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INTRODUCTION



Introduction: The Blockade in the Era of the World Wars

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ABSTRACT

How did blockades shape the course, outcome and aftermath of the world wars? In both wars, belligerents sought to blockade their enemies, cutting them off from vital resources such as food, oil, information and capital to hasten their defeat. They thus impacted societies the world over, testing their resilience and vulnerability. They produced new forms of violence and humanitarian care, prompted innovation and learning, and had integrative and disintegrative effects on wartime societies, alliances and the world order. The special issue on “The Blockade in the Era of the World Wars” challenges orthodoxies that have been in place for decades, and stake out the ground for new research. It brings together experts from different historical disciplines and geographical specialisations to produce a nuanced, research-driven transnational and international history of the era of the blockade. Their contributions widen the focus from more traditional protagonists such as admirals, diplomats and government ministers to companies, NGOs, intellectuals and private citizens. They also consider just how strongly the blockade experience of the Great War affected preparation for and policy during the Second World War, not only in terms of raw materials or food, but also of know-how, law and mentalities. Finally, they integrate legal, military, economic, business, diplomatic, social and cultural perspectives, paving the way for an understanding of the world war-era blockades as a system that is larger than the sum of its parts.

KEYWORDS

First World War; Second World War; blockade; economic warfare

The history of blockades is almost as long as that of war itself, and raises questions about the nature of warfare that go beyond the clash of arms: economics, civilian experience, humanitarianism, international law, and high strategy.¹ The navies of both Athens and Sparta conducted operations of trade protection and interdiction that were crucial to the outcome of the Peloponnesian War, 431-404 BCE. Sparta eventually starved Athens into surrender with a blockade that cut off the supply of Black Sea grain.² The Dutch blockade of Spanish ports in Flanders pronounced in 1584 is considered by international lawyers to be the first formal blockade.³ A cycle of French and British blockades from the late eighteenth century finally resulted in the defeat of Napoleonic France in 1815; and the British blockade of the coast of Africa ended the Atlantic slave trade from 1808.⁴ In the American Civil War, the Union blockade of the Confederacy devastated the South's economy and played an important part in its defeat.⁵

This special issue focuses on the ‘hidden weapon’ of blockade and its impact on the First and Second World Wars, including their preparation and their aftermaths.⁶ Blockades were a weapon

of war, but one that effected 'slow violence', i.e. 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight',⁷ – though the American blockade of Japan in the Second World War shows how effectively 'slow violence' could be combined with the immediate, direct application of force.⁸ As the major belligerents, the world's leading trading nations, blockaded each other, they targeted not only the enemy metropole but also its (in)formal empire in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Moreover, their efforts to control or disrupt key nodes of international trade wreaked havoc on neutral neighbours, occupied territories, and worldwide trade partners to an entirely unprecedented extent. Finally, the World War blockades were not limited to cutting off their enemies from the flow of trade but also that of international capital, communications and mobility. All of this meant that the blockades affected societies the world over, causing scarcities and disruptions for private households, companies and states alike. Blockades, in short, were one of the principal phenomena that made the World Wars global and 'total'.

Blockades are therefore crucial to understanding not only the way the World Wars were waged but also their impact on entire generations. The articles in this issue reveal that the World War blockades affected peoples and societies more profoundly across a far greater space than their forerunners, exposing vulnerabilities and testing resilience.⁹ They caused temporary and lasting shifts in supply chains, production, and consumption, triggering humanitarian crises. The memory of blockades affected mentalities, politics, and strategic planning for decades to come.

For the purpose of this special issue, we have defined blockade as a set of policies backed by military power, designed to curtail the flow of commodities, financial services and information between third parties and enemy states to undermine their capacity to wage war and hasten their defeat. This definition sets apart blockade from other elements of economic warfare such as aerial bombing, in which the enemy was targeted directly rather than through an act of isolation which impacted a spatially much wider area.¹⁰ It also serves to distinguish blockade from sanctions, which are non-violent, generally peacetime measures, backed by law and intended to coerce a state into taking certain actions¹¹ – such as stepping down preparations for war, or ending an infraction of international law.¹²

