

Tirpitz, Treaties and Transgressions:  
The Evolution of German Naval Strategy 1918-1939

By: Naval Cadet Cameron S. T. Donaldson

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Versailles 1919.....	6
Chapter 2: Washington 1922.....	18
Chapter 3: London 1930.....	30
Chapter 4: AGNA 1935.....	41
Conclusion.....	55
Bibliography.....	59

## Abstract

The interwar period from 1918-1939 was a significant era for German naval strategic development, where over the course of 20 years the level of resources available to Germany would dramatically change how it hoped to achieve its naval objectives. A series of treaties and international accords during this period would place restrictions on the size of Germany's navy and affect how its adversaries would develop their own navies, which in turn would force Germany to modify its thinking on how it would hope to counter them. With the majority of its fleet sunk at Scapa Flow in 1919, Germany could have rebuilt its navy around new strategic concepts that could have produced greater results than it achieved during the First World War, but it would be severely restricted in what it was allowed to build and for which purposes. For the German navy, an internal debate regarding the relevancy between large battlefleets and smaller squadrons of cruisers paired with submarines would dominate most of the strategic conversations of the 1920s and 30s. This debate would eventually be won by the promotion of *Admiral* Erich Raeder to the position of commander of the navy, who would go on to pursue a strategic policy that mirrored that of *Admiral* Alfred von Tirpitz during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The combination of restrictions that were placed upon the German navy by the Western Allies and Raeder's commitment to a strategy that he did not have the resources for would be the most significant factors that would affect how Germany would develop its navy in the leadup to the Second World War.

## Introduction

From the end of the First World War to the beginning of the Second World War, the German navy underwent what can only be described as a period of complete revitalization, primarily in the area of strategic naval capability. As of the Armistice of 11 November 1918, the *Kaiserliche Marine* (Imperial German Navy) possessed a formidable surface force with their High Seas Fleet, as well as a burgeoning submarine fleet, where they chose to concentrate in the North Sea to serve as a bulwark against their chief naval adversary, Great Britain. Following the scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow and the creation of the new Weimar Republic, the German navy was renamed the *Reichsmarine* (Navy of Germany) and attempted to rebuild and structure their forces with very limited resources and mitigate the severe restrictions imposed upon them by the Allies. By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, the renamed *Kriegsmarine* (German War Navy) had shifted their naval policy from a concentration of battleships in the North Sea to the dispersion of their forces, both surface and subsurface, to engage in maritime interdiction in the waters surrounding Europe, primarily in the Atlantic, as well as the North and Norwegian Seas. The *SMS Bayern*, the most advanced battleship of the *Kriegsmarine*, would have been considered obsolete when compared to the *KMS Bismarck*, the most powerful battleship that Germany has ever produced. The *Type VII* U-boat that Germany began the Second World War with was generations ahead of the U-boats that were used during the First World War. The strategies of the head of the German Navy in 1939, *Admiral* Erich Raeder, were based upon those of the High Seas Fleet Commander *Admiral* Franz von Hipper. However, they had undergone significant developments during the interwar period and had to be reframed around the new capabilities of the German navy. The vessels, tactics and strategies of the three sequential stages of the German navy changed drastically over the course of 21 years,

so much so that almost the entirety of the fleet, sailors and tactics of 1939 would have been almost unrecognizable to the navy of 1918.

This thesis is structured around four periods, or epochs, of German naval strategic development during the interwar period, revolving around four critical treaties and agreements that had a profound impact on how Germany adapted its naval strategy to meet the demands of each period. First was the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, a document that formally ended the First World War and would represent the biggest hurdle to strategic development for Germany for the longest duration of the interwar period. The second treaty was the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, an international arms limitation treaty that Germany was not a part of but would go on to influence how the German admiralty would develop their strategies to meet those of their adversaries. The third document to have a profound impact on German strategic naval development was the London Naval Treaty of 1930, a build on to the previous arms limitation agreement that would push Germany to become bolder with its transgressions against the Versailles treaty and would eventually lead to the fourth and final agreement. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement (AGNA) of 1935 would be the most critical factor driving naval development, as it finally gave Germany permission to break the conditions of the Versailles treaty and begin rearming for the eventual Second World War. These four documents would signify the beginnings and endings of each of the four eras, as Germany would transform its naval strategy from one that suited its interests during the final days of the First World War to one that reflected what it hoped to achieve in the second.

Throughout this period, there were a number of events that instigated these significant changes in German naval strategy, each building off of each other. These changes could be categorized into the three strategic concepts: ways, means and ends, and each of these concepts

would have a substantial impact on how German naval planners would organize and frame their thinking. Ways, representing the tactics that would be used by the three iterations of the German navy, would develop considerably over the interwar period and how the Germans chose to employ their forces would rely heavily upon the other two concepts. Means, being the assets that Germany had on hand to achieve strategic successes, would change significantly between the two wars and was the chief factor driving the development for the ways in which Germany pursued its strategies. Ends, representing what Germany hoped to achieve through its various strategies, identified the objectives that the German navy was tasked with achieving, and these objectives would change as the assets and tactics would develop over the years. Regarding the vessels that made up the German navy, there were several treaties and agreements that would restrict what the Germans were allowed to possess, both in terms of numbers and in technology, while simultaneously allowing the Allies these same types of vessels. This would force Germany to change how it usually employed its navy, leading them to pursue other naval tactics that suited their fleet and seek out other allies to make up for their deficiency in sheer number of warships. Having been forced to change tactics, this would also require a reevaluation of what Germany hoped to achieve within the maritime domain, and this evolution would be the driving factor behind their naval strategy going into the Second World War. With the several treaties and agreements of the interwar period serving as the catalyst, this thesis will argue that these influential factors would eventually lead to the development of a new German strategic outlook in the 1920s and 30s, transitioning from a focus on a Mahanian battle fleet during the First World War to a future focus on maritime interdiction and commerce raiding in the lead up to the Second World War.

## Chapter 1: Versailles 1919

Immediately following the end of the First World War, there were a number of critical events that transpired that would revolve around the Treaty of Versailles 1919, the document that outlined Germany's naval restrictions and the large amount of reparations that they would be made to pay. One of the greatest impacts on the development of German naval strategy between the two world wars had to come from the scuttling of the High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow, where 15 battleships, 4 light cruisers, and 32 destroyers of the *Kaiserliche Marine* were sunk by the German crews themselves.<sup>1</sup> Following the Armistice of 11 November 1918, Germany was ordered to surrender 6 battlecruisers, 10 Dreadnought battleships, 8 light cruisers and 50 of its most modern destroyers, all of which were to be interned at Scapa Flow off the coast of Scotland until the fate of the warships would be decided in the eventual Treaty of Versailles in 1919.<sup>2</sup> In addition to its surface fleet, Germany was also ordered to surrender all of its U-boats, 176 in total, which were interned at Harwich, England where the submarines were dismantled and the German crews allowed to return home.<sup>3</sup> This left Germany with a navy of 6 pre-Dreadnought battleships, 6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers, 12 torpedo boats, and 15,000 sailors to crew them all, a far cry from the massive fleet they once possessed.<sup>4</sup> For Germany, and in particular for Kaiser Wilhelm II, the High Seas Fleet had been an important source of pride, comprising the majority of their surface forces. It was only when it became evident that the surface fleet was not going to achieve any major strategic success against the British that the German Admiralty began to place a focus on their submarine force, but by then it was too late.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Jacob Marder. *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era 1904-1919: 1917: Victory and Aftermath*. Vol. 5. 5 vols. (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1970), 282.

<sup>2</sup> Robert K. Massie. *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany and the Winning of the Great War at Sea*. (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2004), 777.

<sup>3</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 780.

<sup>4</sup> n.d. *Treaty of Peace with Germany (Treaty of Versailles)*, in U.S. Department of State, and Charles I Bevans. *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America: Volume 2 (Multilateral Treaties, 1918-1930)*. (Versailles, FR: Library of Congress, 1919).

Following the Armistice, Germany was forced to hand over its High Seas Fleet while the Allies deliberated on what to do with this large number of ships. Each Allied country had their own intentions for the captured German warships, with the French and Italians wanting those vessels to bolster their fleets to make up for the ships that they had lost during the war. The British and Americans wanted to have the ships disposed of so as to not upset their level of naval supremacy over all other nations.<sup>5</sup> The Germans, not wanting to see their surface fleet be handed over to their enemies to use as they saw fit, and as a means to deny the Allies an addition to their naval force, decided to scuttle almost their entire force in the Allies' possession. This left them with a navy composed only of the small number of obsolete ships that they had not been forced to hand over. In addition, the entirety of their U-boat fleet was required to be relinquished and was subsequently destroyed, with this meaning that Germany would need to completely rebuild their fleet, giving them a lot more freedom in how they chose to use their resources to develop and operate a new force in the future.

One of the first major issues the German navy ran into was regaining control of their personnel, as there were still large amounts of unrest within the non-commissioned ranks following the Kiel Mutiny in November of 1918. Upon hearing news that they would be ordered on a suicide mission against the Royal Navy (RN) in the hopes of inflicting enough damage to demand better conditions at the negotiating table, sailors of the *Kaiserliche Marine* mutinied against their higher command. This event would eventually lead to the German Revolution that would see the Kaiser removed from power and the Weimar Republic established.<sup>6</sup> Still wary of their senior officers, and having their concerns amplified by worsening economic conditions, many that served in the surface fleet still held onto socialist ideas, whereas their counterparts in

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<sup>5</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 778.

<sup>6</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 776.



the former U-boat arm tended to be much more conservative and supportive of the Second Reich, similar to the German Admiralty.<sup>7</sup> This distinction in interests would result in large elements of the surface fleet cutting their losses and returning to civilian life, whereas the old officer corps and those that served on the U-boats, even though Germany no longer possessed any, largely chose to remain with the new *Reichsmarine*. It would be these men that would seek to rebuild and regain some of their prestige that had been lost as a result of Germany's surrender in the war.<sup>8</sup>

Around the early 1920s there began to be a growing difference of opinion among the *Reichsmarine* regarding the best form of future naval strategy, and this distinction became more and more apparent in the years following the Treaty of Versailles. In one camp were the “traditionalists”, those being proponents of Mahanian theories such as concentration of force with balanced fleets focused on battleships. Led by the famous naval reformer *Admiral* Alfred von Tirpitz, this camp would be largest and most dominant during the First World War, and would eventually be championed by *Admiral* Erich Raeder, future commander of the *Kriegsmarine* for the first half of the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> The opposing camp consisted of *Reichsmarine* officers that did not believe that Germany could compete with Britain by means of battleship fleets, and instead supported ideas such as commerce raiding with smaller squadrons of cruisers, with a much greater emphasis on the role of the U-boat in these kinds of operations. This group was much smaller than the Mahanian camp, with its ideas originating from the writings of *Konteradmiral* (Rear Admiral) Wolfgang Wegener, who would often be overshadowed by his contemporaries within this school of thought. His ideas would interest

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<sup>7</sup> Tomas Termote. *War Beneath the Waves: U-Boat Flotilla Flandern 1915-1918*. (London, UK: Uniform Press, 2017), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 773.

<sup>9</sup> Holger H. Herwig. “The Failure of German Sea Power, 1914–1945: Mahan, Tirpitz, and Raeder Reconsidered.” *The International History Review* 10, no. 1, (1988), 73.

commanders such as *Admiral* Reinhard Scheer and *Admiral* Karl Dönitz in the later halves of both the First and Second World Wars.<sup>10</sup> These competing sets of beliefs on naval strategy would have a tremendous impact on how the German navy would operate during the world wars, and almost as importantly, how Germany would plan its shipbuilding programme.

Greatly influenced by von Tirpitz, German shipbuilding strategy for most of the First World War was focused on trying to match British Dreadnoughts in the hopes that whenever the Mahanian-style decisive engagement ever took place, *Deutschland* would come out on top. Finally recognizing this could not be achieved, and understanding that they could not match the British gunnery skills, German shipbuilders placed a much greater emphasis on having slower but far better armoured battleships. These new German battleships could withstand punishing amounts of fire from the enemy and still maintain their ability to return fire in kind.<sup>11</sup> This characteristic of German battleships would remain for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on survivability as a key design factor, as could be seen in almost all of their battleships beginning with *SMS Nassau* and going all the way through to *KMS Bismarck*. Another reason for this emphasis on sustaining fire was the fact that the Germans knew that they could not match the British shipbuilding capabilities, and so had to focus on quality over quantity, in order to make up for this shortfall in industrial capability. Nowhere was this better demonstrated than at the Battle of Jutland 1916, where despite being outnumbered, German battleships were able to withstand more hits before sinking when compared to their British adversaries, resulting in an engagement where the German navy suffered fewer losses than the RN, although they were unable to break the British blockade imposed on the northern German ports.<sup>12</sup> It would be this failure to seize a strategic victory at Jutland that would prompt a change in German naval

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<sup>10</sup> Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power", 83.

<sup>11</sup> Robert K. Massie. *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), 496.

<sup>12</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 665.

strategy. The capability of the submarine would be examined as a means to break Britain's naval supremacy and inflict devastating blows to its economy.

Britain, being a small island with a large population, was entirely dependent on imports brought in from either Europe or other parts of the world, and as one of Germany's chief adversaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was in Berlin's interest to exploit this vulnerability. Since they could not form a surface blockade around the island due to the fact that they themselves were blockaded in Wilhelmshaven during the First World War, the only other option that was left for Germany was to utilize their U-boats, this technology being a new addition to the German fleet. Due to submarines being such a new innovation, many senior German naval commanders, such as the architect of Germany's First World War fleet *Admiral* Tirpitz, did not fully realize its potential capabilities, and as a result chose to allocate their resources to the tried and tested strategy of balanced surface fleets.<sup>13</sup> But when it became evident that the *Kaiserliche Marine* could not win the war with surface ships alone, more resources were allocated to the sub-surface fleet, its numbers rising sharply from 29 U-boats in September 1914 to 373 by war's end, of which almost exactly half were sunk by the enemy.<sup>14</sup> Sinking over 11 million tons of Allied cargo during the war, particularly after the Kaiser approved the use of unrestricted submarine warfare in February of 1917, the U-boat arm proved very influential in exerting a great amount of pressure against Britain.<sup>15</sup> It was however not enough to reverse German losses in the land campaign on the Western Front.

When the Germans were finally brought to the Hall of Mirrors, the same room where the German Empire was first proclaimed, to sign the Treaty of Versailles in June of 1919, the Allies

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<sup>13</sup> Clay Blair. *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunters, 1939-1942*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. (London, UK: Cassell, 1998), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Clodfelter. *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492-2015*. 4th ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2017), 428.

brought the full weight of their animosity towards Germany at the negotiating table. Treaty terms included severe military and economic restrictions, territorial losses and reparations, all backed up with the threat of recommencing hostilities should the Germans refuse to agree to the terms. Handing over all of its colonies in Africa and Asia, Germany ceased to be an overseas empire with one stroke of the pen, losing its ability to project its presence across the globe.<sup>16</sup> As most naval vessels of this time were still powered largely by coal-produced steam, this required ships to stop frequently at ports to refuel, and the more ports and coal depots that a navy controlled throughout the world the greater the range of their ships and where they could operate. The *Kaiserliche Marine* East Asia Squadron represented Germany's naval presence in the Pacific until it was destroyed at the Battle of the Falkland Islands in late 1914. It had succeeded in forcing the RN to disperse some of its forces that would have been used to blockade Germany in the early part of the war, but it was only able to operate so far from mainland Germany due to the controlled port of Jiaozhou in China, numerous ports in German New Guinea, and friendly ports along the Chilean coastline.<sup>17</sup> With all of these oversea territories gone, Germany lost its ability to operate its navy outside of the Baltic and North Seas, confining its naval presence to a small portion of Europe with the few warships that it was allowed to retain from the Treaty of Versailles. No longer a blue water navy, the new *Reichsmarine* would focus the naval power it could project around the northern coast of Europe for the next two decades.

In addition to the relinquishment of its colonial empire, Germany also was forced to turnover large portions of its European territory to the Allies, some of which severely impacted the German economy and its industries. In the east, the ripe farmland of Posen was turned over to Poland and with it went a significant portion of Germany's food production, forcing food

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<sup>16</sup> n.d., *Treaty of Versailles 1919*.

<sup>17</sup> Geoff Bennett, *The Pepper Trader: True Tales of the German East Asia Squadron and the Man Who Cast Them in Stone*. (Jakarta, ID: Equinox Pub., 2006), 171.

prices to rise sharply for a German population that had suffered from a crippling British blockade for four years and was already suffering from the economic downturn of losing the war.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the large port city of Danzig, which was made into a city-state under the mandate of the League of Nations, Germany lost considerable access to its Baltic Sea ports and was isolated from East Prussia, further restricting their potential range and capabilities of naval operations that they could launch in this portion of Europe.<sup>19</sup> To the west, the heavily industrialized territory of Alsace-Lorraine was given to France, who had lost the territory during the Franco-Prussian War, and in addition to this the Saar coalfields were to be operated by the French for a period of 15 years. These losses were perhaps the most damaging to the German economy, as they restricted Germany's industrial output considerably as it attempted to make good the reparations that were forced upon it. The loss of one of the largest coalfields in Europe deprived Germany of a cheap energy source that was still one of the most common in the world.<sup>20</sup> One of the only things that Germany had in their favour regarding their industrial output was the fact that their industrial zones were largely untouched during the war in comparison to France, which would take decades to recover, and this allowed the Germans industries to readjust after the loss of Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>21</sup> As has been previously stated, coal was critical to the operations of early 20<sup>th</sup> century navies, and as most of the ships that the *Reichsmarine* retained were old and still ran on coal, this loss of coal output to the French severely restricted the operations of German warships. This led to German admirals being very conservative with the amount of time warships spent at sea, which resulted in crews lacking the experience required to operate effectively.

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<sup>18</sup> Wesley B. Truitt, *Power and Policy: Lessons for Leaders in Government and Business*. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 114.

<sup>19</sup> Truitt, *Power and Policy*, 115.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Shannan Peckham. *Rethinking Heritage: Cultures and Politics in Europe*. (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 107.

<sup>21</sup> Peckham, *Rethinking Heritage*, 108.

Territory was not the only form of concession that Germany was forced to make as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. The most contested point of the treaty was the clause that forced Germany to accept all responsibility for the starting of the conflict, and thus had to pay reparations for all of the damage that was done to the Allies. Article 231, colloquially known as the war guilt clause, laid all of the blame for instigating the war at Germany's feet and at no other nation, in spite of the fact that Germany had only joined the conflict after Russia, Austria-Hungary and Serbia had already declared war on one another.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the moral burden that this blame would create, Germany was also forced to make good the damages that had been inflicted against the Allies, while still rebuilding its own economy that had been badly affected by the war. The cost of damage to the Allies was estimated to total billions of marks, of which would be calculated and would begin to be paid back after the treaty was signed, but until then Germany would turn over resources that they had on hand, most notably ships. As all of this deliberation on what Germany should pay was going on between the Allies, the Germans knew that the Allies would demand that their High Seas Fleet, which was still interned at Scapa Flow, be turned over to them permanently. As a result *Admiral* Ludwig von Reuter made the executive decision to scuttle the fleet while they still had the chance, forever denying the Allies the replacements they wanted to make up for their warship losses from the war.<sup>23</sup> However, warships were not the only maritime losses that the Allies suffered, as Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare campaign had sunk over 11 million tons of Allied cargo and thousands of Allied merchant ships, for which the Allies would demand reparations.<sup>24</sup> All of Germany's merchant vessels that had a capacity of over 1,600 tons of cargo and half of the ships that had a capacity between 1,000 and 1,600 tons of cargo were handed over to the Allies. These losses would

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<sup>22</sup> n.d., *Treaty of Versailles 1919*.

<sup>23</sup> Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 428.

decimate Germany's maritime economy for decades to come, and did nothing to ease the suffering of its citizens trying to cope with the severe economic restrictions imposed upon them.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that while the Treaty of Versailles negotiations were taking place, Germany was still being blockaded by the RN due to the possibility that hostilities would resume. Britain did not want to cede any advantage they had against the Germans prior to the armistice. Once the High Seas Fleet was turned over to the Allies, Germany no longer posed a threat to Allied naval operations, and they were then able to further tighten their blockade without fear of a response from the *Kaiserliche Marine*. This led to worsening conditions for the German people who had already been suffering from the blockade for the last four years, as Germany, like Britain, was reliant upon foreign imports to feed its population.<sup>26</sup> The continuation of the blockade, and the strengthening of it after the armistice, placed greater pressure upon German negotiators to capitulate to Allied demands quickly, as the Allies refused to lift the blockade until all of the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles were agreed to. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how many Germans died of starvation following the armistice and in direct relation to the blockade, but the largely agreed upon number is 100,000.<sup>27</sup> It was only after the Germans turned over almost the entirety of their merchant fleet that the Allies allowed a small amount of food imports into Germany to curtail the exponential rise in starvation until the treaty was signed. For German leaders, with no longer a navy to speak of, they were completely helpless against the threat, and indeed the great damage that the RN was inflicting against them. It would be this inability to respond to a naval threat against their country that would remain in the back of the mind of every German naval strategist for the next two decades.

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<sup>25</sup> n.d., *Treaty of Versailles*.

<sup>26</sup> A. Goodwin, *The New Cambridge Modern History*. 2nd ed. Vol. 12. (14 vols. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 213.

<sup>27</sup> S. L. Bane, *The Blockade of Germany after the Armistice 1918–1919*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1942), 791.

Following the First World War and the subsequent Treaty of Versailles, most Germans were angry at the harsh terms imposed, and blame for Germany's loss was directed against all elements of the German government. A popular belief at the time, the so-called "stab-in-the-back" myth, was that the armed forces of the Kaiser had fought valiantly against the Allied forces, but that they had been betrayed by the politicians and those on the home front. Those that believed this fantasy were sure the German army could have achieved a breakthrough and tipped the scales of the war to achieve victory or an honourable peace.<sup>28</sup> In reality, Germany had lost millions of men, spent hundreds of millions of marks of equipment, and was on the verge of collapse. This did not stop the harbouring of resentment against Weimar republicans, communist revolutionaries and most notably Jews, who were largely blamed for betraying the Germans fighting at the front by negotiating for an armistice.<sup>29</sup> Within the German armed forces, accusations were thrown around that one service or one department had contributed more to the war effort than the other, and the majority of that blame was leveled at the *Kaiserliche Marine*. For the decade leading up to the First World War, Germany had entered a naval arms race against Britain, Europe's great naval power, and attempted to reach parity in the new Dreadnought-style of battleships, hoping to one day upset the RN and achieve dominance over the coastlines of Europe. While they were unable to achieve parity with the RN, Germany had still constructed one of the largest surface fleets in the world at a considerable cost to the military budget, and against the wishes of the army and the fledgling air force.<sup>30</sup> When war broke out, the German High Command had wished to use the High Seas Fleet, built at great cost, against the RN's Grand Fleet and the coastal towns of England and Scotland. However, the High Seas Fleet was blockaded into the port of Wilhelmshaven for the majority of the war and the only attempted

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<sup>28</sup> Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914-1949*. (London, UK: Penguin books, 2016), 61.

<sup>29</sup> Kershaw, *To Hell and Back*, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Scott Stephenson. *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84.



breakout, the infamous Battle of Jutland 1916, achieved little strategic success for Germany.<sup>31</sup> As the High Seas Fleet was sitting at anchor, the Imperial German Army was seeing combat all over the continent and were incurring tremendous casualties. As a result, when the war was over, the army felt great animosity against the navy, as they now perceived it had soaked up a large share of the military spending with little to nothing to show for it.<sup>32</sup> The *Kaiserliche Marine* attempted to alleviate some of this perceived loafing by planning a suicide attack against the RN to better their odds in a potential armistice, however this plan was thwarted when the sailors rose up and mutinied, beginning a communist uprising that threatened the stability of the government. This only worsened the army's view of the navy by now perceiving them as filled with brigands and revolutionaries.<sup>33</sup> When the new Weimar Republic in the post war years would decide where to allocate their military spending, these opinions of the navy would contribute greatly to funds being allocated to the army and the development of the brand-new *Luftwaffe*, instead of rebuilding the navy.

Although Germany was forbidden to possess submarines under the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, there were covert attempts by the new *Reichsmarine* to design and develop new classes of submarines that would form the base for a future U-boat fleet, as well as advance and maintain German engineering capabilities in the field of subsurface vessels. In early 1922, the *Reichsmarine* decided to set up a fake Dutch engineering company controlled by the *Reichwehr* (German armed forces) and based in the Netherlands with the name of Ingenieurskantoor voor Scheepsbouw (IvS). This company would create submarine designs for paying countries, such as Turkey, Finland and the Soviet Union. The Germans also used this company as a front for designing their own submarines, including the Type VII U-boats, these

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<sup>31</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 665.

<sup>32</sup> Stephenson, *The Final Battle*, 87.

<sup>33</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 776.

going on to be Germany's most common submarine during the Second World War.<sup>34</sup> The IvS continued to operate unimpeded by the Allies until it was exposed by a journalist in 1927. His exposé stated that the company, among others, was being used for rearmament purposes for the German armed forces, and as a consequence both the war minister, Otto Gessler, and the head of the *Reichsmarine*, Admiral Hans Lenker, were forced to resign in what became to known as the Lohmann Affair.<sup>35</sup> In spite of this, the IvS resumed its regular operations as an engineering firm, but continued serving as a means for German naval engineers to design in secret, this time with more discretion and less transparency. When Germany openly admitted to be designing new submarines in 1933, the IvS transitioned from its roots as a civilian company into the technical school for U-boats in Kiel. It was this not-so-subtle attempt to camouflage blatant breaches of Versailles that would characterize much of German rearmament effort in the lead up to the Second World War. The Germans began to believe that the Allies did not possess the will to go to war over minor aggressions, and continued to believe it right up until the declaration of war over Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939.<sup>36</sup> All of these experiences would define Germany's strategic development throughout the Versailles treaty era, until eventually another major international agreement would instigate another large change in formulating naval strategy.

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<sup>34</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 34.

## Chapter 2: Washington 1922

By the end of 1922 there would be a major naval arms limitation treaty that would guide global naval development for the next two decades, with Germany spending the majority of this period posturing their strategies in order to meet these new “Washington fleets”. As the buildup of naval forces in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was perceived as one of the major instigators of the eventual First World War, there was a great desire in the international community to prevent another arms race from happening. There needed to be actions taken in order to decrease the likelihood of another global conflict breaking out, and so the groundwork was set for a naval arms limitation agreement, the first ever of its kind, to be deliberated between the major naval powers of the world. As a part of the demilitarization policies of US President Warren Harding’s administration, the United States offered to host the first naval conference in Washington, D.C. in November of 1921. It invited the five largest naval powers, consisting of the United Kingdom, Japan, France and Italy, to participate, however exempted other nations with significant naval backgrounds, such as Russia and most importantly Germany.<sup>37</sup> One of the biggest conditions of the treaty that all five powers agreed to was a moratorium on all battleship construction for ten years, meaning that for most navies who had battleships that were part way through their construction, these vessels would not be allowed to be finished in their intended form. Most nations would therefore choose to finish these hulls as aircraft carriers, as there were far fewer limitations on the tonnage or number of aircraft carriers at this time.<sup>38</sup> In addition to this restriction, there was a limitation placed on the gross tonnage of surface vessels that each nation was allowed, with a ratio roughly of 5 British : 5 American : 3 Japanese : 1.75 Italian : 1.75 French, with the RN receiving the largest cap at 604,000 tonnes and the French and Italians

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<sup>37</sup> Robert C. Stern, *The Battleship Holiday*. (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Seaforth Publishing, 2017), 88.

<sup>38</sup> n.d. *Treaty between the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan and the United States of America for the Limitation of Naval Armament*, in League of Nations. *League of Nations Treaty Series: Volume 25*. (Washington, D.C: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1922).

receiving the smallest at 178,000 tonnes.<sup>39</sup> Included in this overall tonnage of surface vessels was limits on each individual ship classification, with battleships not allowed to surpass 35,000 tonnes or possess a gun caliber greater than 16 inches and all other surface ships (largely affecting cruisers) to not surpass 10,000 tonnes with a maximum of 8-inch guns. Aircraft carriers were not to exceed 33,000 tonnes, however carriers that were less than 10,000 tonnes were not considered for the overall tonnage limit.<sup>40</sup> What this meant for the signatories was that there was now a hard ceiling and size of their fleets that they were permitted under the conditions of the treaty, effectively ending any possibility of an arms race. However, the limitations of this treaty would influence the development of warship design and construction for the next two decades as each nation tried to find loopholes and ways around the restrictions in order to increase the effectiveness of their navies while still adhering to the written rules and expecting everyone else to do the same.

One of the biggest changes in warship development that came as a result of the treaty was the limit of 10,000 tonnes and 8-inch guns for all non-capital ships, limitations that were far smaller than what many cruisers of the previous decade possessed. This effectively ended the reign of traditional heavy cruisers and cemented the role of the light cruiser in naval warfare. In order to get around some of these restrictions, some nations would design the gun mounts on their vessels so that they could easily be replaced with a turret of a much larger gun caliber in the event of hostilities breaking out and the cessation of the treaty. This therefore still nominally respected the 8-inch limitation but also allowed the capability to quickly refit the vessel and be able to bring larger amounts of firepower to bear upon the enemy.<sup>41</sup> Another loophole that was discovered in the treaty was the fact that overall tonnage of a vessel was difficult to calculate and

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<sup>39</sup> n.d., *Washington Naval Treaty*.

<sup>40</sup> n.d., *Washington Naval Treaty*.

<sup>41</sup> Stern, *The Battleship Holiday*, 105.

produced a wide margin of error, allowing signatories to underestimate the tonnage of their designs or even just under represent the true tonnage of their warships. As there were few ways for observers to verify this, it led to warships that in many cases were actually larger than what the treaty allowed but not enough so as to prompt a response from the observers or other members of the treaty.<sup>42</sup> Aircraft carriers, and the whole concept of naval aviation still being a fairly recent innovation, were largely underrepresented in the naval conference with only the limitation that they must be smaller than 33,000 tonnes. This meant that most battleships that were under construction at the time of the Washington Naval Conference that lacked a superstructure could be easily converted into an aircraft carrier without violating the capital ship moratorium. The clause that any aircraft carrier that was less than 10,000 tonnes was not considered against the total 80,000 tonne carrier limit led to a surge in the development of light carriers, those being smaller aircraft carriers that were faster but carried smaller hangers and air groups. This prompted some countries, such as Britain, America and Japan, to begin designing their fleets around these smaller and therefore more numerous carriers, taking the first steps towards creating naval task forces built around these warships.<sup>43</sup> There were also very few restrictions on submarines, aside from a total allotment for each signatory of 90,000 tonnes, leading to some countries, such as the United States and Italy, to be unhindered in the development of their submarine force, something that would be displayed in the successful uses of these forces during the Second World War in the Pacific and Mediterranean respectively.<sup>44</sup>

For the duration of the Washington Naval Conference, the Americans had used their position as hosts to attempt to gain an upper hand in the preceding negotiations, in the hopes of

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Gardiner, and Roger Chesneau. *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1922-1946*. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980), 290.

<sup>43</sup> n.d., *Washington Naval Treaty*.

<sup>44</sup> n.d., *Washington Naval Treaty*.

coming out of the conference as the predominant naval power in the world. Since the days of the Battle of Trafalgar, Great Britain had remained the world's most powerful naval force, and even after losses from the First World War and the crippling of their pride at Jutland, the RN still remained at the top, but their challengers were quickly catching up to them. The industrial powerhouse that was the United States, situated between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was slowly coming out of its period of isolationism, and there was a growing body within the American Congress that vied to be a superpower in global affairs.<sup>45</sup> Ever since Theodore Roosevelt advocated for a strong navy in order to advance American interests in the Caribbean, and Alfred Mahan's writings gained attention regarding the control of the seaways, the United States government had placed an increasing level of importance on naval power. As an emerging economic and military power following the First World War, America was prepared to assume the role from Britain as the predominant naval power.<sup>46</sup> With the naval conference taking place on their home soil, the Americans used this opportunity to monitor all traffic between the delegates and their governments in order to learn their interests and what was the lowest possible conditions that each possible country was willing to take. This unethical strategy was used particularly against the Japanese, whose absolute lowest condition that they would accept was intercepted by the Americans. They then drove the Japanese hard at the bargaining table knowing that they would eventually accept their offer.<sup>47</sup> Through these tactics, the Americans were able to achieve near parity with the British restrictions, and with the shipbuilding programme of the Naval Act of 1916 well underway, the USN was posed to succeed the RN as the "king of the waves".<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Craig L. Symonds, *The U.S. Navy: A Concise History*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 70.

<sup>46</sup> Symonds, *The U.S. Navy*, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Stern, *The Battleship Holiday*, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Symonds, *The U.S. Navy*, 72.

Another significant element of the conference was the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, an agreement between Britain and Japan that had lasted for 20 years and had allowed the preservation of British interests in the Pacific. The British gained the protection from the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) in exchange for giving Japan diplomatic support as it was building its relations following its period of isolation a half century prior.<sup>49</sup> This alliance had allowed the British to withdraw some of their naval and military forces from the Pacific to be brought closer to their domestic territory, but it had made Japan Britain's ally, something that other Western powers were less than pleased with, especially the United States. Wanting to be the dominant force in the Pacific, the growth and increasing militarization of Japan represented a threat to American interests in the region, particularly with regard to China, which was threatened by Japanese expansionism.<sup>50</sup> America could not act against Japan so long as it had a codified alliance with the United States' closest ally, Britain. In order to appease and curry favour with its former colony that was drastically growing in strength in the Pacific, Britain chose to terminate its alliance with Japan, a decision that the Japanese were less than pleased with.<sup>51</sup> With Japan now politically isolated in the Pacific, the United States were free to force their will against them with the backing of Britain and the other European signatories, forcing Japan to agree to naval restrictions that they opposed. Realizing that the USN represented the biggest threat to their interests in the region, Japan had hoped to secure a naval tonnage limit that would allow them an IJN that was 70% of the size of the USN. This was a ratio that Japanese strategists had agreed would be the minimal size required to be able to strategically defeat the USN and seize control of the Pacific, but instead they were forced to agree to a ratio of 60%.<sup>52</sup> It was this perceived backstabbing by Britain that had politically isolated Japan from their former ally. With few other

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<sup>49</sup> Ian Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1884-1907*. (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 1986), 203.

<sup>50</sup> Nish, *Ango-Japanese Alliance*, 211.

<sup>51</sup> Nish, *Ango-Japanese Alliance*, 228.

<sup>52</sup> Stern, *The Battleship Holiday*, 103.

potential allies to turn to, thanks to the United States's disdain for Japan and few countries that were openly willing to upset the growing American superpower, the Japanese were driven into the arms of Germany, a nation that had also experienced the scorn of the Western Allies.

Regarding another future Axis ally of Germany, Italy was also a signatory of the Washington Naval Treaty, albeit as a smaller naval power than Japan. As Italy had finished the First World War on the side of the Allies, they had curried some favour with the major powers like Britain and the United States, but it was perceived that this was an alliance based on interests, and not so much on values. When Italy did not receive some of the land that they were promised by the Allies from the Paris Peace Conference for their support during the war, they also felt betrayed by the Western Allies.<sup>53</sup> The favour granted to them by their late wartime role had allowed them entry into the Washington Naval Conference, and in an attempt to secure a balance of power in mainland Europe, it was decided that Italy and France should be granted the same tonnage restrictions. This decision was made in spite of the fact that France had always been a larger naval power than Italy, and that France sought to continue a naval presence in the Atlantic, Mediterranean and its colonies in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, whereas Italy was mainly just concerned with the Mediterranean. The French were reasonably outraged at this decision, as it would allow the Italians to potentially build up a considerable fleet in the Mediterranean, something that the French had always considered their personal domain. These objections were dismissed by the other Western Allies as it was assumed that Italy would continue to be allied with the larger Western powers.<sup>54</sup> Due to the perceived betrayal by the Allies for renegeing on their promise for certain territories, and with worsening economic conditions in Europe as a result of the war, a political movement would begin to rise in Italy.

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<sup>53</sup> Edward R. Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience: Italian Society and Culture 1922-1945*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1972), 22.

<sup>54</sup> Stern, *The Battleship Holiday*, 99.



This movement's values were contradictory to those held in Western liberal democracies, and this would lead to future tensions in the Mediterranean with a resurgent Italian navy in the interwar period.

What all of this meant for Germany was that its rivals were limiting themselves in terms of what they were allowed to build as per the treaty stipulations. However, these "Washington fleets" were still considerably larger than anything that Germany was permitted to construct. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was permitted to retain 6 pre-Dreadnought battleships, 6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers, and 12 torpedo boats of its former *Kaiserliche Marine*, but was not allowed to exceed this limit of warships, only to gradually replace them as they aged and became obsolete.<sup>55</sup> The reason why the Allies permitted Germany to have a navy at all was so that Germany would be able to act as an obstacle against Bolshevik Russia, which was soon to become the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>56</sup> Poland, having recently acquired access to the Baltic Sea through post war territorial gains, was still developing its navy and would stand no chance against a possible attack from the Russian Bolsheviks. In response, the Allies agreed to permit Germany, who had considerable naval experience, a small naval force in order to act as a possible bulwark against any Russian interests in the Baltics.<sup>57</sup> With the German government being opposed to the Bolshevik movement spreading in Eastern Europe, and fearing that this ideology would take hold in Germany and overthrow the government just as how it did in Russia, the justification made sense. Poland would serve as a buffer zone between Germany and Bolshevik Russia, and as the Russians had minimal naval forces in the Baltics after their Baltic Fleet had been withdrawn to Kronstadt during the final days of Russian participation

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<sup>55</sup> n.d., *Treaty of Versailles 1919*.

<sup>56</sup> Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. die politischen ideen des deutschen nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933*. (Munich, GER: dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1962), 210.

<sup>57</sup> Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, 218.

during the First World War, Germany was in a strategically safe position from communist expansion.<sup>58</sup> However, despite the threat that Bolshevism posed, German military planning, including the development of naval strategy, would primarily be directed against both France and Great Britain, focusing on what could be done against the might of the Royal Navy.

It would have been in Germany's interests to have been permitted into the Washington Naval Conference and granted similar restrictions to those of the other naval powers. But the Allies did not wish to allow their former adversary to build back the fleet they had lost at Scapa Flow. One of Germany's biggest fears was that Britain would reimpose another blockade against them, just as they had done in the early days of the First World War. With the fleet that Germany possessed after the war and the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, preventing this reimposition of the blockade would have been incredibly difficult if not impossible. With a population that was one of the largest in Europe, and terrain and territory that did not particularly suit sufficient agricultural production combined with a workforce that was increasingly being pulled from the fields to work in factories or serve in the armed forces, Germany was forced to be reliant on food imports from other countries. These came primarily from the United States, who would have to cross the Atlantic and pass through the British blockade in the North Sea to get to German ports.<sup>59</sup> In addition to food, Germany was also reliant upon iron ore from Sweden, a country rich in minerals. Trade with this neutral nation could aid German rearmament, but access to Swedish ports could be cut off by a blockade in the straits between Denmark and Sweden.<sup>60</sup> If Germany was to prevent the naval catastrophes of the First World War, they would need to secure their supply chains that were reliant upon open and free sea routes. This was a

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<sup>58</sup> Harald Fock. *Z-vor: Internationale Entwicklung und kriegseinsatz von zerstörern und Torpedobooten, 1914 bis 1939*. (Herford, GER: Koehler, 1989), 193.

<sup>59</sup> Goodwin, *Modern History*, 215.

<sup>60</sup> Goodwin, *Modern History*, 216.

principle of naval warfare that was most famously preached by the American naval theorist Alfred Mahan, of whose theories and strategies were very popular among the German Admiralty, even in the interwar years.<sup>61</sup>

Mahan's book, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, had become an international bestseller following its publication in 1890, with figures such as Queen Victoria and Kaiser Wilhelm II praising his evaluation that those who controlled the access to the sea controlled the world. Aspiring naval officers began studying his concepts as scripture in order to best guarantee their nation's success in the future "war to end all wars".<sup>62</sup> German pre-war naval planners had paid a lot of attention to Mahan's concepts of concentration of force and decisive engagements, and it had cost them when their numerically inferior fleet had been boxed into Wilhelmshaven. This state of affairs allowed the British to dominate the sea lanes and enforce their blockade around the German coastline (also a Mahanian concept), slowly depleting the nation's food and other vital reserves while they faced an offensive on two fronts.<sup>63</sup> Following the First World War, some German naval strategists began to develop their naval strategy so that they could avoid failures that they made during that war in the future. Many came to the conclusion that attempting to force a decisive engagement, which was very much in line with German strategic thinking since the days of Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz, was neither in their best interests nor within their capabilities. Originally, German naval planners had believed that they could achieve parity with the RN's surface fleet, and when it became evident that this would not be the case, they had hoped that the quality of their battleships would make up for their numerical deficiency. When this proved to be false after their failed attempt to destroy the RN at

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<sup>61</sup> Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power", 83.

<sup>62</sup> Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power", 72.

<sup>63</sup> Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power", 69.

the Battle of Jutland, some German officers realized that the key to victory laid outside the battleship domain.

*Konteradmiral* Wolfgang Wegener, an aspiring naval officer who was quickly rising through the ranks, published his strategic thoughts in his book *Die Seestrategie des Weltkrieges* (Naval Strategy of the World War) in 1929, where he argued that the *Reichsmarine*'s future lay in their ability to disrupt British maritime shipping and force a decisive engagement where the odds lay in Germany's favour.<sup>64</sup> Not wanting to risk constant engagements with the Germans where they might gradually wear down the strength of the blockade, the RN chose during the First World War to employ a distant blockade, where the mere threat of an engagement was what was more so keeping the Germans in port as opposed an actual line of warships actively repelling attempts to break through.<sup>65</sup> This allowed small contingents of the High Seas Fleet to slip through the larger cracks in the line and attack both British maritime trade and coastal towns along the English Channel and North Sea. However, the small area of the Heligoland Bight made potential breakout points for German forces limited. Realizing this during the war, Wegener advocated for seizing territory further north along the Jutland peninsula and even along the Norwegian coastline in order to allow greater German access to the North Sea, highlighting the emphasis that Mahan placed in the importance of geography in naval warfare.<sup>66</sup> Once Germany had acquired this new Scandinavian territory, Wegener argued that the navy should use both U-boats and small cruiser squadrons to attack British merchant ships, not necessarily for the sole objective of wearing down British logistics enough to bring them to capitulation, but to force Britain to attack en masse in order to cease German commerce raiding operations. Desiring this,

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<sup>64</sup> Wolfgang Wegener. *The Naval Strategy of the World War*. Translated by Holger H. Herwig. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989. First published 1929 by E. S. Mittler & Sohn).

<sup>65</sup> Goodwin, *Modern History*, 213.

<sup>66</sup> Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War*.

the Germans would now have the initiative and would attempt to force the engagement on their terms, believing that this advantage would be enough to make up for the German navy's quantitative deficiency. They hoped to be able to destroy a significant enough portion of the RN that Germany could claim naval supremacy and reverse their fortunes at sea.<sup>67</sup>

The similarities between Wegener's strategy and the origins of the Battle of Jutland are quite striking, the only difference being that Wegener wanted to choose the place and time that the engagement took place, and the outcomes that he anticipated were quite different from the realities of what happened in the actual battle. Even if Scheer's forces had the initiative that Wegener proposed, their numerical inferiority, 37 British battleships to 31 German battleships, would have limited the amount of destruction that the *Kaiserliche Marine* would have been capable of before both sides pulled back their forces to regroup within the safety of their ports.<sup>68</sup> In spite of the outcome of Jutland and the First World War, Wegener continued to advocate that his strategy of forcing multiple decisive engagements, as Germany no longer had the means to win a large, single decisive engagement after Scapa Flow, on German terms would be the best option that Germany possessed. While many within the officer corps objected to Wegener's thesis, particularly his former classmate Erich Raeder, his ideas would begin to shape how German strategists thought about the best options to pursue to attempt to break the RN's hold over the North Sea.<sup>69</sup> In the next war, the *Reichsmarine* could not afford to be confined to port again while the British imposed a crippling blockade around Germany. Wegener's observations that Britain was just as reliant upon foreign imports as Germany highlighted the possibility of targeting British supply lines enough so as to hamper their economic and industrial output,

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<sup>67</sup> Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War*.

<sup>68</sup> Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 661.

<sup>69</sup> Hansen, Kenneth P. "Raeder versus Wegener: Conflict in German Naval Strategy." *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 4, (September 1, 2005), 92.

something that the U-boat arm had attempted to achieve during the First World War. As Germany no longer possessed any U-boats and was not permitted any under the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, German strategists were forced to contemplate the feasibility of attempting the same operations but with surface vessels. However, the vessels that they currently had in their fleet were not capable of this due to their age and obsolescence against modern warships. If Germany was to stand a chance of achieving a major strategic victory at sea in the foreseeable future, its navy would require a major overhaul and expansion, something that would not be allowed so long as they were still held to the Treaty of Versailles by the Allies. Although they were not signatories to the Washington Naval Treaty, Germany's naval strategy would still be considerably impacted by this agreement as they would attempt to meet the new fleets of the Western Allies with the scarce resources that they had on hand.

### Chapter 3: London 1930

The London Naval Treaty of 1930 was an attempt to build upon the foundation of the Washington Naval Treaty, however the final agreement would signify to Germany that the Allies' resolve had weakened and thus a new period of strategic planning would soon begin for future German policy makers. During the Washington Naval Conference in 1922, the main objective of most parties was to place and enforce arms limitations upon Dreadnought-style battleships and battlecruisers, thought to be at the time the biggest threats to international peace and the source of another very potential naval arms race. The overwhelming majority of the conference was focused on creating a 10-year moratorium on these vessels, restricting their capabilities, and placing an overall tonnage limit on the size of all signatories' fleets in order to achieve a naval balance of power. However, very little work was put into restricting other types of naval warships, particularly submarines, cruisers and destroyers. The signatories of the Washington Naval Treaty decided to reconvene to attempt to rectify this absence of limitations of smaller vessels, and this time it was Britain's turn to host. This would lead to another conference held in London in 1930, where the five major naval powers (Britain, United States, Japan, France and Italy) met to try to establish limits.<sup>70</sup> One of the first issues that was debated was a limit on individual submarine tonnage, as there had only been a restriction on the total submarine tonnage from the last naval conference. This limit was to be set at 1,800 tonnes with an additional restriction being placed upon the gun caliber of submarines at 6 inches, putting an end to the "big gun submarines" currently being designed by some signatories.<sup>71</sup> Destroyers, who had also not received an individual tonnage limit from the Washington Naval Treaty, were to be

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<sup>70</sup> Zara Steiner, and Stanley Hoffmann. "The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933." *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5, (January 1, 2005), 587.

<sup>71</sup> n.d. *Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armament (London Naval Treaty)*, in U.S. Department of State, and Charles I Bevans. *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America: Volume 2 (Multilateral Treaties, 1918-1930)*. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1930).

capped at 1 675 tonnes with a maximum gun caliber of 5 inches, and Britain, the United States and Japan received overall destroyer tonnage limits of 135,000, 135,000 and 95,500 tonnes respectively.<sup>72</sup> Cruisers, which had been restricted during the last naval conference, but whose restrictions prompted a surge in the popularity of so called “light cruisers”, were to be split into two now officially designated subcategories, heavy cruiser and light cruiser, with the only distinction being either an 8-inch or 6-inch gun caliber.<sup>73</sup> Heavy cruisers were given both a numerical and overall tonnage limit that was different for each nation, whereas for the light cruisers there was only the overall tonnage limit. The Americans were given a larger limit for heavy cruisers and the British the higher limit for the light cruisers to suit the current composition of their fleets.<sup>74</sup>

Again, Germany was left out of these discussions, as it was still being held to the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles that limited its fleet, in spite of the industrial growth the country had created as it attempted to recover from its wartime losses throughout the 1920s. Within the restrictions of Versailles, the German warships could not be replaced until they were at least 20 years old, and for their battleships, they could not exceed 10,000 tonnes, the same amount as the signatories of the Washington Naval Treaty were permitted for their cruisers, whereas their battleships were permitted to be up to 35,000 tonnes.<sup>75</sup> However, curiously enough, there were no restrictions on gun calibers detailed in the Treaty of Versailles, meaning that so long as the Germans met the tonnage limits of the treaty, they could assign as large of a gun caliber that would fit aboard a vessel and remain afloat.<sup>76</sup> Realizing this, and with their oldest battleships beginning to turn 20 years old in 1922, the *Reichsmarine* began to design a

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<sup>72</sup> n.d., *London Naval Treaty*.

<sup>73</sup> n.d., *London Naval Treaty*.

<sup>74</sup> n.d., *London Naval Treaty*.

<sup>75</sup> n.d., *Treaty of Versailles*.

<sup>76</sup> n.d., *Treaty of Versailles*.



new class of warship that would allow them the most amount of firepower while still adhering to the Versailles treaty. This would essentially be a cruiser that met the 10,000-tonne limit and possessed the largest possible gun caliber. After several years of deliberation between both naval planners and politicians, a design was agreed upon in 1927 that possessed two triple turrets with 11-inch guns, one of the largest calibers that had ever been paired with a vessel that small. Dubbed the *Deutschland*-class *Panzerschiffes* (armoured ships), the plans to build these warships immediately angered the Allies, who saw these vessels as a direct threat to their interests in Europe and the beginning of German mobilization, but as Germany was technically still adhering to the Treaty of Versailles, there was little that they could do.<sup>77</sup> The Germans, seeing this fear as a possible opportunity for them, offered to cease construction on the *Deutschland* class in exchange for admittance to the Washington Naval Treaty with a tonnage limit of 125,000, still smaller than all of the other signatories. This move would have negated Germany's current naval restrictions and would have permitted them to construct a sizeable naval force. The Allies may have agreed to it were it not for France's objections due to their fear of their neighbour and old enemy's remilitarization. So, with no legal means to stop them, the Germans commissioned *RMS Deutschland* in 1933, beginning a period of rapid German force expansion.<sup>78</sup>

The economic restrictions placed upon the German people by the Treaty of Versailles were hardly popular during the first decade of the treaty's enforcement, however things quickly took a turn for the worse following 24 October 1929.<sup>79</sup> The Wall Street Crash of 1929 was the single worst event in the history of the American stock market, and its effects were felt around the globe. It was one of the biggest instigators of the Great Depression, a period of severe

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<sup>77</sup> Erich Groner, Dieter Jung, and Martin Maass. *Major Surface Vessels*. (Vol. 1. 2 vols. Of German Warships, 1815-1945. Annapolis, MD, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 60.

<sup>78</sup> Groner, *Major Surface Vessels*, 62.

<sup>79</sup> William Ashworth. *A Short History of the International Economy since 1850*. (2nd ed. London, UK: Longman, 1962), 237.

economic decline experienced by most of the world. Very soon the people of Germany began to feel its effects, turning what was a barely manageable economic situation into something far worse. Following the hyperinflation of the *Deutsche Mark* in 1923, the German economy was in no way prepared for another economic crisis. As the effects of the depression began to reach Europe, the Weimar Republic refused to increase the surplus of money, fearing another period of hyperinflation.<sup>80</sup> Very soon Germany became unable to continue paying its war debts as detailed in the Treaty of Versailles, and eventually the Allies agreed upon a moratorium on Germany's debt repayments in 1931. This angered France, who had become very much dependent on these repayments. The moratorium damaged Germany's creditability on the global market, and soon foreign banks stopped lending to the German government, leading to severe reductions in government and corporate spending and an unemployment level of 25% by 1932.<sup>81</sup> Luckily for the *Reichsmarine*, the shipbuilding programmes for the *Deutschland*-class had already been approved by the *Reichstag* (German parliament) and thus were not affected by the spending cutbacks, though future ship construction would be stalled for the foreseeable future. The economic situation of Germany in the early thirties would lead to rise in popularity in more radical political parties, one of whom would have a profound impact on the development of the *Reichsmarine*.

The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSADP), more commonly known as the Nazi Party, had been present in German politics since their failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. However, they only began to become a serious player in the *Reichstag* during the Great Depression and its consequences for the German economy.<sup>82</sup> In the elections of 1930, the Nazis

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<sup>80</sup> Sally Marks. "The Myths of Reparations." *Central European History* 11, no. 3, (September 1, 1978), 238.

<sup>81</sup> Nicholas H. Dimsdale, Nicholas Horsewood, and Arthur Van Riel. "Unemployment in Interwar Germany: An Analysis of the Labor Market, 1927–1936." *The Journal of Economic History* 66, no. 03, (September 1, 2006), 778.

<sup>82</sup> William L. Shirer. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. (New York, NY: MJF Books, 1990), 112.

won 18% of the vote and became the second largest party in the *Reichstag*, only six points behind the ruling Social Democratic Party of Germany (SDP). With the Social Democrats struggling to maintain their influence over the parliament due to their mismanagement of the economic situation, the Nazis were presented with an opportunity to very quickly rise to power.<sup>83</sup> Blaming the economic crisis on a combination of the SDP, the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, and a so-called “Jewish conspiracy” to control Germany, the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler’s messaging found a great deal of resonance among the German people. This helped to propel him to the position of Reich Chancellor by 1933.<sup>84</sup> One of the tenets of the Nazi platform was that Germany needed a strong military in order to return to the greatness that it held prior to the First World War. This growing militarism would require a rearmament programme that would run against the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, which worried the Allies. Following Hitler’s accession to the German presidency after the death of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg in 1934 and Hitler’s subsequent declaration of himself as *Führer* (leader of the German people), there remained little opposition to the Nazi’s control over Germany, allowing them to begin forcing their ideology on the country and pursuing the renouncement of the Treaty of Versailles terms as an official government position.<sup>85</sup> Militarism would quickly regain its prominence in German society, and military leaders and strategists, particularly among the army and navy, would begin developing plans to take advantage of this new agency granted to them by the government.

Following the Lohmann Affair in 1927 and the subsequent resignation of *Admiral* Hans Zenker, *Admiral* Erich Raeder was given the position of commander of the *Reichsmarine* in October of 1928, a position that would allow him incredible influence over the development of

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<sup>83</sup> Shirer, *Third Reich*, 156.

<sup>84</sup> Shirer, *Third Reich*, 192.

<sup>85</sup> Shirer, *Third Reich*, 207.

the German navy over the course of the next decade. As Hipper's chief of staff during most of the First World War and an advent supporter of Tirpitz's strategies and philosophy, Raeder came to embody much of the ideals and ways of thinking that much of the old *Kaiserliche Marine* admirals held, specifically regarding the importance of having large battleships and forcing decisive engagements on their terms.<sup>86</sup> A staunch authoritarian, Raeder did not tolerate those who voiced opposition against his policies. This is best demonstrated regarding Wegener and his published theories advocating a non-conventional naval strategy instead of a return to the Tirpitz era, something that Raeder vehemently opposed that he even attempted unsuccessfully to prevent Wegener's book from going to print in 1929.<sup>87</sup> Through his office of commander of the *Reichsmarine*, Raeder was able to force out older admirals to make way for younger officers that supported his ideas, eventually solidifying his intentions to rebuild a modern version of the High Seas Fleet. Those officers that held differing opinions and remained were forced to keep those opinions to themselves and just bide their time, such as Raeder's eventual replacement, Karl Dönitz. Raeder advocated strongly for more funding to be allocated for the navy, however often found himself in third place behind the army and air force, due in part to the previously discussed perceived sloth of the navy during the First World War. Another reason for more funding not going to the navy was because Raeder was advocating for battleship designs that were in clear violation of the Versailles Treaty, and many German politicians were hesitant to do anything that might upset the Allies.<sup>88</sup> As Germany's naval strategy would develop throughout the 1930s, it would be Raeder who would be the driving element for much of this development. However, his ideas were not so much as revolutionary as they were just modern incarnations of the ideas that

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<sup>86</sup> Charles S. Thomas. *The German Navy in the Nazi Era*. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 261.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas, *The German Navy*, 57.

<sup>88</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett. *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918-1945*. (London, UK: Macmillan, 1967), 191.

Tirpitz proposed, a man that Raeder idolized so much he would even refer to him as “the Master”.<sup>89</sup>

It is important during this period to discuss how the Allies were developing their naval strategies, and how this would impact Germany’s decision to begin remobilizing as the 1930s developed. Following the First World War, every European power, but in particular Britain and France, had spent an exorbitant amount of money on their respective militaries and had sent large components of an entire generation to their deaths at Flanders, the Somme and Verdun. Now these countries hoped to claim the so-called “peace dividend”.<sup>90</sup> Both nations, once Germany had accepted the terms of Versailles, downsized their armies considerably into small peacetime forces. They hoped to keep it that way so that they may begin using a portion of their budgets traditionally reserved for defence for rebuilding their economies and holding together their slowly crumbling global empires. Regarding their national will, both respective peoples had lost most of the nationalistic fervor that drove their desire to fight the Germans at the outbreak of war in 1914. A favoured manner for politicians to hold onto power was by championing peace in Europe, with those that even dared to discuss another major military commitment likely to get booted from office at the next general election. Britain even went so far as to enact a so-called “Ten Year Plan” in 1919, whereby the Cabinet told the service services that they should not plan for a major European war for the next 10 years, and their funding for that period would reflect the new posture accordingly.<sup>91</sup> The French, beginning in 1929, constructed a series of well-developed fortifications known as the Maginot Line along the German border at a great national expense. While this defensive line was more for deterrence than actual defence, it gave the

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas, *The German Navy*, 81.

<sup>90</sup> Douglas E. Delaney, *Imperial Army Project: Britain and the Land Forces of the Dominions and India, 1902-1945*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 168.

<sup>91</sup> Delaney, *Imperial Army Project*, 175.

French people a false sense of invulnerability and only antagonized the Germans.<sup>92</sup> The Allies had little appetite for another war with Germany, and German strategists recognized this and would soon begin to use it to their full advantage.

When the Nazis slowly began to come to power in 1930, they were not unique among European fascist groups, in fact they were not even the first fascist party to assume control over a national government. That title goes to Italian Benito Mussolini and his *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party) (PNF), who were able to be democratically elected in 1922 with Mussolini as prime minister, and would eventually force out all opposition to his rule through the use of secret police and judicial reforms, creating the first fascist state by 1927.<sup>93</sup> While Italy had traditionally been an opponent of Germany, especially during the First World War, Mussolini took a stance that was far more neutral regarding the great power competition in Europe. Instead, he set his sights on territorial expansion in Africa, calling upon the symbolism of reigniting the Roman Empire. When Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933, Mussolini had a new fascist ally in Europe, and while the two shared a personal relationship built upon their ideological similarities, Italy was initially still neutral with regards to Germany, trying to play both sides as best they could. It would not be until 1936 when Italy and Germany would begin formalizing relations, due in large part to sanctions brought against the two fascist states by the League of Nations. In this new relationship agreement it was confirmed that Italy's sphere of influence would consist of the Mediterranean, while Germany's would be constructed around Northern and Eastern Europe.<sup>94</sup> With this relationship in place, especially regarding naval matters, Germany would leave the Mediterranean to the *Regina Marina* (Royal Navy of Italy),

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<sup>92</sup> Robert J. Young *Uncertain Idea of France*. (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 2005), 35.

<sup>93</sup> Stanley G. Payne. *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 212.

<sup>94</sup> H. James Burgwyn. *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 185.

and would focus their efforts in the North and Baltic Seas, and when the *Reichsmarine* would begin receiving greater funding, eventually including the Atlantic as well.

In the Far East, Germany's other critical ally during the Second World War was growing far more militaristic and politically isolated from the other members of the League of Nations, bringing it closer into Berlin's orbit of potential allies. Since the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1922 as one of the conditions of the Washington Naval Treaty, Japan had found itself with few allies in the international community. With a rapidly growing population and limited natural resources, it was quickly becoming a destabilized country. Japan had a long history of militaristic elements controlling its government, but had been a democracy from 1912 to 1926 under Emperor Yoshihito. However, when Emperor Hirohito came to power following Yoshihito's death, this short period of democracy came to an end and saw the resurgence of the Japanese military becoming a key player in policymaking.<sup>95</sup> One of the tipping points for Japan's growing militarism came during the London Naval Conference of 1930, where Japanese politicians agreed to naval limitations that severely limited and enraged the IJN. The IJN would begin to resent the political class and support the army in pursuing their interests counter to what the politicians wanted, deepening the divide between civil administrators and military commanders and strategists. Desperately needing more natural resources to support its industrial economy, and with numerous trade barriers imposed against them from the United States and its allies, Japan's military decided to expand into Manchuria in 1931 to gain access to these resources. This drew the ire and condemnation of most of the League of Nations, placing Japan into the same camp of outcasts as Germany and Italy.<sup>96</sup> Germany and Japan's first formal relations would begin in 1936 with the Anti-Comintern Pact, an agreement from both parties to

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<sup>95</sup> Peter Wetzler. *Hirohito and War: Imperial Tradition and Military Decision Making in Prewar Japan*. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 104.

<sup>96</sup> Robert H. Ferrell. "The Mukden Incident: September 18-19, 1931." *The Journal of Modern History* 27, no. 1, (March 1, 1955), 70.

oppose the expansion of global communism, directed against the Soviet Union. With this agreement in place Germany would begin to rely upon the IJN to tie up the RN in the Pacific in order to limit the number of forces that Britain would be able to use to counter *Reichsmarine* operations in the North and Baltic Seas.<sup>97</sup>

With Hitler firmly in the driving seat of German policy and strategy by 1934, the military service chiefs finally had the political champion that they had been begging for, and it would not be long before military expenditures would increase drastically. One of the main reasons why so many in the German government were in support of rearmament, in spite of the fact that it was in clear violation of the Versailles Treaty, was that it would inject billions of marks into the German economy. This rearmament programme would dramatically decrease the level of unemployment and save many German factories from financial ruin due to the Great Depression.<sup>98</sup> This was kept from the international community by a number of German dummy corporations that acted as fronts, whereby these corporations would falsely accrue debt and have it purchased or “bailed out” by the German government, allowing the government to discreetly accrue debt in a manner that did not appear to the League of Nations as the Germans raising funds for possible rearmament.<sup>99</sup> What this meant for the navy was that there was now a surplus of funding for the sole purpose of expanding the military. However, the majority of that funding went to building a large professional and semi-mechanized army, which would better serve Germany’s grand strategic goals on the continent. This funding also included the development of the *Luftwaffe*, which would also be critical in achieving their larger strategic goals on land. The problem for the navy at this time was that most of Hitler’s ambitions lay in conquering land in the East, achieving his desired *lebensraum* (living space) in Poland, and eventually turning west

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<sup>97</sup> Shirer, *Third Reich*, 802.

<sup>98</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 31.

<sup>99</sup> Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany*, 350.



and forcing the French to submit. This would be achieved via the new German tactic of *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war), where armour and close air support (CAS) would smash through enemy lines to rapidly advance on critical objectives.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately for the *Reichsmarine*, the navy would play a very insignificant part of this new operational art, and as a result would see most of the funding following the Nazi's rise to power go towards the army and *Luftwaffe*, elements that German strategists believed would be more strategically useful than a strong navy. By 1935 the London Naval Treaty had stoked the fires of German resentment against the Versailles treaty, and so a new period of strategic development would soon begin, one that would produce the fleet and strategies that Germany would eventually go to war with.

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<sup>100</sup> John Keegan. *The Second World War*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), 54.

## Chapter 4: AGNA 1935

1935 would serve as a turning point for the development for the German navy, as they would soon sign an agreement that would revoke most of the restrictions of Versailles and instigate a period of intense rearmament, and that critical document was the AGNA. Although the *Reichsmarine* did not see the majority of the rearmament funding, thanks to the efforts of Raeder's avid campaigning, the Nazis agreed to some new shipbuilding programmes. All of these programmes would end up being in violation of the Versailles Treaty, however this would not be a critical issue for much longer. By 1935, *RMS Deutschland* and *RMS Admiral Scheer* of the *Panzerschiffes* were completed and in service, with the third ship of this class expected to be completed in early 1936, all of which frightened the Allies regarding their potential capabilities.<sup>101</sup> In 1932 the League of Nations organised a Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments based in Geneva, Switzerland, with the goal of limiting the levels of rearmament among the global powers. However, this conference was seeing very little success due to the League of Nations having very little agency to enforce these measures without the backing of major nation-states, few of which supported the measures.<sup>102</sup> Once the Nazis came to power in 1933, they would remove Germany from both the conference but also the League of Nations by October of that year, and when this happened the other major powers realized that there was no point in discussing arms limitations if one side did not agree to recognize them, so the conference quickly fell apart by 1934. With few other avenues left to attempt to control German ambitions, and with the *Panzerschiffes* and other German ship designs being considered for construction, the Allies feared that the Nazis would do away with the Versailles limitations altogether. In an attempt to keep the German rearmament somewhat contained, the British,

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<sup>101</sup> Groner, *Major Surface Vessels*, 60.

<sup>102</sup> Joseph A. Maiolo. *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933 - 39: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War.* of *Studies in Military and Strategic History*. (London, UK: Macmillan Press, 1998), 13.

supported largely by the Admiralty, decided to submit to the pressure and give the German new restrictions on their navy, in what would eventually be known as the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. This agreement was a landmark event in the progression of German rearmament and would signify a new era for the *Reichsmarine*, who would be renamed shortly after the agreement to *Kriegsmarine*, a moniker reserved for times of war to signify the intentions of the new Nazi Germany.<sup>103</sup>

For the British, in particular the Admiralty, the naval threat that the new German heavy cruisers posed was enormous, especially if the *Panzerschiffes* were only the beginning of a series of new and powerful German surface vessels. The RN wanted to prevent the Germans from outright violating the naval limitations that were imposed upon them at Versailles in 1919, especially considering there was little recourse they could take that was not direct military intervention, and so many in the Admiralty wanted to create a new series of restrictions that would satisfy the Germans but still minimize their potential as a threat.<sup>104</sup> Not long after 1919, many German politicians had been claiming that the limitations imposed on Germany were not fair, especially considering that countries such as France and Poland were allowed to rearm without any recourse available to Germany, and there were some elements within the Western Allies that were sympathetic to this argument, most notably within Britain. As there had been no change to the restrictions placed on Germany in over 25 years, and if the consequence of not loosening the limitations was no longer having any means of control over German rearmament, some British strategists believed that a change in policy was required. Led by First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield, the Admiralty argued that the only way to maintain the RN's supremacy over the *Reichsmarine* was to give them new restrictions that would keep the German

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<sup>103</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 35.

<sup>104</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 22.

navy a manageable size for the current capabilities of the RN.<sup>105</sup> Realizing this willingness on the part of the Admiralty, and after some discussion and debate among senior German ministers, including Hitler and Raeder, the Germans formally requested that they be permitted to have a navy that was 35% of the tonnage of the RN. This offer was eventually accepted by the British, as they believed that this percentage was still a sufficiently small size that could still be handled by the RN in the event of another war.<sup>106</sup> While this agreement may have kept the Germans somewhat under the control of the Allies, as the first agreement to repudiate Germany's limitations as laid out in the Versailles Treaty, it would not be long before the Germans would realize that they could continually keep pushing the envelope back. They would use the Allies' desire for peace against them as they prepared for the next world war.

When France learned of this agreement, they were outraged at the British, believing that they had sold out the French for the perceived safety of the RN.<sup>107</sup> Even within the British Cabinet, there had been a lot of opposition against the agreement, particularly coming from the Foreign Office. However, it was eventually decided that a concession was better than no deal and no peaceful means to keep Germany in check, and so the agreement came into effect on 18 June 1935, and the Germans would waste little time utilizing their new, post-Versailles leash. Although Raeder had attempted to argue that he believed that Germany could get more than 35% out of the British, he was quite pleased with the outcome and set to work constructing two new classes of powerful surface vessels, the *Admiral Hipper*-class heavy cruisers and the *Scharnhorst*-class battlecruisers.<sup>108</sup> Owing to the fact that the *Kriegsmarine* could now construct 50,000 tonnes of heavy cruisers equipped with 8 inch guns as allotted to them by the AGNA,

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<sup>105</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 26.

<sup>106</sup> Samuel Hoare. *Exchange of Notes between His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the German Government regarding the Limitation of Naval Armaments*, in League of Nations. *League of Nations Treaty Series: Volume 161*. (London, UK: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1935).

<sup>107</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 72.

they decided to build five 10,000 tonnes vessels. However, only three of them would be commissioned and see service in the *Kriegsmarine* during the Second World War. Upon completion of the vessels, it was realized both by the Germans and the Allies that the vessels were actually 16,000 tonnes and 18,000 when fully loaded at sea.<sup>109</sup> With *KMS Admiral Hipper* commissioned in April of 1939, *KMS Blücher* in September of 1939, and *KMS Prinz Eugen* in August of 1940, in addition to the three *Deutschland*-class cruisers already completed, the *Kriegsmarine* would have a small but very capable squadron of heavy cruisers at their disposal. While not a critical threat to the RN's Home Fleet, they would still present enough of a danger to the Allies so as to draw a considerable amount of their naval forces and attention during the Second World War from other key operations and theatres.<sup>110</sup>

Regarding battleships and battlecruisers, the *Kriegsmarine* immediately set about the construction of two battlecruisers, *KMS Gneisenau* which was commissioned in May of 1938 and *KMS Scharnhorst* in January of 1939.<sup>111</sup> These two battlecruisers were the first battleships that Germany had built since 1917 (the last being *SMS Baden*), and were more modern than the 1908 *SMS Schleswig-Holstein* that Germany had been allowed to keep following the Treaty of Versailles, and as such presented a new strategic asset to Nazi Germany.<sup>112</sup> While not sufficiently powerful enough to challenge large battleships such as *HMS Nelson* or the French *Dunkerque* on their own, the *Scharnhorsts* still presented a significant threat to Allied cruisers. So much so that their sinking, in addition to two more future German battleships, would be one of the biggest priorities of the RN during the early stages of the Second World War. As such, until the development of other strategies later on in the decade, the foreseen role for the

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<sup>109</sup> Groner, *Major Surface Vessels*, 65.

<sup>110</sup> Gordon Williamson. *German Heavy Cruisers 1939-1945*. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 37.

<sup>111</sup> Groner, *Major Surface Vessels*, 32.

<sup>112</sup> William H. Garzke, and Robert O. Dulin. *Battleships: Axis and Neutral Battleships in World War II*. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 127.

*Scharnhorsts* was to tie up RN assets in the North Sea so that they could not deter German forces, primarily on land, elsewhere in Europe. It would not be until much closer to the outbreak of war that a new strategy was envisioned for them, that of commerce raiding.<sup>113</sup> Relying upon Britain's maritime commerce vulnerability and dependence on foreign imports, the use of these fast battlecruisers to attack lightly defended merchant vessels would cause an incredible amount of harm to the British economy and food security, not only through the vessels that it sunk, but also the deterrence factor that it projected to other merchant vessels that might have to attempt to outrun the vessels. These battlecruisers were an excellent first addition to Raeder's envisioned new "High Seas Fleet", however much more was needed to expand the *Kriegsmarine's* capabilities to include a proper battle fleet. The next step would be to include much larger battleships in the next round of shipbuilding projects.

Possessing new possibilities for naval expansion due to the AGNA, it would not be long before the *Kriegsmarine* would begin constructing their most ambitious programme, the design of the 41,000 tonnes, 8 x 15-inch guns vessels that would eventually become the infamous *Bismarck*-class battleships.<sup>114</sup> Their origins dates back to the early 1930s, where Raeder and other German naval strategists were envisioning a battleship that met the limits of the Washington Treaty (even though at this point Germany was still limited by Versailles), but could also challenge the *Littorio* that the Italians had ordered in 1934 and the *Richelieu* that the French ordered the following year.<sup>115</sup> The original plan for the *Bismarcks* was for them to form the backbone of a battlefleet to be used in the North and Baltic Seas, and as a result they were designed around the concept of shorter-range surface engagements, which resulted in a very

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<sup>113</sup> Garzke & Dulin, *Battleships*, 130.

<sup>114</sup> Garzke & Dulin, *Battleships*, 208.

<sup>115</sup> Timothy Mulligan. "Ship-of-the-Line or Atlantic Raider? Battleship Bismarck between Design Limitations and Naval Strategy." *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 4, (October 1, 2005), 1023.

think armour belt that would slow the vessel down considerably.<sup>116</sup> This would prove to be an issue as, when the Second World War broke out, Germany had far fewer battleships than they would have liked. As a result, the two *Bismarcks*, *KMS Bismarck* commissioned in August 1940 and *KMS Tirpitz* in February 1941, would end up serving the same role that the *Scharnhorsts* would, that of commerce raiding. The problem for the two heavy battleships was that, due to their considerable armour protection and the extra weight that came with it, they were far less manoeuvrable than their battlecruiser predecessors. Their smaller fuel tanks, intended for limited skirmishes in the North Sea, severely limited their range and potential to venture out into the Atlantic for commerce raiding, something that would be left up to the battlecruisers and heavy cruisers that possessed that range.<sup>117</sup> Even these powerful battleships were not enough to dramatically tip the naval scales in Germany's favour as many in the *Kriegsmarine* hoped, and although the quality of these new warships built after the AGNA were on par or higher than the other major navies of the time, the problem for them was that there simply wasn't enough of them. This was coupled with the fact that the Germans were still relying heavily upon the strategies from the First World War, strategies that largely had not worked.

While most of the excitement among the *Kriegsmarine* admiralty was focused on the new large surface ships that they would now be allowed to construct, as most of the officer corps had become Tirpitzian-era enthusiasts like Raeder, there were still some elements that supported other forms of naval strategy. Chief among these were those that supported a reconstruction of the *Uboatwaffe* (submarine arm, or branch), led by *Admiral* Karl Dönitz, who was one of the few German admirals that still supported the use of submarines as one of the main forms of German naval strategy. It would be Dönitz who would be the mastermind behind the U-boat campaign

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<sup>116</sup> Garzke & Dulin, *Battleships*, 204.

<sup>117</sup> Mulligan, "Ship-of-the-Line or Atlantic Raider?", 1028.

against the Allies during the Second World War and would eventually replace both Raeder as Commander of the *Kriegsmarine* and even Hitler as President of Germany.<sup>118</sup> However, as of the signing of the AGNA, Dönitz was still subordinate to Raeder. The two of them would strongly debate in the coming years about where best to direct this massive expansion of the *Kriegsmarine*, with Raeder typically getting his way and directing the funds towards large surface vessels. As part of the AGNA, Germany was now allowed to construct submarines with a tonnage parity to that of Britain, a decision that would certainly come back to haunt British merchant sailors. Thanks to the efforts of the previously mentioned IvS, the Germans already had designs that had been tested and were ready to be constructed for the *Kriegsmarine*, and eventually Raeder would give the green light to begin constructing a small squadron of submarines.<sup>119</sup> As the Germans had already begun construction before the AGNA, *U-1*, a *Type II* U-boat, was commissioned into the *Kriegsmarine* just one week after the signing of the agreement. It would be shortly followed by five more *Type IIs*, returning a capability that the German navy did not possess since they last turned over all of their U-boats to Harwich at the end of the First World War.<sup>120</sup> This began a debate between Dönitz and Raeder regarding what the best composition of the *Uboatwaffe* would look like, a strategic debate that would have tremendous impacts on how Germany would be able to use these submarines in the Second World War and the effects that they would be able to have.

For Dönitz, he was one of the few senior *Kriegsmarine* commanders that recognized that Britain would most likely be their largest enemy in a hypothetical future war, whereas most other commanders believed that the AGNA was a sign of British goodwill between the Germanic and

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<sup>118</sup> Charles Hamilton. *Leaders & Personalities of the Third Reich: Their Biographies, Portraits, and Autographs*. (Vol. 2. 2 vols. San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 1996), 285.

<sup>119</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 24.

<sup>120</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 34.



Anglo-Saxon peoples and that instead France and Poland would be Germany's main adversaries.<sup>121</sup> To that end, recognizing Britain's severe vulnerability in its reliance on foreign imports, Dönitz wanted his *Uboatwaffe* to be composed primarily of the *Type VII*s, which were double the tonnage of the *Type II*s. This greater size would allow them to operate throughout most of the Atlantic, whereas the smaller *Type II*s would only be able to operate in the English Channel and parts of the North and Baltic Seas. The six initial *Type II*s were expanded into a skeleton structure of sorts by June of 1936, comprised of 24 *Type II*s, 10 *Type VII*s, and two *Type I*s (which were three times the tonnage of the *Type II*s, but due to major technical and design problems the *Type I*s would eventually be replaced with the more advanced *Type IX*). It was after this point that Dönitz attempted to have the rest of the funds allocated for U-boats be spent on the *Type VII*s, however Raeder had other intentions.<sup>122</sup> The *Kriegsmarine* commander wanted a balanced fleet of U-boats, similar to his desire for a strong and balanced surface battlefleet consisting of battleships, cruisers and destroyers, and so would order a balanced number of 8 *Type II*s, 14 *Type VII*s and 13 *Type IX*s. This infuriated Dönitz, as the *Type IX*s were best used for trans-Atlantic operations along the North American coast, and as the United States was seen as much less of a threat than Britain, Dönitz saw these larger U-boats as a waste as he could have gotten close to two *Type VII*s for every *Type IX*.<sup>123</sup> By December of 1938 Raeder had somewhat been swayed by Dönitz's arguments and ordered an additional 21 *Type VII*s and only 11 *Type IX*s. However, most of these would not be ready until 1942, meaning that Germany would enter the Second World War with only 56 U-boats ready for operations, with only 22 of them able to operate in the Atlantic and the rest being confined to the Channel, North and Baltic Seas.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 40.

<sup>122</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 45.

<sup>123</sup> Blair, *The Hunters*, 47.

<sup>124</sup> Evan Wilson, and Ruth Schapiro. "German Perspectives on the U-Boat War, 1939-1941." *The Journal of Military History* 85, no. 2, (April 1, 2021), 376.

While Dönitz was able to argue his case for more *Type VII*s, and indeed for more U-boats as a whole, ultimately he was unable to deter Raeder from spending the majority of the navy's budget on his deeply sought after battleships, which could be argued that produced a far smaller strategic advantage than the U-boats did during the Second World War. Dönitz's appraisal that the *Type VII*s would be the most useful turned out to be entirely correct, and over 700 would be constructed by the end of the war and would be responsible for the overwhelming majority of Allied shipping losses to German U-boats. Most of these losses would occur in what would be known as the "Mid Atlantic gap", the space in the Atlantic where merchant convoys could not reach via air support from either Newfoundland or Ireland.<sup>125</sup> One of the main reasons for his strong preference for the *Type VII*s was that they had the ability to operate deep into the Atlantic that the *Type II*s did not, and that they were far cheaper and easier to build than the *Type IX*s. These would allow Dönitz a greater number of vessels for the same cost, which would play into his strategy of how to best employ those vessels. Originating from *Admiral* Hermann Bauer, a successful U-boat commander from the First World War, Dönitz built upon Bauer's concept of *Rudeltaktik* (pack tactic), where U-boats would operate in small groups to attack vessels and convoys from multiple directions, in what would come to be known in English as the "Wolfpacks".<sup>126</sup> The problem for Bauer was that encrypted, short-band radio was not developed enough during the First World War to sufficiently organize these Wolfpacks. However, that form of technology would be available by the mid 1930s, where Dönitz would conduct exercises with his new U-boats incorporating the Enigma encryption machine with high frequency (HF) radios that achieved great success.

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<sup>125</sup> John Terraine. *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars, 1916-1945*. (London, UK: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1989), 196.

<sup>126</sup> Jurgen Rohwer. *Critical Convoy Battles of WWII: Crisis in the North Atlantic, March 1943*. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2015), 257.

Dönitz's strategy, in order to be most successful, would require access to captured ports in Western Europe in order to allow his *Type VII*s to operate and attack merchant convoys in that Mid Atlantic gap, however this was not what Raeder had in mind for the *Uboatwaffe*. Raeder saw the *Kriegsmarine*'s future role to destroy the enemy's naval forces and their ability to respond militarily as advocated by Clausewitz, and he intended the U-boats to contribute to achieving this goal.<sup>127</sup> Raeder's initial plan for a German fleet post AGNA was one that could defeat the RN and any other enemy naval force in a decisive engagement, harking back to the Tirpitz and High Seas Fleet days, hence his insistence on the construction of the *Bismarcks* and *Scharnhorsts* as the foundation of a powerful but far larger battlefleet. Raeder foresaw the U-boats' primary aim as being able to covertly target important naval vessels, similar to when *U-47* would sneak into Scapa Flow in October of 1939 and sink the battleship *HMS Royal Oak*.<sup>128</sup> To that end, he wanted a balanced fleet of all three types of U-boats in order to best take advantage of a possible engagement near the German coastline, in the Atlantic and in North American waters, no matter how unlikely the latter case was when compared to the first two, however Raeder's strategic outlook would change quite drastically as global tensions rose and he realized that the *Kriegsmarine* would not be receiving the level of funding nor have the time that he had hoped it would. Part of this realization would come after the failure of his most ambitious shipbuilding programme yet, most commonly known as Plan Z, which would have provided the *Kriegsmarine* with one of the most powerful navies in the world had the Second World War not interrupted this plan.<sup>129</sup>

Following the ordering of the two *Bismarcks*, Raeder planned to continue expanding the *Kriegsmarine*'s battlefleet, relying upon the assumption that war was several years away, as even

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<sup>127</sup> Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power", 86.

<sup>128</sup> Wilson & Schapiro, "German Perspectives", 378.

<sup>129</sup> Wilson & Schapiro, "German Perspectives", 376.

Hitler had personally assured him that Germany would not be engaged in a major conflict until at least 1948.<sup>130</sup> Hoping to make the *Kriegsmarine* into a strong contender for naval superpower, the so-called Plan Z was signed by Raeder and Hitler in January of 1939 and consisted of a whopping six additional battleships, all of which would be the advanced H-class battleship (essentially just larger *Bismarcks*), three new O-class battlecruisers that would be akin to the *Deutschland*-class with larger armament, 12 new *Panzerschiffes*, and four aircraft carriers (two of the *Graf Zeppelin*-class and the other two of another design), 249 U-boats of various types, and a myriad of other smaller vessels.<sup>131</sup> This considerable contribution to Germany's naval capabilities would have satisfied Raeder's and most of the German admiralty's desire for the resurgence of German naval power, and would have represented a significant change in strategy from what the navy had been preparing for over the last two decades. However, the outbreak of war in September of that same year put an end to those ambitious plans, and as a result not a single one of those ordered capital ships would be finished and see operations during the Second World War. All that the programme had achieved in reality during its eight-month lifetime was to pull resources away from the other major warships already under construction, resulting in longer construction times and the fact that some of these vessels would not be ready for two years in some cases. This also signaled to the world that Germany in fact had no intentions of conforming to any international arms limitation, even the weak restrictions of the AGNA.<sup>132</sup>

The *Kriegsmarine* was absolutely taken by surprise by Britain and France's declaration of war over Hitler's invasion of Poland in September of 1939, and as a result had to scrap their beloved dream fleet and instead work with the vessels they had on hand or would soon be completed, proving the old moniker "you go to war with the navy that you have, not the navy

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<sup>130</sup> Gardiner & Chesneau, *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships*, 220.

<sup>131</sup> Gardiner & Chesneau, *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships*, 224.

<sup>132</sup> Gardiner & Chesneau, *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships*, 232.

that you want”.<sup>133</sup> Even if the Second World War had not begun until 1948 as Hitler had promised Raeder, there were numerous problems with Plan Z that had never been addressed that would have severely impacted its utility to the *Kriegsmarine*, such as the deficiency of large enough drydocks and other critical maritime infrastructure to support this expansion of massive battleships, this programme would have put a considerable strain on Germany’s fuel reserves as it would have drawn significant resources from the *Luftwaffe* and *Panzer* divisions who also desperately needed that fuel. Also, Germany had no real experience with naval aviation and as a result had never significantly factored it into their strategic planning.<sup>134</sup> Instead of planning decisive engagements to take on the might of the RN, the *Kriegsmarine* now had to find the best method to employ their mighty but very few surface ships. The navy would revert back to its strategic plans that had been developed before Raeder to target Britain’s vulnerability of reliance upon maritime commerce and to scatter the fleet so that they can best draw the RN’s attention away from a coordinated naval operation aimed against Germany. The “surface raiders”, as they would come to be known, would go on to sink a large number of merchant vessels, including some powerful warships such as the battlecruiser *HMS Hood* and aircraft carrier *HMS Glorious*. However, their performance during the war would be massively overshadowed by Dönitz and his *Uboatwaffe*, resulting in his eventual replacement of Raeder as commander of the *Kriegsmarine* in January of 1943, but by then it was too late for him to implement his strategies and turn the tide of the war in Germany’s favour.<sup>135</sup>

While Plan Z had called for the construction of 259 U-boats, they were given a lower priority than the ordered surface combatants, something which infuriated Dönitz. As a result, none of those 259 would be built before the declaration of war, with the *Uboatwaffe* still in the

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas, *The German Navy*, 181.

<sup>134</sup> Adam Tooze. *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*. (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008), 294.

<sup>135</sup> Terraine, *Business in Great Waters*, 520.

process of building the last order of 32 U-boats from December 1938. The *Kriegsmarine* would enter the Second World War with only 56 operational U-boats, a number far smaller than the 300 that Dönitz believed would be sufficient to wage a successful maritime interdiction campaign against Britain, and a number that was not large enough to support Raeder's strategy of forcing multiple decisive engagements with his battlefleet.<sup>136</sup> Working with what he had, and with Raeder more or less allowing the *Uboatwaffe* to pursue their own campaign independent of the surface fleet, Dönitz would go on to use his wolfpack tactics to achieve a significant effect against Allied shipping, particularly before the Allies began to perfect their convoy tactics and regularly decrypt German naval communications. The difference in successes between the surface raiders and the U-boats during the war is jarring, with the *Uboatwaffe* claiming over 2,900 vessels sunk compared to only 187 claimed by the surface fleet, most of which came from merchant cruisers that were modified with armament to serve the purpose of maritime interdiction, not the large and expensive capital warships that were ordered by Raeder.<sup>137</sup> There was an attempt by some in the *Kriegsmarine*, such as naval architect Wilhelm Hadeler, to develop naval aviation capabilities based largely on lessons learned from the IJN. However, due to a bureaucratic fight for control between the *Kriegsmarine* and *Luftwaffe* over the planned *Graf Zeppelin*-class carriers, and with the limited resources at the navy's disposal being prioritized for the surface fleet and some to the U-boats, the whole German naval aviation project eventually collapsed.<sup>138</sup> It is possible that if given sufficient time, the *Kriegsmarine* could have possessed naval aviation capabilities, as the first *Graf Zeppelin* was launched and nearly operational by the deceleration of war. However, due to this concept being a very recent introduction into German naval thought, and with no significant strategic planning involving aircraft carriers, it is unlikely

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<sup>136</sup> Wilson & Schapiro, "German Perspectives", 374.

<sup>137</sup> Clay Blair. *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted, 1942-1945*. (Vol. 2. 2 vols. London, UK: Cassel, 1998), 771.

<sup>138</sup> Clark G. Reynolds. "Hitler's Flattop: The End of the Beginning." *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, 767, 93, no. 1, (January 1, 1967), 42.

that the carriers would have improved Germany's naval strategic situation by any considerable margin.<sup>139</sup> The AGNA would make all of this shipbuilding and strategic development possible and would serve as one of the leading causes to the eventual Second World War.

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<sup>139</sup> Reynolds, "Hitler's Flattop", 56.

## Conclusion

Throughout this 21-year long period, the German navy would undergo two name changes, see the complete destruction of their fleet at Scapa Flow and the attempted reconstruction of it on the eve of global war, and have their strategic policy change several times based both on their current capabilities and what they hoped to possess. All of these events and changes revolved around a number of very critical international agreements, not all of them directly involving Germany. One of the most important documents, indeed the one that directly affected Germany the longest, was the Treaty of Versailles 1919. Due to the effects of this treaty, the *Kaiserliche Marine* was dealt a crippling blow by the victorious Allies, who would limit the Germans to possessing a fleet in name only, forcing them to design their strategies around what little fraction of their navy they were allowed to keep and maintain. Due to the failure of the navy to achieve any real strategic victory during the First World War, the commanders of the new *Reichsmarine* would have to struggle against the other two services throughout this period to gain any sort of political or material support from the government. While Germany was not a participant in the Washington Naval Conference of 1922, the resulting treaty would significantly impact how the other major navies would develop their fleets, as well as their strategies for maritime dominance. As a result, for the next two decades, its existence would greatly affect how Germany planned to counter these strategies with the fleet that they had on hand. It is during this period that alternative and non-conventional naval strategies, such as those from Wolfgang Wegener, began to challenge the existing strategies that had been in place since the era of Tirpitz at the turn of the century. Germany's two major allies in the next world war, Japan and Italy, would also be impacted by the scorn of the western Allies for their increasingly authoritarian tendencies, and it would be the strength of their navies, both in the Pacific and Mediterranean,



that would influence how Germany would construct its naval strategy to focus around Northern Europe.

The domains of naval warfare that were overlooked in the preceding naval limitation would attempt to be rectified with the London Naval Conference of 1930, primarily regarding the construction of new cruisers. Cruisers were something that both German and British strategy would come to rely heavily upon as the RN would attempt to reimpose its blockade from the previous war and the *Reichsmarine* would attempt to break it. Instigated by severe economic hardships, both from the global recession and the terms of Versailles, the Nazi party would gradually come to dominate German politics, and with its rise to power came a whole new surge of German militarism that would attempt to restore the glory of the *Kriegsmarine* to its former glory. At the helm of the navy, and perhaps the man most responsible for the development of Germany's naval strategy in the decade leading up to the Second World War, was Erich Raeder, who was obsessed with becoming the next Alfred von Tirpitz. His desire to create a powerful battlefleet with which to rule the waves would have a considerable impact on the composition of the German navy during the Second World War. Hitler's aggressive actions regarding Germany's transgressions against its previous agreements would eventually lead Britain to sign the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in 1935 in an attempt to keep Nazi Germany at the diplomatic table. However, it would only lead to a large German buildup of powerful vessels, both surface and sub-surface, that Germany would eventually use to challenge the might of the RN. Thanks to Raeder's efforts, most of this new freedom to build warships was focused on large battleships in order to force decisive engagements, much to the ire of Karl Dönitz and the rest of the *Uboatwaffe*, this arm proving to be much more useful than the surface fleet during the war. The attempted Plan Z would have provided the *Kriegsmarine* with a mighty fleet that could

have challenged Britain's naval dominance. However, it was implemented far too late to be of any use to Germany, and so the *Kriegsmarine* would change their strategy of forcing engagements to slowly sapping Britain's strength through maritime interdiction on the fly once it became obvious that what they had was all that they were getting.

Looking at the strategic developments that took place over this period, there are several key factors that are useful in aiding the reader to understand how naval strategy is constructed in a modern context. One of the biggest factors that influenced Germany's naval strategy was the type and quantity of vessels that they had on hand, and in most cases, this was one of the biggest limiting factors regarding how they would best choose to employ them. As was demonstrated during the outbreak of war and the interruption of Plan Z, the *Kriegsmarine* had to completely redesign their naval strategy because they had been forming it around the vessels that they wanted and thought they were getting, not the ones that they actually had. Another significant factor was what Germany hoped to achieve with its navy. Whether it wanted to destroy Britain's navy directly or blockade the island into submission, both goals would have to be achieved with what they had at their disposal. The manner in which Germany could pursue its objectives at sea was entirely dependent upon what was available and plausible at the time. This would be evident in Raeder's desire to build a Mahanian-style battlefleet to force decisive engagements and Dönitz's planned use of wolfpack tactics to employ a very distant blockade around Britain, displaying the reliance that methods have on the resources available and objectives of strategic development. In order to develop a sound naval strategy, future plans need to be founded upon all of the resources presently available, what is hoped to be achieved with them, and then how these assets can be utilized to accomplish the overall objective; in other words, means influences ends which influences ways. If any of these elements are neglected, or not founded in present

reality, the perceived strategy as a whole cannot be successful and will only result in failure for those who attempt to follow it. Germany did not enter the Second World War with a sound naval strategy that had been developed since the end of the last world war and was firmly rooted in the strategic foundations of ways, means and ends, and would face significant challenges during the conflict.

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