Nathan Orgill’s book *Rumors of the Great War* greatly adds to the scholarship on the July Crisis by putting forward an explanation as to why German policymakers believed Britain would remain neutral in the event of a continental war following the assassination of Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand. Orgill correctly notes much of the historiography of this topic has myopically focused on the decisions of key political and military figures without conducting an extensive analysis of “the effect[s] of the larger popular milieu” and believes a broader look at the press will further illuminate the dynamics behind German and British decision-making between June 28 and August 4 (p. 8). Orgill assesses the nuances of British newspaper discourse and its evolution throughout the July Crisis to better understand British popular opinion on the eve of the First World War. Orgill makes a compelling argument that the British press “unwittingly encouraged German policy and the expectation of neutrality” due to the favorable coverage the Central Powers, particularly Germany, received in July (p. 14). Orgill notes newspapers were valuable sources of information for British statesmen and an important tool the Central Powers could leverage to restrict the response of British statesmen by influencing or manipulating the British public to oppose intervention. Secondly, Orgill believes popular sentiment did not decisively align with the British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey’s “preferred” policy, which explains why his “policy appeared indecisive and feckless” to some prior to August 3. Orgill maintains this sentiment led Grey to take “a stance of ‘wait and see’ in the hope that popular feeling would ultimately turn his direction” (pp. xv-xvi).

The first chapter examines the “media revolution” that took place in Britain in the late nineteenth century as British newspapers “developed along populist lines to cater to the new voting public” and produced a “cheaper product” that was of interest to an increasingly literate society (p. 23). This chapter also provides Orgill with an opportunity to introduce the reader to some of the major newspapers and players in the British news industry that will be featured in his analysis. One issue Orgill seeks to analyze is the differing strategies the British and German statesmen adopted to cultivate popular support for their policies and the assumptions German policymakers made that the British government had mechanisms in place to shape the content of newspapers. Orgill contends this assumption had “fateful consequences” (p. 55) since German statesmen were under the mistaken impression that “the reports of the [British] press were tantamount to the re-
ports of the government” (p. 229). Orgill recognizes British statesmen still had the ability to influence these organs to write favorable coverage or delay the release of an unfavorable article through the social networks they cultivated despite assertions to the contrary to their German counterparts.

Although the British press covered the details of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the second chapter recognizes the British press was largely oblivious to the broader ramifications it would have on Europe as a whole prior to the Austrian ultimatum. Orgill identifies two domestic issues that redirected British attention from the developing crisis: the question of Ireland and, to a lesser extent, the death of Joseph Chamberlain on July 2. Furthermore, Orgill maintains “the unfamiliarity” of British journalists (p. 68) with Austria-Hungary led many of them to miss the larger significance of the assassination and its likely consequences to European relations. Orgill contends these factors in addition to the sympathy the assassination elicited from the British public for the Habsburg family “created an extremely favorable situation for the statesmen of the Central Powers,” who sought to exploit them for their advantage (p. 76). The Germans and Austrians hoped to influence the British press so that it would frame its coverage in ways that articulated Austria-Hungary's grievances and to justify their actions.

The third chapter provides a nuanced investigation of the attitudes of the British press in the period between Austria-Hungary delivering its ultimatum to Belgrade until the end of July. Although Orgill notes “some conservative papers were more inclined to criticize the harshness” of the ultimatum, he maintains “the conservative and the liberal press held more in common than not” (p. 123). Through this analysis, Orgill concludes liberal newspapers and a few conservative ones believed “Austria-Hungary was largely justified” in the terms of its ultimatum to Serbia (p. 126). Orgill recognizes the British press later diverged in its assessment of the party most responsible for escalating the crisis, with the conservative press blaming Austria and the liberal one blaming Russia, particularly after it mobilized. Furthermore, Orgill's analysis of the press reveals that Germany was perceived more along the lines of being “pacific” rather than a supporter of Austria-Hungary's belligerence (p. 136). Orgill uncovered articles in the Morning Post, the Westminster Gazette, the Daily Telegraph and the Times from between July 27 and July 30 that spoke to that effect. Orgill believes the Anglo-German détente that occurred prior to WWI is a likely reason as to why the press framed Germany in this way. In fact, the day before Britain declared war on Germany, the conservative Standard published an article that failed to recognize the German role in precipitating the crisis and asserted Germany was being “dragged” into the conflict by the “recklessness” of Austria-Hungary and “the equally precipitate action of Russia” (p. 140).

The fourth chapter explores the divisions that existed within the cabinet, Grey's maneuvering in late July and early August, and the events that ultimately led the British to declare war on Germany. Furthermore, the chapter examines British coverage of the late stages of the crisis, which Orgill contends “led German statesmen to conclude that their efforts to spin public opinion had been successful” since those advocating for British intervention appeared to be few in numbers (p. 160). However, Orgill notes there was a shift in the opening days of August when “the press took a dramatic turn toward intervention” (p. 172). Although newspapers were growing increasingly suspicious of Germany's intentions after it rejected an offer of a conference and issued its ultimatum that Russia demobilize, it was the German threat to Belgium that settled much of the dissent in the British cabinet for war and galvanized the press, with the exception of “the most radical organs” to support the government’s position (p. 197).
Orgill consulted various archives and libraries in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany when researching this book. However, his argument benefited from the discovery of sixty-nine British newspaper articles and other documents preserved in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts that demonstrate British newspapers were being read and analyzed by the Germans. These sixty-nine articles represent slightly more than half of the 136 articles preserved within this collection, which suggests the interest the German Foreign Office had in the views of the British press. Furthermore, Orgill provides substantial evidence from archival research and published documents to show the German and Austrian ambassadors to the United Kingdom, Prince Karl Max von Lichnowsky and Count Albert von Mensdorff, respectively, monitored British newspapers and tried to influence the British press to produce coverage favorable to the agenda of the Central Powers. Furthermore, Orgill uses the recollections of J. A. Spender, the editor of the Westminster Gazette, as further evidence that the Austrians tried to cultivate a favorable position through the efforts of Baron Georg von Franckenstein. Although Orgill’s analysis recognizes some newspapers echoed those talking points the Central Powers wanted discussed, he ultimately concludes that “it is quite clear” German and Austrian attempts to influence the British press lacked “a real, long-lasting effect” and “created more hostility and suspicion than anything else” (p. 230).

Aside from uncovering the attempts made by the Central Powers to cultivate the British press for their own objectives, Orgill provides a strong analysis of the newspaper coverage examining a number of key conservative and liberal papers and provides circulation data so that readers can see how widely read some of these newspapers were in 1914. Orgill’s contention that the British press was distracted in the beginning of the July Crisis is supported by Ian Bullock’s analysis of the socialist weeklies Labour Leader, Clarion, and Justice, which were not featured in Orgill’s analysis [1]. Orgill’s use of diaries written by C. P. Scott and R. D. Blumenfeld, the editors of the Manchester Guardian and Daily Express, respectively, also supports this as they speak to how these two placed greater weight on the issue of Ireland. Furthermore, Orgill does a fine job charting the shifts in commentary of several newspapers through various stages of the July Crisis, including the lateness with which some newspapers adopted a more critical view of Germany. Orgill believes the coverage in the conservative Daily Telegraph and liberal Westminster Gazette on August 3 and after “was significant, because it was the first real expression of any anti-German feelings” exhibited by them (p. 198). However, questions arise as to why an analysis of the Daily Mirror did not feature more prominently in this book since it had a circulation number of approximately a million in 1914, which is a larger number than that of the other newspapers listed in tables A.4 and A.5.

In conclusion, Orgill writes an engaging and nuanced analysis of British liberal and conservative press coverage during the July Crisis that will be valuable for students and scholars in the field since it fills some of the gaps in the existing historiography. Orgill reminds readers that it was ultimately the politicians that were the ones to declare war against the Central Powers rather than the press, but there was some degree of interaction between the two groups that allowed editors and journalists to influence political perspectives. Rumors of the Great War highlights the importance of newspapers in influencing politicians and masterfully unravels how the Germans and Austrians attempted to use the press as a tool to advance their agendas during the tense days of the July Crisis. It is a must-read for those interested in the British press on the eve of WWI.

Note
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