Studies of the First and Second World Wars and their aftermaths number in the tens of thousands. Recent scholarship underlines the global nature of the wars¹³, and considers them as wars between empires rather than wars between nation-states¹⁴, and as total wars to be understood as much through the experience of 'home fronts' as through the clash of the armies on the battlefields.¹⁵ While such new perspectives might quite naturally lend themselves to an in-depth treatment of blockades, only a handful of recent works devote more than a few pages to them.¹⁶ The field remains largely defined by a handful of semi-official monographs released after the two World Wars and written by former Allied blockade administrators – even the most recent of them being over seventy years old.¹⁷ These monographs demonstrate the contemporary significance attributed to blockades, hint at their global scope, and list the economic, diplomatic and bureaucratic resources invested in their administration. But they suffer from various degrees of (self-) censorship and rely almost exclusively on a small body of mainly British sources that was available to the authors at the time.¹⁸

Studies of specialized aspects of the World Wars make mention of the blockades, but they are rarely their focus. Naval histories of the war, for example, analyse the deployment of blockading ships or anti-submarine warfare.¹⁹ The diplomatic efforts to reroute blockaded trade away from the enemy are treated in international history, while some of the devastating effects of blockades are discussed in studies of nutrition and deprivation.²⁰ But there has been little effort to transcend boundaries between historical subdisciplines and bring together the different dimensions of blockades – legal, economic, diplomatic, social and cultural – or to understand the blockade as a larger system. Moreover, research on blockades is still defined by national case studies, and often based almost exclusively on English-language sources. Entire regions critical to the function and impact of blockades, such as eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America or the Indo-Pacific region, hardly feature in existing accounts.

Another obvious knowledge gap, resulting from the absence of research on the blockades on a global scale, is the lack of answers to vital questions as to their effects. For example, did blockades affect the course of the war by undermining the German economy and weakening morale during the First World War, as German and British contemporaries often claimed?²¹ Some historians have echoed these sentiments, arguing that the blockade was 'the greatest factor behind the Allied victory over Germany'.²² By contrast, some economists have held that the blockades had little effect on either of the World Wars, since they were easily countered by German, Italian and Japanese trade rerouting, substitution and economic adaptation.²³

Calculating effects is no easy matter, for it requires the ability to isolate the effects of blockade on the economy from other war-related consequences, such as destruction and labour shortages. Although attempts have been made to come up with satisfactory calculations, most scholars simply acknowledge that there is, so far, no convincing methodology or evidence to quantify the impact of blockades, or the costs and benefits of the counter-measures.²⁴

Calculations matter when considering the impact of the blockades, but so do perceptions. We do know something about how contemporaries perceived the effects of blockades, but just how these perceptions affected behaviours, mentalities, and political, economic and military decision making remains an open question. The claim that the First World War blockade experience helped shape interwar Italian, German and Japanese autarky policies and, later, war economies is probably correct, but has hitherto not been substantiated systematically.²⁵ Similarly, the literature is largely silent on how, exactly, blockades impacted the creation and functioning of interwar and postwar forms of intergovernmental cooperation within the League of Nations and the United Nations²⁶ – although we do know that the blockade experience was a critical element in discussing bloc formation and the intergovernmental organisation of international finance and trade. The lived experience of blockade was moreover evident in the remarkable personal continuity between wartime blockade-related institutions and supranational integration following both wars.²⁷

Research on the two largest blockades in history is therefore not only a pressing need in historical scholarship in order to better understand the era of these global and total wars. It is also once again timely, as the issue of access to scarce resources in the globalized economy has come to the fore in contemporary geopolitical conflicts. Twentieth-century competition over oil, iron ore and rubber has given way to twenty-first-century competition over energy resources in general, rare earths, and computer chips. Food, and increasingly water, remain potential sources of conflict and potent objects and weapons of war and blockade. The Russo-Ukrainian war and the Gaza-Israel conflict, taking place as we write this article, demonstrate the extent to which the withholding of key materials, both civilian and military, remains a staple of otherwise rapidly modernizing warfare.

This special issue takes a first step towards addressing these deficits. It features articles presented during a conference held in Trondheim, Norway, in June 2022.²⁸ Combined, they make several distinct contributions. First, they expand and deepen knowledge of the blockades and establish their relevance to the era of the World Wars and twentieth-century history, whether in the field of global supply chains or humanitarianism. The articles widen the focus from more traditional protagonists such as admirals, diplomats and government ministers to companies, NGOs, intellectuals and private citizens. Secondly, we believe the history of blockade is a lens through which to gain a new understanding of the interconnections between the two World Wars. The special issue examines just how strongly the blockade experience of the Great War affected preparation for and policy during the Second World War, not only in terms of raw materials or food, but also of know-how, law and mentalities.²⁹ Collectively, the articles point to the shared generational experiences and learning processes from the first to the second blockade and hence offer building blocks for an integrative history of the era of the world wars. Finally, the special issue aims to break down disciplinary walls (as often exist between economic and cultural history, for example) and integrate legal, military, economic, business, diplomatic, social

and cultural perspectives. Only in this way can we understand the blockades of the World Wars as a system that is larger than the sum of its parts.

The special issue brings together experts from different historical disciplines and geographical specialisations to produce a nuanced, research-driven transnational and international history of the era of the blockade. It features a mix of younger and more experienced scholars to showcase and debate a variety of approaches. Its intention is to bring into conversation different (also non-Anglophone) historiographies, challenge orthodoxies that have been in place for decades, and stake out the ground for new research.

Africa was a testing ground for many of the policies the Allies would implement in the First World War, shows *Gabriela A. Frei*. During the Second Boer War (1899-1902) concern over critical war matériel reaching the Boers via then-Portuguese Mozambique led the British government to introduce various measures of trade control to police what came in and out of the seaport of Lourenço Marques (today Maputo) without declaring a formal blockade, and thereby alienating powerful neutrals. In doing so, those British government officials not only experimented with legal and practical policies to achieve the same effects as a physical blocking of Lourenço Marques, but also tested the limits of neutrals' reaction to them.

The Allied blockade of Germany and Germany's counter-blockade of 1914-1918 not only impacted belligerents, imperial dependencies and neutrals, but also occupied territories. Via an arrangement with the neutral Americans, food relief was allowed through both blockades for the benefit of the Belgian and northern French civilian population. But when the Americans declared war, their role as crucial intermediators fell to a Dutch-Spanish Committee. *Samuël Kruizinga's* article shows that, even in the absence of American power, Dutch and Spanish diplomats managed, sometimes despite themselves and their neutral governments' official position, to maintain a delicate balance between the belligerents and the Belgian civilian population. They were thus in a crucial position to prevent mass starvation and German designs to break up the Belgian state.

If neutral actors managed to shield civilian non-combatants from the most severe effects of the blockade in Belgium and northern France, such humanitarian protection was largely limited to western Europe. As *Heather Jones* shows in her treatment of the Mediterranean blockade of the First World War, the blockade there had a radicalizing effect, setting grave precedents for the targeting of civilian populations. This radicalization, Jones shows, can only be understood by recognizing that the Mediterranean blockade was not a single blockade, but actually involved multiple, interlocking blockade efforts by Britain, France, Italy, and other countries, as well as a submarine-based counter-blockade by the Central Powers. It was this fact, and the diffusion of responsibilities that came with it, that turned the wartime Mediterranean into a space for wartime radicalization. The result was both the indiscriminate submarine attacks on hospital ships by the Central Powers and the starving of Ottoman civilian populations by the Allies.

The way in which the practice and theory of blockade shifted during the First World War is also the subject of *Avram Lytton's* article. British blockade thinking in the years leading up to and during the first months of the First World War was focused near-exclusively on blocking German access to overseas sources of supply. But German and Austro-Hungarian conquests in central and eastern Europe opened up new avenues for replacing what the naval blockade lost them. This, shows *Lytton*, was a source of continuing concern for British war planners from 1915 onwards, and led to an evolution of British economic coercion strategy as well as an increased focus on eastern and south-eastern Europe as critical sources of supply and theatres of war.

Matthew Seligmann shows that while the general understanding of the first Allied blockade in Britain was that it had made an effective contribution to victory, inside government it was controversial almost from its inception. After 1918, two diametrically opposing narratives emerged. One, advanced mainly by the Foreign Office, held that British sea power 'was the dominant cause of Allied victory', decisively weakening the German war economy, combat strength, and civilian morale. By contrast, the Admiralty argued that undue diplomatic consideration of the interest of neutral countries in trade with Germany had prevented the imposition of a totally effective

blockade.³⁰ Inability to agree on a stance on blockade – its viability, relation to international law, and future application – caused its official history, published in 1937, to be declared an official secret – to be declassified only in 1961.³¹

In both World Wars, blockades aimed to curtail the enemy's import of strategic raw materials necessary for armaments production, among other uses. These raw material blockades, however, are not just the business of governments, argues *Simon Renner*. His article details the attempts by the Canadian International Nickel Company (INCO) to break into and further develop the German market in the 1930s. In this way, INCO played into the hands of the Nazi government just when its own government was planning for a repeat of the Great War blockade. Rather than aligning itself with British-imperial blockade planning and concentrating on business opportunities that aligned with those plans, INCO derailed them in search of profit, making use of its First World War experience to counter British, Canadian and imperial assaults on its company strategy.

While the Canadian INCO worked to the advantage of the German government, Germany's own steel industry did not, or at least not always, do so, as *Alexander Donges* shows. In order to lessen dependence on foreign iron ore imports, the Nazi government tried, but failed, to entice the German steel industry to increase domestic mining for (substandard) German ores. In 1937, the German government therefore founded a state-owned company, the *Reichswerke AG für Erzbergbau und Eisenhütten* 'Hermann Göring', to do what private industry would not. However, before German capacity for replacing overseas imports with domestic substitutes could seriously be tested, the military campaigns in the west secured control over higher-quality iron ore deposits.

Along with nickel and iron ore, rubber was another strategic commodity targeted by blockade. *Bastian Linneweh-Kacmaz* examines the response of German officials and businessmen in the rubber sector to the blockade during and after the First World War and discusses its interwar consequences, with a particular focus on Germany and the United States. Using a global value chain analysis, his article shows the enormous short- and long-term impact of the blockade on states and corporations and their efforts to control global markets. The blockade experience led states to develop two main long-term strategies for dealing with interwar commodity conflicts: securing rubber supplies through substitutes such as synthetic rubber, and building international cooperation.

Jonas Scherner, finally, examines the focus on raw materials in a broader context, including both the First and Second World Wars. Drawing on new archival material and using economic counterfactuals, he evaluates the impact of the blockade on the availability of German raw materials during the First World War. His findings challenge the prevailing narrative that the decline in imports occurred mainly in the second half of the war. Rather, German imports of raw materials fell drastically in 1915-16, largely due to the blockade. But while Imperial Germany showed remarkable resilience in the face of raw material shortages, it was Nazi Germany that 'learned' the lesson that Germany could withstand a long blockade by taking appropriate countermeasures.

These lessons, indeed, were also learned transnationally. As *Sheldon Garon* shows, Imperial Japan's military leaders, closely advised by their German counterparts in the inter-war years, relied on their perception of the blockades of the First World War to plan the conquest and exploitation of the human and material resources of Asia. Japan thus adopted a programme of self-sufficiency, above all in food and oil.³² Despite these efforts, Japan experienced a catastrophic collapse in the supply of food and raw materials, caused mainly by the Allied blockades in the Second World War. These blockades, among the most 'successful' in history, have gone virtually unacknowledged in scholarship, which continues to attribute the Japanese surrender almost entirely to the devastation wrought by the atom bombs.

In a final examination of the two blockades and their entangled histories, *Elisabeth Piller* traces their impact on modern wartime food aid. As she shows, the Allied food blockades of Europe in both wars created new humanitarian practices, most notably humanitarian corridors to Belgium in the First World War and Greece in the Second World War. These instances of trans-blockade

relief demonstrated that large-scale relief was possible even in total war, and created a new sense of humanitarian possibility and expectation among a generation of humanitarians. Decades before the Geneva Conventions even considered civilian starvation a war crime, international humanitarians were creating organizations and practices to address the issue. Modern food aid, Piller shows, is a neglected product of the era of blockade.

The special issue is only a starting point for what needs to be a broader examination of blockade history in the first half of the twentieth century. The blockades remain a neglected element of the era of the World Wars, but one with considerable analytical value for understanding that era.

One dimension of the blockades that requires much further study is the experience of neutral and occupied countries. To what extent did blockade structure the wartime experience of neutral countries? How did the Mediterranean blockade during the First World War affect the decision of neutrals such as Italy and Greece to enter the war in 1915 and 1917 respectively? How did the blockade in the Second World War affect trade relations and, perhaps more importantly, the sense of sovereignty of Sweden, Switzerland or Portugal? Even where national case studies exist, there is a real need for broader comparative or transnational studies of the intersection of blockade and neutrality. The same applies to the experience of occupied nations. In both World Wars, blockades targeted not only the main belligerents, but also the territories they controlled through colonization or occupation – hundreds of millions of people in the Second World War. Yet comparatively little is known about the experience and perception of blockade in these territories, despite the fact that blockade became part of wartime propaganda. The German occupiers, for example, sought to blame the Allied blockade for food and other shortages, and the Allies, in turn, feared that a hard blockade policy would jeopardize British and American post-war prestige. In both cases, transnational and/or comparative studies of the neutral and occupied blockade experience would be of immense value in better understanding the psychological, political, economic and social damage caused by the ‘hidden weapon’.

A second, even more glaring gap is the functioning of blockades beyond Europe and the north Atlantic. Although this special issue casts a wider net than usual, with articles on Japan, the United States, Canada, South Africa and the Mediterranean, it is only a first step towards capturing the globality of total war-era blockades. Many global questions remain unanswered. For example, how did the restriction of trade, movement and communication affect the overseas territories of blockaded nations, including those of France and the Netherlands in the Second World War? Conversely, what role did Allied colonies and dominions play in maintaining the wider blockade system? And how were seemingly distant wartime actors, such as Latin American countries, affected by the many inconveniences and opportunities of blockade?

The articles in this issue remind us of the need to think of the two blockades together. They provide powerful evidence of the deep entanglement of the First and Second World Wars. They demonstrate just how strongly the experience of the first blockade shaped the expectations and preparations for the second, and that these learning processes were not limited to government and war planners, but included humanitarian NGOs, companies and individuals. More could be done, exploring the precise processes and idiosyncrasies of transnational learning and, at the micro level, the individual preparation of households and civil society actors, not least women and women’s organizations. Such studies will shed light on the increasing military and civilian preparation for and resilience to blockade and, at the same time, the totalization of warfare.

Finally, one should also consider the long-term effects of the blockades after 1945. If the blockades were indeed as consequential as we suggest, what traces do they leave in the post-war world? For example, what impact did the Allied blockade machinery of the Second World War have on the realignment of world trade in the aftermath of the war?²³³ Did the blockades retard or accelerate the process of decolonization? As all these questions suggest, blockade history can open a window onto the globality, totality and deeper consequences of the era of the World Wars.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Heather Jones for her very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this introduction. We would also like to thank all contributors to this special issue and the many reviewers for their time and expertise. For a comprehensive discussion of the various definitions of maritime blockade, see Phillip Drew, *The Law of Maritime Blockade. Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–10. We define blockade more broadly, however, to include measures that go well beyond the projection of naval power. See for example for communication, Heidi J. S. Tworek, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019) and especially Heidi Evans [Tworek], ‘“The Path to Freedom”? Transoceanic and Wireless Telegraphy, 1914–1922’, *Historical Social Research*, 35/1 (2010), 209–236.
2. John Nash, ‘Sea Power in the Peloponnesian War’, *Naval War College Review*, 71/1 (2018), 119–139, 132–133.
3. Michael D. Fraunces, ‘The International Law of Blockade: New Guiding Principles in Contemporary State Practice’, *The Yale Law Journal*, 101/4 (1992), 893–918, 895; James F. McNulty, ‘Blockade: Evolution and Expectation’, *International Law Studies*, 62 (1980), 172–196, 174–175.
4. Lance Davis and Stanley Engerman, *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History since 1750*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3–6, 25–52.
5. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom. The Civil War Era*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 380–382.
6. Cf. David L. Gordon and Royden Dangerfield, *The Hidden Weapon. The Story of Economic Warfare* (New York: Harper, 1947).
7. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1–2.
8. See Sheldon Garon’s contribution to this special issue, referenced below.
9. For an example of vulnerability and resilience in geographically limited spaces, see the success of the French cotton-spinning industry in adapting to the British blockade of the continent (1803–06) and the French counter-blockade of Britain (1806–13), which has been recently demonstrated by Réka Juhász, ‘Temporary Protection and Technology Adoption: Evidence from the Napoleonic Blockade’, *American Economic Review*, 108/11 (2018), 3339–3376.
10. Our definition also excludes urban sieges, such as the siege of Leningrad (even if, in Russian, it is often described as a ‘blockade’).
11. Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon. The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022). For a recent case study see Sam Matthews Boehmer, ‘Questionable Allies: British Collaboration with Apartheid South Africa, 1960–90’, *The International History Review*, 46/1 (2024), 102–119.
12. Elena V. McLean, ‘Economic Coercion’, in Jon C. W. