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Lance E. Davis, Stanley L. Engerman. *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History since 1750.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. x + 453 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-85749-9.

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A One-Stop Statistical Data Shop

This volume does researchers and students of naval history a valuable service by compiling an impressive array of statistical data from a wide range of secondary sources. Much of this data has long been available, as is the case with Brian Mitchell's and Phyllis Deane's *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (1962), on which Davis and Engerman rely for most of their information about the British economy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Nonetheless, those in search of detailed information about the economic consequences of modern naval blockades may regard this as their one-stop shop.

Davis and Engerman devote chapters to the Anglo-French struggle, 1793-1815; the United States and Great Britain, 1776-1815; the American Civil War; British and German economic warfare in World War One; the Battle of the Atlantic; the American submarine offensive against Japan, 1942-45; and peacetime blockades and sanctions, chiefly in the post-World War Two era. An introductory chapter summarizes both the historical evolution of naval blockades and the international legal framework surrounding them, and two brief concluding chapters revisit the legal dimension and reiterate the authors' conclusions.

Those conclusions are by and large judicious, although two substantial ambiguities, one of them beyond Davis's and Engerman's control, and the other largely self-inflicted, permeate the work. The first is the partial nature of the economic data, especially for the earlier conflicts, coupled with the fact that, as the authors themselves stress (with reference to the Anglo-French wars, in this instance), "there were numerous other forces that affected the success or failure of the blockades, and, as a result, any simple evaluation is problematic" (p. 35).

Although the former problem diminishes as statistical data becomes more comprehensive, separating the consequences of an enemy's economic warfare from, for instance, domestic policy decisions by the German high command during World War One, or Japan's fatal incompetence at anti-submarine warfare during World War Two remains a problem. Thus, readers should not be surprised that many of the conclusions are couched in very tentative terms. For example, "[t]here was little prospect," Davis and Engerman write, "that a French

blockade designed to bring down England would be successful, but the introduction of the Continental System probably had a somewhat positive effect from the French point of view" (p. 39). Such cautious language may frustrate readers in search of definitive answers, but the evidence does not permit greater certainty.

Elsewhere Davis and Engerman are generally on solid ground. They conclude, rightly, that the Union blockade of the Confederacy did serious economic harm to the latter, that the British "blockade" of Germany in World War One was "an effective weapon in the allied arsenal," although not in itself decisive, and that the American submarine and mining campaign against Japan in World War Two "may have been the most effective naval blockade in history," although, again, Japan might well be cited as an accessory to its own defeat (pp. 158, 214, 377).

The other problem might be termed definitional. At the outset Davis and Engerman candidly admit that "we have no formal training as military historians, nor did we seek to utilize naval archives to obtain primary material" (p. ix). The latter lacuna is not a serious drawback, given that most of the statistical data upon which they rely is not generally found in naval archives and that the naval material that they do use–numbers of ships or submarines at sea, ratios of tonnage sunk, and the like–is available from published sources. On the other hand, their lack of familiarity with naval history probably contributes to their failure first to distinguish clearly between military and economic blockades (although at times they do acknowledge the distinction) and second to distinguish between commerce raiding (Alfred Thayer Mahan's *guerre de course*) and blockading. Their confusion over the latter is especially pronounced, leading them to assert that convoying was and is a countermeasure to the latter, rather than the former.

This confusion probably stems in part from the blurred boundaries between the objects and the consequences of blockades. The British blockades of France in the eighteenth century were military in intent, designed to prevent the French navy from putting to sea, but by the early nineteenth century had reached a level of effectiveness that they had economic consequences as well. Put another way, the British ended up with the capability to impose an economic blockade on much of Napoleonic Europe more or less by accident.

An even more vexing question, of which Davis and Engerman generally steer clear, is determining what was and what was not a blockade in the post-1815 era. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, blockades typically consisted of large warships stationed close off enemy naval arsenals to prevent their fleets from escaping. The aim broadened in the nineteenth century as first the British and then the United States employed blockades to damage their respective enemies' economies, although the tactic of the close blockade remained. But technology–in particular torpedoes, mines, and submarines–altered the conduct of blockading operations beyond recognition in the twentieth century.

