

***Allies in War:  
Britain and America against the Axis Powers, 1940-1945***  
**Roundtable Review**



Reviewed Works:

**Mark Stoler.** *Allies in War: Britain and America against the Axis Powers, 1940-1945.* New York: Oxford University Press, February 2006. 318 pp. \$39.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-3407-2026-4 (hardcover); 978-0-3407-2027-1 (paperback).

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**Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge**

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**M**ark Stoler brings extensive teaching, research, and previous publications to his *Allies in War: Britain and America against the Axis Powers, 1940-1945*. Since 1970, he has taught diplomatic and military history at the University of Vermont. He has three previous studies that deal with U.S. diplomatic and military history of World War II and a “problems” book that also focuses on the war. His successful integration of diplomacy and warfare is also evident in his service as President of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (2004) and as a trustee for the Society for Military History.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Stoler’s latest book is his ability to cover all theatres of WWII with the exception of the German-Russian front and to address not only major diplomatic issues but also the ebb and flow of wartime strategy and major engagements in little more than 200 pages. In a concluding chapter, Stoler explores the consequences of WWII and takes the story into decolonization, the Cold War, and postwar Anglo American relations. Gerhard Weinberg’s *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* devotes 1,200 pages to this subject with the inclusion of the Nazi-Soviet war. The reviewers agree that Stoler makes almost every word count, follows very few tangents from the main story in each theatre, and discusses quickly almost every pertinent historiographical question that has been raised in the past thirty years on WWII.

Stoler’s study provides an opportunity for the specialist in U.S. diplomacy to revisit a field that has received considerably less recent scholarly attention than its successor, the Cold War, and offers a very good introduction for the graduate student entering this field and looking for an introduction and a comprehensive bibliography. The book could also serve well as a core text for an upper division lecture course on WWII.

So is there anything new and controversial in Stoler’s succinct synthesis? Stoler suggests that he has relied on major secondary works to update earlier assessments such as the impact of Ultra intelligence on allied strategy and to incorporate major challenges to Winston Churchill’s version of the war. The reviewers also note the author’s emphasis on the Anglo-American wartime alliance, its origins, nature, and shifts during the war as well as the integration of the European and Pacific wars in one study. Stoler definitely raises issues that merit further discussion, such as

1. Does Stoler successfully offer a story of the war on both major theatres including the Mediterranean and India/Burma/Southeast Asia with his focus on Anglo-American relations? Stoler does give considerable attention to the role of Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt in the formation of the Anglo-American alliance in 1940-41 through the ARCADIA conference in Washington and the maintenance of the alliance to victory in the Atlantic, Europe, and the Pacific. Within the constraints of space and scope, the reviewers would like to have had more development of the

personalities involved on both sides, their views of each other, and how the relationship worked at different levels.

2. How does the Anglo-American alliance shift during the war with respect to the relative influence of each side on strategic decisions such as priorities with respect to Europe and the Pacific, the timing of the allied invasion of Europe, the importance of the Mediterranean as an alternative route into Central Europe, and appropriate tactics in dealing with Josef Stalin and the Soviet Union? Stoler devotes more attention to this than previous studies by noting the gradual strengthening of the U.S. role after Pearl Harbor as Washington provided more and more of the war materials through Lend-Lease, as the American naval, air and troop commitment intensified in both major theatres, and as FDR shifted to back the American Joint Chiefs of Staff versus Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff. For example, FDR joined Churchill in supporting a North African invasion in 1942 versus the Joint Chiefs of Staff (64-70), and at the Casablanca Conference FDR again agreed to an invasion of Sicily in 1943 whereas American commanders wanted to put more resources into the Pacific and the return to Western Europe. (86-89). However, by the QUADRANT conference in August 1943 and the Teheran Conference in November, the U.S. role had increased vis-à-vis the British and FDR sided with the JCS against Churchill on making a major effort in Italy or the Balkans as opposed to Overlord in Normandy and the multiple offensives against Japan. (123-137, 139-142)
3. Historiographical debate on WWII issues used to focus on questions such as FDR and the “back door” to war thesis on Pearl Harbor; the impact of the allied policy of unconditional surrender on Axis resistance; the realism and wisdom of FDR’s assumptions and diplomacy in dealing with Stalin; the alleged betrayal of Eastern Europe to communism at the Yalta Conference; the British-U.S. dispute over whether to invade Germany with a broad advance by all armies versus a single thrust for Berlin; and the decision to use atomic bombs to end the war in the Pacific. Stoler masterfully discusses each of these issues and takes most of the air left out of all of them with the exception of the a-bomb issue. In Chapter VI “Aspects and Impact of Total War” Stoler also judiciously reviews conflicting views on the role of the European resistance, the intelligence revolution and impact on the Atlantic war, the nature of the strategic bombing campaign against Germany, and debate on its tactical versus strategic impact.
4. One classic issue that Stoler develops throughout the book is Churchill’s quest to reinvade Europe through the alleged “soft underbelly” of Italy and the Balkans. Stoler highlights Churchill’s stubborn persistence to redirect allied forces from Overlord or the Pacific to the Mediterranean and Balkans at the QUADRANT conference (123-125), to gain FDR’s backing for a move on the island of Rhodes in September 1943 (128-129), at Teheran (141-142), and throughout 1944 over the plans for the ANVIL invasion to support Normandy (147-149). Churchill’s quest to the extent that he even lost the support of the British Chiefs of Staff in 1944 is a

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fascinating example, one of many, that Stoler provides on major disagreements within the alliance from European vs. Pacific priorities to growing disagreements on postwar concerns such as colonialism and economic relations.

5. Stoler also provides sufficient ammunition for pro and con assessments of the major British and American military leaders. Lt. General Bernard L. Montgomery would seem to rank the highest on Stoler's list of candidates for most inflated reputation and most impossible to deal with in the allied coalition. He merits a separate entry in the index for "ego and arrogance." If General Douglas MacArthur had served in Europe he might have been a close contestant. Stoler also notes how each side retained a degree of prejudice and suspicion toward the other, such as the repeated suggestions of British diplomats and military leaders that American generals and soldiers were pretty second rate and needed a lot of British guidance. This was matched on the American side by excessive suspicions that the British just wanted to restore their colonies and let the Red Army take care of Germany and for the U.S. to keep Japan preoccupied.
  
6. The Pacific war receives appropriate attention from Stoler, although the Anglo-U.S. relationship is more limited. Initially, the British role was mainly one of resisting the U.S. Chief's desire to step up the offensive against Japan with the British mainly engaged in Burma and then Southeast Asia. What is most striking from Stoler's assessment on the Pacific are the difficulties and costs in casualties that the U.S. and its allies incurred to destroy the Japanese navy and drive the Japanese out of many outposts on so many islands. Stoler makes clear that this experience heightens the importance of a Soviet entry into the war in order to keep Japanese troops in China and to deal with the anticipated costs of invading the Japanese home islands if the Japanese resisted the way they did on almost every island from Guadalcanal to Okinawa.

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