation's had done so—including even hemispheric neighbors Brazil and Chile.⁶⁸ American leaders realized that in this new world it could no longer rely on the British to block European intervention, it was now up to the United States to, for the first time, enforce the Monroe Doctrine.⁶⁹

The first American-German confrontation occurred over the Pacific island of Samoa in 1889. Fortunately, both nation's navies were limited to but a handful of cruisers—the first ships of the new American steel navy, while Great Britain's territorial interests made them a party to the crisis as well. This time the three sides came to an amicable solution.⁷⁰ Nearly a decade later, however, the United States and Germany would nearly come to blows in the Philippines. Germany eyed the Philippines as a possible base of naval operations for their *Weltpolitik*, a strategy upset by the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. Following his victory over the Spanish fleet at the battle of Manila, Admiral George Dewey established a blockade of the port of Manila. Germany responded by dispatching a squadron of five fast cruisers, a fleet even more powerful than Dewey's command, to challenge the American blockade and defend German commercial rights. Conflict seemed imminent, however, the German's position was undermined by the Treaty of Paris in December 1898 which officially ended the war and transferred the Philippines to American control.⁷¹

Only three years later war seemed certain during the Venezuelan Crisis of 1902. The government of Venezuela defaulted on loans totaling hundreds of millions of pounds from

⁶⁸ Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare, 1815-1914*, Kindle Edition loc. 3290-3387.

⁶⁹ Warner Schilling, "Admirals and Foreign Policy, 1913-1919" Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1954, pp. 49-84; 230-259.

⁷⁰ Paul Kennedy *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* (Dublin, Irish Press, 1974).

⁷¹ Herwig, *The Politics of Frustration* pp. 24-36.

British, German, and Italian financial institutions, which prompted the nations to send a fleet of warships to blockade Venezuela's coastline until those debts were collected.⁷² The Venezuelan government offered international arbitration and asked President Theodore Roosevelt to convince the Europeans to agree. When the crisis erupted, and a European fleet entered South American waters, Roosevelt ordered Admiral Dewey to assemble the largest fleet possible, a total of 54 warships from the North Atlantic, South Atlantic, Caribbean, and Mediterranean squadrons, massed off of Puerto Rico. While Great Britain agreed to arbitration, the Germans wavered.⁷³ Roosevelt, worried that the Germans were using the crisis to expand territorially in the region, quietly passed a message to Berlin that failure to accept arbitration would mean war with the United States.⁷⁴ The Germans backed down and war was avoided, however, the Kaiser and his advisors were outraged and planning for a German attack on the United States intensified.⁷⁵

The result was an American-German rivalry that would last for much of the next fifty years, ending American restraint that, in turn, generated a rivalry against a Great Britain eager to maintain its position in the face of American armament and German aggression. This would come to a climax in World War II where Germany's destruction and Britain's exhaustion would pave the way for America's global supremacy, with its challenger a powerful but badly weakened Soviet Union.

⁷² Ibid, pp. 76-85.

⁷³ A. E. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States, 1895-1903* (London: Longmans, 1960) pp. 11-21.

⁷⁴ Edmund Morris, "'A matter of extreme urgency': Theodore Roosevelt, Wilhelm II, and the Venezuela Crisis of 1902." *Naval War College Review*. Volume 55 (2) 2002, 73-85. See also, Herwig, *Germany's Vision of Empire in Venezuela, 1871-1914* (Princeton University Press, paperback edition, 2014).

⁷⁵ Herwig, *Politics of Frustration*, ibid.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Great Britain and its Two Rivals

The United States matured as a nation under the constraints and protections of *Pax Britannica*; it became a world power because of the threat of a rising of Germany.

For one hundred years the British Empire dominated the world like no other nation before it. While the Rome was sovereign of the Mediterranean, and the Mongols terrorized Europe and Asia, London's powerful political, military, and economic tentacles extended to all the major continents, binding East Asia, the Western Hemisphere, Africa, India, Central Asia and Europe into a vast global trade and financial nexus. So powerful would Great Britain become that British politicians would frequently speak of their "splendid isolation"—an Empire was so powerful it had little need for allies.⁷⁶

By the end of 19th century all that would change as it faced the great struggle of responding to the simultaneous rise of two great powers: The United States and Germany. Comparatively speaking, the impact of each nation's rise couldn't have been more different.

