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John H. Maurer and Christopher M. Bell, eds., *At the Crossroads between Peace and War: The London Naval Conference of 1930*. Annapolis: Naval Inst. Press, 2014. Pp. x, 269. ISBN 978-1-61251-326-3.

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After the carnage and devastation of the Great War, the victorious Allies attempted to prevent future conflicts by means of international treaties and agreements, such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 “outlawing” war. With the prewar naval arms race between Great Britain and Germany still fresh in memory, particular efforts were made to place limits on naval power.¹ The Treaty of Versailles, for example, severely limited the size of Germany’s navy. The Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 [hereafter, Washington Treaty] between France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the United States, restricted battleship design and construction.² Each successive effort at naval arms control, however, left loopholes or resulted in new shipbuilding races that necessitated yet more conferences. The Washington Treaty placed no restriction on one critical class of warships—cruisers. In Geneva in 1926–27, French, British, and American negotiators tried to extend size and number limitations to cruisers, but their efforts foundered on US insistence on parity across all types of warships. This marked the nadir of Anglo-American relations during the interwar years. The London Naval Conference of 1930 [hereafter, London Conference] brought together the signatories of the Washington Treaty to pursue agreement on as yet unregulated warships.

Editors (and contributors) John H. Maurer and Christopher M. Bell have gathered essays by seven distinguished historians in *At the Crossroads between Peace and War*. The book focuses on the efforts at the London Conference to bring cruisers, destroyers, and submarines within the ambit of the ratio and size restrictions established by the Washington Treaty. Only Great Britain, Japan, and the United States came to any understanding; France and Italy declined to join them. The tripartite agreement proved to be ephemeral, however. Naval leaders in Japan viewed it as unfairly constraining and soon embarked on an expansion of naval power that culminated in Japan’s wars of aggression in the Far East.

The first book-length consideration of the London Conference since 1962,³ *At the Crossroads* “provides the first comparative examination of the major powers involved in interwar naval arms control negotiations at London in 1930” (3). The volume’s contributors go beyond the usual concentration on Great Britain and the United States, drawing on recent research and analysis to consider the positions of France, Italy, and Japan as well. The essays open new perspectives on the internal conflicts and strategic considerations that preoccupied the members of each national delegation. The editors maintain that the London Conference

was a pivotal moment in interwar arms control and, by extension, in the history of the interwar period.... This volume fills an important gap in our understanding of what happened at London and why its achievement proved so fleeting. By reexamining the London Conference, it is possible to see how history turns, how one era ends and a new one begins. London marked the end of the First World War’s aftermath, of the attempts by world leaders to construct a new international order based on a liberal worldview of cooperation and mutual security, to reduce the danger of war by controlling arms. (3)

Chapter 1, “A Turning Point in Anglo-American Relations?” by John T. Kuehn (US Army Command and General Staff College), and chapter 2, “Great Britain and the London Naval Conference,” by Christopher Bell

1. See Emily O. Goldman, *Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control between the Wars* (University Park: Penn State U Pr, 1994).

2. See Erik Goldstein and John Maurer, eds., *The Washington Conference 1921–22: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor* (NY: Routledge, 1994).

3. Raymond G. O’Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium: The United States and the London Naval Conference of 1930* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 1962).

(Dalhousie Univ.) concern the efforts of US and British civilian leaders to bring about the conference and of naval leaders to obstruct any arms limitation agreements. President Herbert Hoover and Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald were determined to move their nations toward a new agreement and to avoid the consequences of the failed efforts in Geneva. Their primary motive—to save money on naval expenditures—was opposed to various degrees by their navies' leaders. Kuehn shows, however, that the influence of the US Navy's General Board "was significant and beneficial" in furthering "a British-U.S. rapprochement on the key issue that separated them and stood in the way of a closer relationship—treaty cruisers" (35). He argues that the London Conference should not be judged a failure, in light of subsequent events, particularly regarding Japan. Rather, he sees it as a turning point in ensuring close cooperation between Great Britain and the United States for decades to come.

Bell provides a similar analysis from the British viewpoint, showing how internal dissension was overcome to reach some understanding at least with the United States. Ramsey MacDonald's role in this was critical "because of the especially high value he placed on close Anglo-American relations, his genuine faith in disarmament, and his willingness to overrule his professional advisors" (77). While the British government failed to achieve its broader aims of damping international tensions and implementing real disarmament, Bell, too, stresses that the London Conference should not be seen as a failure, because it secured improved relations between Britain and the United States.

