

## BOOK REVIEW

## Allies against the Rising Sun

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. *Allies against the Rising Sun: The United States, the British Nations, and the Defeat of Imperial Japan*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. xxii + 458 pp. Notes, bibliography, photographs, maps. \$39.95 (cloth).

The prosecution of the war in the Pacific, from December 7, 1941, until November 1945 has never been a topic that has been short on attention. What has often been the case, however, is an overemphasis on the tactical and operational aspects of that campaign. Moreover, the scholarly work that has focused its attention on the strategic direction of the prosecution of the war in the Far East has been overwhelmingly American in nature. This is a natural and understandable occurrence given the success of American forces in the Pacific war, the overwhelming forces provided by the United States in the Allied war effort, the ignominious performance of the British Empire and its armed forces in the region, and the primacy of the United States in the postwar security environment. Nonetheless, the usual approach taken by American scholars dealing with the strategic aspects of the war in the Pacific have been for the most part overly nationalistic in tone and professionally unsupportable as far as recognition and research into allied contributions to that particular war effort. The book under review is a welcome change from that stale American-centric fare and a valuable contribution to the study of the *allied* war effort in the Pacific.

The research undertaken for the book has a good balance to it, a necessary attribute for a work of this nature. The author's archival research has been conducted on both sides of the alliance in equal measure, with many archives and primary sources being consulted. This research pattern is another welcome departure from most discussions of the Pacific war, which have tended to be dominated by American sources only. More importantly, the author recognizes the various layers of interaction at work not only between the American and British decision-making processes, but also that the British side of the equation was a vastly more complicated and intricate web of diplomacy and statecraft during wartime than the simple American national condition. Australian, New Zealand, Canadian perspectives and influences on the planning for war against Japan, particularly the final invasion of the home islands, is done with a fine attention and detail to the need for not only the British side of the equation to

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balance its own competing needs, but, also, for the American need to respect those inputs as well, for the good of the postwar relationship. An overarching desire to not fight the final battles of the Pacific war in a fashion that endangered closer British-American relations in the postwar era is also an important theme throughout the book. Sarantakes is careful to also ensure a balanced presentation as far as the number of actors introduced as part of the strategic policy-making elite goes. The overall effect is to produce an even-handed and thorough analysis of the allied strategic drivers that were in play during the debate and final planning for the invasion of Japan. When read in conjunction with another book published in 2009, about the allied effort to finish the war in the Pacific by invading the Japanese home islands, *Hell to Pay: Operation DOWNFALL and the Invasion of Japan, 1945-1947*, by D. M. Giangreco, students of that particular war will now have the most thorough explanation of strategic and operational considerations to date.

There are a few areas of concern with the Sarantakes book, however. The first is the nonconclusion of the work. The final chapters are a combination of philosophical vagueness, complimented by a "what they did after the war" section for the key actors discussed throughout the text, and that is the final word on the matter. There is no attempt to tie up how relations made during the war would or did move forward, no attempt made to make any conclusions about what this most fantastic of examples of alliance warfare means for studies of that sort, nor does it make any statement of what sort of impact the Pacific campaign had on the postwar Anglo-American strategic relationship, a theme that is brought out in earlier parts of the book. The conclusion gives the appearance of someone who had had enough of the book, could not decide how to end the work comprehensively, and just made a quick and easy finale to the effort. This disappointing end to the work raises questions then of just what was the purpose of the book, what are the enduring themes or issues we should take away and what is there to do in the future to add to questions asked or areas now opened up. And that should not be the way the reader is left feeling after all of the rest of the strong work that has gone into the monograph.

The other distracting aspect is the moralistic and judgmental character assessments of key actors. Does it really make a difference if these men were drunks, adulterers, and workaholics, when it comes to assessing the validity and appropriateness of their strategic decision making? If the answer is no, then there is a good deal of space wasted here on providing such information. If the answer is yes, then a great deal more work in the area of psychology, decision making, and the connection between those psychological traits and the final decisions taken needs to be done. The provision of such information, almost without context or direction, makes the inclusion of such judgments on character a curious method of assessing policymaking efficiency and appropriateness. This pattern of providing incomplete and unattached character vignettes only distracts from the flow of the book and does not really add anything to the analysis of the decision-making processes. This is particularly unfortunate given

the opportunity missed here to make a statement on the different strategic cultures and decision-making processes in the British and American conditions. Without a clear introduction that highlights not only the people, but the very different values, world views, centers of gravity, strategic priorities, and victory conditions, the reader is left with a good sense of who was involved in this high-level policymaking but much less satisfied as to the why aspects.

These quibbles aside, potential readers should not be put off from purchasing the book. This is by far the most up-to-date and accurate account of the realities of the concluding phase of the war in the Pacific, which was an Anglo-American affair. This focus on an allied approach is a most instructive example of American and British strategic needs both having to compromise to achieve a common end, a lesson not to be missed by today's American and British strategic policymakers. Moreover, it marks an important step forward in how top-level American historians are finally moving away from the "hegemonic" school of history, which has been the dominant approach to the study of American military participation in the First and Second World Wars for the last sixty years. It is more than time that American military and foreign policy historians recognized the fact that while a major actor in world affairs, the United States was rarely *the only* actor involved in shaping major international events. Sarantakes' work is to be applauded for breaking that parochial America First model for the study of the Pacific war, and it is to be hoped that others will take note and continue to apply this comparative and collaborative model to their own future efforts. Conclusion apart, the model provided here, particularly regarding the breadth of non-American archival sources, is a first-rate one to emulate.