To understand why, we must first recognize the fundamental weakness at the core of the mighty British Empire: its increasing need to import food stuffs to feed its population and raw materials to fuel its expanding economy. As its population grew and its economy transitioned from Mercantilism to free trade, the nation's strategic position grew increasingly perilous. British leaders, fearful that rivals might build the capability of cutting the Isles off from both global

⁷⁶ On the extent of Britain's dominance of the international financial system see Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick, "The Empire Effect: The Determinants of Country Risk in the First Age of Globalization, 1880-1913" *Journal of Economic History*, 66/2, 2006 pp. 283-312.

trade and its food supply, were hypersensitivity to shifts in the balance of power potential threats and used an array of aggressive measures to ensure their continued naval dominance, including engaging in arms races against the French, military actions against the Russians, and even preemptive strikes like against Copenhagen in 1807 to eliminate Danish Naval power. As a consequence, Great Britain required total domination of the oceans and with Horatio Nelson's triumph at Trafalgar it achieved that goal. No single nation could challenge British supremacy.

However, if two nations could ally their navies, they might have the ability to strangle the British Isles. This fear drove British diplomacy throughout the 19th century; just as Germany historically feared fighting a two-front war on land, Great Britain feared a two-front war at sea. The Americans were their most significant threat. A significant American naval capability, including both battleships and frigates could, in coordination with the French, turn the Atlantic into a gauntlet for British shipping, had the United States built that capability the British would likely have had to reacted aggressively to preempt it, either through military attack or allying with Mexico as British Foreign Minister George Canning suggested in 1824 and for that nation to act as a bulwark to American expansion.

America also debated its strategic destiny: does it build a navy that would rival the Europeans or instead avoid balance of power politics altogether. America would choose the latter, what today we would call a strategy of restraint, building a navy focused on tackling piracy and showing the American flag around the world, but not one that would offer a challenge to British naval dominance. This strategic relationship worked until the rise of Germany in the second half of the 19th century.

By 1871 the Prussian state had defeated Denmark, Austria, and France leading to the creation of the German empire. By the late 1890s German power had grown to the point that it

demanded its own place in the sun, including expansion in Latin America putting it on a collision course with the United States and Great Britain, a battle that would determine the future of the world for a century to come.

Part I: America Under Pax Britannica

Chapter One: Do You Want to be Copenhagened?

The founders believed that the young United States represented a new hope for the world, a republic that would empower its people and inspire those around the world. How it behaved would determine how much of an influence it would be. One side was Thomas Jefferson who believed that the young United States must act as a republic, avoid balance of power politics and maintain a minimal military capability reliant on state militias and a navy of hundreds of small gunboats to protect U.S. harbors. Others, like George Washington, felt the U.S. should play a role in the European balance of power system by building a navy comprising upwards of fifteen battleships, thirty frigates that can defend the U.S. coast line against British blockade fleets and influence the European political scene.

The Anti-Navalists, as the Jeffersonians were called, insisted that given the massive size of the Royal Navy, the U.S. could never build a fleet sufficient to stop a British blockade of the U.S. coast and following the battle of Trafalgar, there was little hope that any American fleet could impact the European balance of power. Instead, they argued that the United States needed to accept British dominance and build a navy of smaller vessels, sloops, brigs and gunboats to

fight piracy. The position was formally adopted in 1827 at which point the United States, for all intents and purposes, became a geopolitical dependent of the British Empire.

Chapter Two: The Importance of Mr. Madison's War

The War of 1812 was one of the most audacious decisions in American history, one that risked disaster for the new nation. After years of British harassment of the American merchant fleet, seizing ships, cargo, and impressing sailors by the thousands, some three thousand Americans alone were seized from the late 1790s to the early 1800s, President Madison declared war on Great Britain. Given America's lack of preparedness, the decision to go to war was foolish at best. However, the war's long-term impact was profoundly important for the rise of the United States, demonstrating to the British that America, though badly outgunned, was already a worthy adversary at sea. With its victories over the British fleets at the battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain, American secured its norther frontiers, Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans prevented the British from capturing that city and demanding the Louisiana territories during peace negotiations.⁷⁷ As a result, these victories provided the American people with great confidence, prevented a British takeover of the inland waterways that would have crushed America's westward expansion, and exposed British North America to American attack should war resume, making the costs of any future conflict very high for the British.