Prolific historian Norman Friedman analyzes America's positions at the conference in chapter 6, "Naval Strategy and Force Structure." He emphasizes the divergent views and goals of President Hoover, the US Navy, and the Congress. He also compares the effects of the different political systems in Great Britain and the United States on the conference.

In chapter 5, "Information Superiority: British Intelligence at London," John R. Ferris (Univ. of Calgary) explains the successes of British intelligence before and during the conference, based on previously unavailable archival sources. At the Washington Conference, the United States had decrypted and read Japan's secret communications with its delegation—a tactic essentially abandoned under Hoover. At London, Great Britain's codebreakers were able to read the otherwise secret communications of every delegation, including the Americans. Britain used that intelligence to bolster its negotiating positions, especially vis-à-vis Japan. Unfortunately for the British, "excellence in diplomatic intelligence was harnessed to mediocrity in policy and disaster in outcome" (198). Ferris reveals the value of intelligence gathering in diplomacy and strategic planning, and the extent to which "friendly" nations engaged in such activities even decades ago. In so doing, he furnishes much food for thought in view of recent disclosures about American intelligence gathering practices against ostensible allies. Such endeavors have in fact been commonplace for a long time.

Using the findings of his extensive archival research, Paul G. Halpern (Florida State Univ.) demonstrates in chapter 4, "The French and Italian Navies," that, while the "French-Italian rivalry may have appeared as a noisy distraction to the larger navies, ... that rivalry was very real and had a long history, and the fears it created were also very real" (135). He describes the naval competition between France and Italy in the Mediterranean before the First World War and shows how, even after the war, that naval conflict continued to influence the negotiating goals of each country. The Washington Treaty had granted Italy parity in battleships with France. At the London Conference, the French insisted that their security needs demanded a larger navy, especially in light of the growth of Italy's naval forces. Proposals for conciliation relied on Italy's agreeing to some level of French naval superiority. Not surprisingly, Benito Mussolini's fascist regime would have none of it. The result was the exclusion of France and Italy from the agreement reached at the conference and a renewed naval arms race between the two countries. As Halpern concludes, "The French and Italian rivalry represents a notable failure of the London Naval Conference to reduce naval armaments" (172).

In chapter 3, "The London Conference and the Tragedy of the Imperial Japanese Navy," Sadao Asada (Doshisha Univ.) provides a compelling account of the dissension that wracked Japan's delegation to the conference. Unlike previous discussions of the subject, Asada's essay "capitalizes on hitherto unused records of the 'hawks' in the Japanese delegation and the Navy General Staff, highlighting the internecine splits

within the navy that erupted at the time of the London Conference and indeed continued to plague the navy well into the late 1930s" (89). Asada shows that Japanese naval leaders viewed the Washington Treaty, which stipulated that Japan adhere to a sixty-percent ratio in battleships to the United States, as an affront and a terrible error. As a result, Japan approached the London Conference demanding at least a seventy-percent ratio in auxiliary ships compared to the United States, omitting submarines from the formula. Even so, Japan's delegation was sharply divided, and the Imperial Navy's hawks insisted on no backing off from the country's pre-conference positions. When civilian delegates reached an accommodation with the United States on cruisers, a crisis ensued both within the Japanese delegation and in the government at home. Ultimately, the civilian leadership imposed the compromise on the navy. Thereafter, Japanese naval leaders broke into two factions; those opposed to the "humiliating" treaty ultimately prevailed, with tragic consequences for East Asia and the world: "as far as the Japanese navy (and also Japanese-American relations) was concerned, the conference spelled a tragedy, marking a significant milestone on the road to Pearl Harbor" (121).

John Maurer (US Naval War College), in his summational chapter 7, "The London Conference: A Strategic Reassessment," asserts that it "represents a watershed, a turning point in the history of the interwar period" (229). Certainly, the essays collected here offer a more nuanced view than does previous scholarship on the topic; they judiciously balance successes, for example, the new British-American mood of cooperation, against failures, like the subsequent French-Italian naval expansion and the discontent of Japan's naval leaders. But the seeds of the failures and the pressures that culminated in the Second World War were planted long before 1930. And even today, tensions over China's rising power in East Asia attest to the familiar potentials and perils of "attempting to arrest international rivalries through arms control negotiations" (4).

The book is equipped with illustrations, extensive chapter notes, and an index, but, unfortunately, no bibliography. That quibble aside, *At the Crossroads between Peace and War* is a most valuable addition to the historiography of arms control initiatives during the interwar period. It should attract and instruct a readership extending well beyond naval historians.