

**William Thomas Johnsen.** *The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Collaboration from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016. 438 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-6833-3.

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**Published on** H-War (December, 2018)

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The relationship between the United States and Britain during the first half of the twentieth century is often remembered as one of two great powers mutually supporting each other. In *Grand Alliance*, historian William T. Johnsen provides an in-depth look at the development of the partnership and exposes the reality of the tension between senior military leaders and politicians. Johnsen encourages the reader to see the relationship of the two countries as a continuous evolution and not as it is often remembered in popular history.

The narrative begins with a discussion of US isolationist attitudes prior to and during WWI. A general disdain towards partner nations was evident among the armed forces even after the American entry into the war, and it was clear that the national interests of Britain and the United States were quite dissimilar in WWI. President Woodrow Wilson fought hard for the exclusivity of US units, favoring a relationship in which British generals did not have full operational control. As opposed to learning from their French and British counterparts, US commanders desired to rely on their own tactical training and education. While Wilson was forced to concede as the amalgamation of allied units brought US troops to the front line faster, the relationship “contained

caveats that fully preserved US freedom of action” (p. 28).

During the interwar period, little was done by either country to build upon or improve their relationship. The United States exhibited a deep-seated anti-British sentiment that resulted from large demographic changes. The British attitude towards the US was one of resentment, stemming from America’s late entry into the war. Each country seemed to be at odds with the other as the US returned to an isolationist approach to foreign affairs and British strategic planning did little to incorporate other European nations. Economic downturn in the 1930s kept the two nations at odds politically as trade policy and competition prevented collaboration. Through a descriptive narrative and key insights, Johnsen illustrates an unwillingness on each side of the Atlantic to cooperate, even in the face of fascist political movements in central Europe.

Not until Japanese action in China in late 1937 did each country desire to renew collaborative military efforts. Anti-interventionist attitudes among political opponents made it difficult for President Roosevelt to make decisions that would support Britain in its efforts to deter Germany. Through a system of conferences and meetings, held in the US and Britain beginning in early

1939, each country addressed the major issues requiring resolution in order to facilitate war preparations. One of the first objectives of the conferences was understanding the increased need for industrial production from Western nations to counter the growing German threat. As the French anticipated invasion, the request for aircraft grew. Requests were made to Britain as well as the United States for material support. US initial reluctance was evident at the first conference held in Britain in August 1940. Britain shared its concern for the slow-developing logistic chains and poor means of resupply currently in place. Considering the threat in the Far East as well as Germany, the US was more concerned with developing a coherent strategy than looking at material solutions.

Johnsen develops an effective argument for the impact of the conferences, highlighting the conference having the greatest impact on US-UK relations. This was the American-British Conversations-1 Conference (ABC-1) that occurred from January to March 1941. War planners and delegates from each nation came together in the United States looking to answer several problems. First, the British sought to convince the US that the European theater had priority over the Pacific and that within the Pacific, Singapore was the critical point. Second, the US was still primarily concerned with Western Hemisphere defense and maintaining autonomy of command if and when its forces were committed to Europe. Johnsen correctly asserts that for the US “there were more requirements than resources” (p. 144). The output of this conference was the ABC-1 Report. The report functioned as a memorandum of understanding outlining the area of responsibility for each nation, the command structure, a grand strategy, and specific policy aims. Some of the major agreements were a US-led naval presence in the Pacific, the purpose being to protect Far East interests, and a British-led strategy in Europe, with US naval augmentation. Through very detailed research, Johnsen exposes the generalizations asso-

ciated with the report's agreements as well as the difficulty of developing an approach that met the strategic goals of each country. While not absolute, the ABC-1 report served as a guide for future collaboration and provided the framework for detailed operational-level planning to occur.

Policy in the Far East was continually debated, as ABC-1 did not address all the British concerns. It was difficult for US naval officers to understand what the command/support relationship should be and how to best achieve unity of command. Not until the Riviera Conference in 1941 did the United States-Britain relationship strengthen. Johnsen notes the significance here of the intangible benefits of strengthened relationships between each nation's leaderships, in particular that of Roosevelt and Churchill.

While only a few weaknesses exist in this book, it is important to note that the construct of ends, ways, and means forms the author's approach to analysis and his conclusions about the US-British collaborative process and coalition-building. This process is referenced early in the book, but the terms are rarely referred back to. Anyone familiar with the process will see it demonstrated well, but outside of military officer circles, the framework will not resonate.

Detracting from the arguments and lending marginal value to the narrative are the author's lengthy biographical descriptions of each senior officer's duty position and background in their respective branch of service. Understanding the assignment history of the various US and British senior officers that attended each conference does not lend itself to understanding the end state desired by each country or the anticipated outcome. What can be said for the officer biographies is the effort given to provide context for each conference held between the United States and Britain and impact those individuals had.

Writing for a scholarly audience, Johnsen brings a wealth of new information from primary source material on how the relationship devel-

oped between the United States and Britain during WWII. The analysis goes well beyond the strategic objectives and materiel issues and exposes the opposite approach each country took to developing an effective plan. This book is insightful and a significant contribution to the field of study surrounding allied-nation war planning and collaboration.

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**Citation:** Kevin Braam. Review of Johnsen, William Thomas. *The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Collaboration from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. December, 2018.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=50480>



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