Chapter Three: Canning's Ultimatum:

The debate over the size and purpose of the United States Navy escalated after the end of the War of 1812, many Americans, flushed with the early success against the Royal Navy, called

⁷⁷ Rippey, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America, 1808-1830*, pp. 47-58.

for a sizeable fleet including battleships and frigates capable of breaking a British blockade, a proposal that struck fear in the heart of the British admiralty.⁷⁸ However, those opposed to a large navy, concerned about how a large military would impact on America's republican system would win the day, drastically scaling back the size of the earlier proposals and putting into drydock the five battleships that had been completed. The focus would remain construction of small warships designed to fight piracy, ceding control of the seas around the U.S. to the Britain's powerful North American and West Indies squadron.

This strategy exposed the United States, and indeed the entire Western Hemisphere to foreign attack, an especially important concern given the turmoil in the region caused by overthrow of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires and the emergence of republics in South America. In response, the Holy Alliance of Russia, Prussia, Austria, created to crush republicanism in Europe aimed to restore Spanish power to the continent. They enlisted France, with its powerful fleet, to pave the way.

On October 9, 1823 Prime Minister Canning summoned French Ambassador Prince Jules de Polignac and informed him that if France continued in its efforts to support the return of the Spanish Crown to South America, Britain would declare war. Not willing to risk war with Great Britain, Polignac signed a memorandum recognizing the independence of the South American nations. Two months later, Dec 2, 1823, Monroe transmitted to Congress his State of the Union address including two short paragraphs that announced the Monroe Doctrine which stipulated that the United States would oppose further European colonization of South America.

Most Europeans responded with derision given that the weakness of the United States. Prince Metternich of Austria wrote that the doctrine was a "new act of revolt" by the U.S.—one

⁷⁸ Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare, 1815-194*, p. 195.

that would grant “new strength to the apostles of sedition and reanimate the courage of every conspirator.”⁷⁹ Yet, none of these frustrations mattered, Great Britain, the nation with the might to block European expansion had, with the Polignac Memorandum already established its own doctrine. The Western Hemisphere was theirs, Britain would tolerate no competitor. The one exception was the United States, Britain had yet to define its own policy towards the nation that represented Britain’s greatest rival in South America. This would be Canning next great task and until his death he treated the United States with great suspicion.

Ironically, by charging the Royal Navy with the protection of the Western Hemisphere, the Polignac memorandum solved America’s greatest national security dilemma, how to maintain a small military capability yet prevent European intervention on the continent. The Royal Navy would now deter European rivals, particularly Russia and France from encroaching on the continent. How it would handle American expansion was a different story.

Chapter Four: British Strategy and American Expansion

By 1850 the United States had succeeded in its great mission to spread across the continent and encompass all territory from the original thirteen colonies to the Pacific Ocean, a massive territorial expansion. Yet, Britain did not intervene militarily to stop the American expansion though they recognized the growing power of the nation and its potential threat to British supremacy on the continent, chiefly its relations with South America. Instead, they hoped their aggressive diplomatic efforts would be enough to constrain American power.

The outbreak of the Mexican-American war provided Britain with its best opportunity to oppose American expansion. The United States effectively used its naval power to blockade the

⁷⁹ George C. Herring. *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 156.

Mexican coastline, supply its armies invading Mexico, and to make possible General Winfield Scott's amphibious landing at Vera Cruz from which he marched on and captured Mexico City. At any moment the British Navy could have intervened to break the blockade and provide support for the Mexican army, to prevent the U.S. navy from resupplying its own invading armies, and to make Scott's landing impossible. During discussions over the northern boundary of the Oregon Territory, the British did not hesitate to blandish their fleet to sway the talks. During the Mexican-American War the British Navy could have as well threatened the Eastern Seaboard of the United States to force America to end its invasion. Yet, Great Britain chose none of these moves missing its best opportunity to prevent America's rise.

This chapter will discuss Britain's strategic calculations to answer why it failed to adopt what George Canning had himself outlined: An alliance with Mexico to deter American power, the strategy Britain employed with the Ottoman Empire to prevent Russian expansion into the eastern Mediterranean. It will explore Britain's global responsibilities and how they weighted the importance of America's rise in North America, considering America's decision not to challenge British hegemony on the oceans. It will also examine how the United States conceived its expansion across the continent, its agreements with the British to define the northern boundary between the two nations, and the limits of American expansion in the Southwest—particularly its decision not to annex all of Mexico with its victory, a move that could have led to British intervention.

Chapter Five: A Lost Opportunity?

By the turn of the 20th century, Europe was in alarm over the rising American giant. Many leaders lamented the wonderful opportunity the American Civil War had presented their

predecessors to have ended the American threat through support of the Confederacy and the division of the country into two nations. Why didn't the Europeans intervene? Was this truly the lost opportunity that British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury would lament in 1902, that Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm would lash out at, that French leaders would decry? Indeed, war could have broken out over the Trent Affair, a major diplomatic incident where the United States warship San Jacinto boarded the British postal cutter Trent to arrest two Confederate diplomats en route to their missions in Europe.

This chapter will examine the strategic rationale behind Europe's decision not to intervene to end the war. First, that the British and French felt that simply by seceding the South had already won the war, there was little that the amateurish Northern Army could do to reconquer the entire south, an area three times larger than France. Nor would Northern leaders seek the destruction of Southern political institutions as that would mean a likely slave revolt. Second, the transformation in naval technology was creating an equally significant change in naval doctrine, one emphasizing steam, iron plating, and exploding shell. Many leaders were uncertain of the costs of intervention in the war, particularly after the battle of Hampton Roads demonstrated the power of the Ironclad over wooden warships. The U.S. ironclad fleet acted as a deterrent to British and French intervention. Third, would the Lincoln Administration retaliate with an invasion of Canada? The war forced Britain to significantly increase the size of its garrison in Canada and its North American squadron. Ultimately, the British and French had to calculate was an intervention on the side of the South worth the risks? The answer was no, to the great frustration of their successors who had to face a mature United States.

Chapter Six: America Exposed, The *Virginius* Affair

With the end of the American Civil War the United States demobilized its vast armies and nearly 700 ship navy. Within a few years the U.S. navy would return to its prewar size of roughly 34 operational warships, the majority of whom were wooden along with a few obsolete ironclads useful for coastal defense but little else.⁸⁰

In 1873 Spanish warships patrolling the waters around Cuba captured the smuggling ship *Virginius* arresting its crew which included over 50 Americans. Alarm spread throughout the United States as Spanish authorities began to execute the Americans, President Ulysses S. Grant began preparations for war. There was only one problem, the United States navy had fallen into such a state of disrepair that all Grant had at his disposal were a handful of wooden ships. The few remaining Civil-War era ironclads were operationally useless beyond the American coastline. Facing the United States Navy was a Spanish force that included over ten ocean-going ironclad warships purchased from the British, one, the *Arapiles* happened to be docked in New York harbor. For America's naval commanders, the sight of the *Arapiles* brought back memories of the Battle of Hampton Roads famed for the slugfest between the USS *Monitor* and the CSS *Virginia*. Prior to the arrival of the *Monitor* the *Virginia* easily defeated three wooden Union warships on blockade duty in the area, whose broadsides simply bounced off the *Virginia* with no effect. The Grant Administration quickly recognized that America had no military options, their solution, to seek help from the British.

American officials appealed to the British *Charge* overseeing the Caribbean warning him of the danger to several British citizens. The British government immediately filed a protest with the government of Spain and the executions stopped; within a year Spain agreed to pay

⁸⁰ James C. Renfrow, *Home Squadron: The U.S. Navy on the North Atlantic Station* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014) Kindle edition, Loc. 436.

reparations to the families. This change would not have happened had it not been for British intervention. American begins to realize it needs modern, ocean going steel fleet.

Chapter Seven: Calling Home the Legions

The 1894 Dual Alliance between France and Russia sets off dominoes that lead to end of American dependency on Britain. Though the Dual Alliance was created primarily to offset German power in Europe by creating the possibility of a two-front war to deter German attack, it also created a similar two-front dilemma for Great Britain. The British Mediterranean fleet, whose job was to support the Ottomans and keep lanes across Mediterranean open to Britain and India, now faced the possibility of having to battle both the Russian black Sea fleet and the French Mediterranean fleet should war with the Ottoman Empire resume. The British repositioned their fleet from Malta to its port in Gibraltar to avoid their fleet being attacked from two sides.⁸¹ Furthermore, the British began the slow withdrawal of their overseas forces to reconstitute into a new Home Fleet to protect the British Isles.

The British decision to draw down their North and South American squadrons placed an unprepared United States square in the way of rising German power. Now uncertain that Britain could, or even would, come to America's aid, the U.S. leaders recognized the need for a powerful, modern navy and launched a significant naval buildup that would eventually turn the United States into the world's third largest naval power. Spain, which had humiliated the Grant Administration during the *Virginius Affair*, received its comeuppance with the war of 1898 as the new American fleet smashed Spanish naval power, forcing Spain to cede several of its foreign possessions, including Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Cuba. Simultaneously, German power

⁸¹ Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare 1815-1914*, loc. cit. 4272-4349

was on the rise in South America as that nation had dreams of building its own empire in the region.

The result was a growing clash between the two rising powers including German-American clashes over Samoa in 1889, Philippines in 1898, and Venezuela in 1902. Tensions would increase to the point that Kaiser Wilhelm even began planning for attack on the U.S., while the United States, too, planned for war leading ultimately to World War I.

Part Two: America and the Rise of Germany

Chapter Eight: Theodore Rex and the Kaiser's Challenge

War between the United States and Germany almost broke out in 1902 when the Kaiser ordered a fleet of seventeen German warships to join Britain and Italy in a task force designed to force Venezuela to pay back hundreds of millions of dollars of loans. For several months the European fleet blockaded the Venezuelan coastline and bombarded several cities to force repayment. In the meantime, Roosevelt ordered Admiral George Dewey to assemble the U.S. navy in response. Within a few months Dewey's fleet grew to 54 warships. Roosevelt demanded that the Europeans submit their claims to international arbitration, which the British and Italians readily agreed to do, however, the Germans resisted, forcing Roosevelt's to threaten war if they refused. An outraged Kaiser agreed but then escalated plans for war against the United States. For the next twelve years the United States and Germany would warily look at each other in the years leading up to World War I.

Chapter Nine: Wilson's Failed Vision

America's entry into World War I, the result of Germany's decision to launch unrestricted submarine warfare against shipping going to the Allies, was its first foray into European politics. President Woodrow Wilson justified his decision to declare war, however, with the goal of finally realizing the great republican experiment that Jefferson had hoped would one day transform Europe. Wilson was determined to end balance of power politics, which he believed to be the cause of so many wars. Wilson believe that to end the threat of war a new mechanism had to be created that would ensure a nation's security without the recourse of arms. That idea was the League of Nations, the most crucial component of his 14 points.

Wilson ideas enraptured the world and he would arrive in Europe a hero to people who had hoped to never again see war. Wilson's trip was the first time that America, now a global power, tried to assert its leadership in Europe. Yet, despite America having largest economy in the world and holding nearly \$20 billion in European debts (at a time when nominal U.S. GDP totaled \$79 billion) Wilson failed to impose his vision on French and British delegations traumatized by the nearly ten million casualties both nations suffered, while American casualties totaled about 320,000. Wilson's failure at Versailles was also America's first failure as a global leader, resulting in America turning inwards for the next two decades.

Chapter Ten: Shadow Boxing

The end of World War I left the United States as not just the dominant economic power in the world but also its greatest financial power. Britain, staggered by its war losses, looked warily at the growing challenge from the United States and its emergence as their greatest rival. Despite rejecting Wilson's vision, Americans embraced the opportunity to assert U.S. power and were especially motivated to finally challenge British naval supremacy.

During World War I, the British blockade of Germany resulted in British officers boarding American merchant ships en route to the European theater, reminding Americans of similar British activities before and during the War of 1812. Outraged Americans demanded a “navy second to none” a direct challenge to British naval supremacy, one of several challenges America launched against British supremacy. In 1916 the Congress passed the Naval Act of 1916, also known as the “Big Navy Act” which committed the United States to build a fleet of ten battleships with significantly more firepower than Britain’s famed dreadnoughts, accompanied by six battlecruisers, thirty submarines and fifty destroyers—a fleet that would end British naval supremacy. As Woodrow Wilson told his closest aid, Colonel House, “let us build a navy bigger than hers and do what we please.”⁸²

With Germany’s defeat British attention turned to the Big Navy Act and its challenge to British naval dominance. The Act, and its implications to the reemerging Anglo-American rivalry, quickly became a subject of negotiations at the Versailles Treaty Conference where the British aimed to forestall the American buildup. As the allies tallied the costs of World War I the expense of a naval rivalry alarmed leading figures within both nations. So, too, did growing Japanese naval power in the Pacific. Wilson’s successor, U.S. President Warren G. Harding called on the world’s leading nations to attend the Washington Naval Conference, which established limits on capital ship construction at a rate of 5:5:3 for the United States, Great Britain, and Japan. However, fast cruisers under 10,000 tons were exempt from these restrictions, a concession given to the British who valued the cruiser’s ability to wreak havoc on an enemy trade, a view held by the Americans as well, resulting in a race between the two nations.

⁸² Schilling, “Admirals and Foreign Policy,” p. 238

Chapter Eleven: America takes command

The emergence of Adolf Hitler and the outbreak of World War II cemented America's rise to power. Hitler was awed by American industrial prowess but utterly contemptuous of its ethnic diversity, or as the Nazis termed it, America's "racial impurity." He believed it was his duty to prepare Europe for its coming confrontation with the United States if it were to avoid being dominated by American civilization, concerns many Europeans had expressed since the turn of the century.⁸³

Americans had hoped to stay out of the conflict entirely, however, Hitler's stunning victories in 1940 against France and Britain and in 1941 against the Soviet Union made that impossible. France's defeat forced America to begin preparations for war, including the massive Two Ocean Navy act which called for the construction a navy capable of dominating the Atlantic and defeating Japan in the Pacific. Eighteen aircraft carriers, seven battleships, and hundreds of smaller vessels would be built, establishing the United States as the world's most powerful navy a point reaffirmed after the naval battle of Leyte Gulf. This time, there was no objection from the British to America's new fleet.

With the deployment of the two-ocean Navy in 1943, coupled with Great Britain's increasing reliance on American lend-lease aid and American armament, the U.S. had officially become the senior partner in the wartime alliance. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was chosen Supreme Commander for the Allied Expeditionary Force. Furthermore, the dispute between the United States and Great Britain over the makeup of Italy's post-Mussolini regime, forced Britain to recognize that, after several centuries of dominance, the Mediterranean had become an American sphere of influence. Therefore, 1943 was the turning point in world history, the year when the

⁸³ Gerhard L. Weinberg, editor *Hitler's Second Book* (New York: Enigma Books, 2003) p. 114.

world's leadership transferred from Great Britain to the United States; Germany's surrender in 1945 cemented America's new status.

Chapter Twelve: America as World Leader

Americans thought the end of World War II would be like the end of all its other great wars, the nation would dismantle its wartime military and reconvert its economy back to peacetime production. The rest of the world would have to wait until the next crisis. That crisis would occur just two years later as America found a new challenger, the Soviet Union. Within only a few years, America would once again mobilize its military with bases for operations around the world and engage in a nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. The Cold War had begun, America's first global crisis as the world's leader.

Conclusion: America's Rise, Germany's Demise—and China

By 1945 the United States had taken its place as the world's supreme power, while its greatest rival, Germany, lay in ruins. Seldom in history have we seen such radically different outcomes as that between Germany and the U.S. The book will conclude with a broader discussion as to what these experiences mean to future. What lessons should future rising powers learn from the German-American experience? What is the most prudent strategy a rising power can pursue if it wishes to avoid war with the world's dominant power? How can dominant power react to rising powers that won't trigger a conflict? Where does China stand today compared to the American and German examples? What does this portend for international relations in the 21st century?