Did the *de facto* (Davis and Engerman rightly emphasize that it was not *de jure* because it failed to meet the legal requirements for legitimacy) "distant" or "masking" British blockade of Germany 1914-1918 meet the historical criteria for one? More to the point, did the German submarine offensives against Britain in World War One and Britain and the United States during World War Two, and the American one against Japan in the latter conflict constitute "blockades" *per se*, or were they closer to Mahan's *guerre de course*? Certainly none of the submarine campaigns adhered to the original aim of blockading, that is, preventing enemy warships from leaving harbor. They may have been economic blockades, but they were not military ones.

At the macro level, this is a semantic rather than a substantive distinction, and naval historians can all draw upon Davis's and Engerman's data and the bulk of their conclusions, even if they disagree with their terminology. At the same time, a few more significant criticisms can be leveled. First, one can question the authors' decision to label the Anglo-American relationship 1776-1815 one of incipient or outright conflict. True, the period was bookended by wars, but much of the intervening twenty-nine years was marked by fruitful commercial relations, regardless of often heated political rhetoric, a fact succinctly summed up by Nicholas Rodger in *The Command of the Ocean*: "[i]t was clear [by the early 1790s] that the economic consequences of American independence had been minimal.... ;. In 1700 10 percent of British exports went to the Americas; by 1798 the figure was 57 percent."[1]

If the chapter on British-U.S. relations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is an uncomfortable fit in this context, that on blockades without war has almost no place at all in a volume specifically titled *Naval Blockades in War and Peace*, as few of the post-World War Two embargoes Davis and Engerman address actually involved naval forces. (One that did, the U.S. naval cordon around Cuba during the missile crisis, goes unmentioned.) In most cases, these were purely economic

sanctions, without a naval enforcement component, although the multinational blockade of Iraq in 1990-1991 constituted a notable exception.

Here and there one can also question the authors' conclusions. They assert, for instance, that the British blockade of Napoleonic Europe and the Continental System "had an impact on industry in the other continental nations similar to the impact on France, being both mixed and relatively minor" (p. 38). By contrast, the conclusion of the leading authority on the subject, FranÃ§ois Crouzet, is that the British blockade wreaked substantial long term damage at sectoral and regional, if not national, levels. Indeed, states Crouzet, "[b]ecause of the permanent injury inflicted on many Continental industries by the interruption of overseas trade, the war brought about a lasting deindustrialization or pastoralization of large areas.... ;. The dislocation and eventual interruption of the Continent's seaborne trade, owing to maritime war and British blockade, brought about undoubtedly a collapse of the 'Atlantic sector' in the Continental economy, which had serious and lasting consequences."[2]

There are also a number of factual errors scattered throughout. For instance, the French Revolutionary Wars began in 1792, not 1789, the British did not triumph militarily in the War of 1812 (it was a draw), the Federal blockade of the South during the American Civil War was not, geographically, the longest blockade ever deployed by any nation¿'the British blockaded major European ports from Hamburg to Venice during the height of the Napoleonic Wars–and the "almost complete destruction of the American merchant marine" was not "the product, either directly or indirectly, of Confederate privateers (of which there were virtually none, by the way) and cruisers," it was chiefly the result of economic trends which predated the Civil War (pp. 112, 130). Most bizarrely, their claim that "[h]indsight suggests that, had U.S. forces bypassed the Philippines.... ; they almost certainly could have taken the Marianas some months before they did" suggests a fundamental want of chronological knowledge: the invasion of the Marianas took place in June 1944, that of the Philippines began four months later.

Finally, there is an irritating amount of repetition. For example, Napoleon's aims in imposing the Continental System are set forth on both pages 31 and 38 and summarized again on page 45, the French industries helped by his embargo are listed on both pages 38 and 52, and the volume of Allied merchant ship construction in World War Two is stated on both pages 284 and 307. Numerous other examples could be noted.

Most of these drawbacks are surely due to the fact that Davis and Engerman are economic, rather than military, historians, and that fact probably provides as good a guide to this volume's utility as any. They are on firmer ground when dealing with economic data and analysis than when addressing the geographic, political, military, or naval realms. Thus, scholars working in any of the latter fields will appreciate the profusion of economic information both in the text and the almost 130 tables, many of them several pages long, but will probably want to rely on other sources when situating that formation in geopolitical or geostrategic contexts.

Notes

[1]. Nicholas Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 367.

[2]. FranÃ§ois Crouzet, "Wars, Blockades, and Economic Change in Europe, 1972-1815," *Journal of Economic History* 24, no. 4 (1964): 573-74.

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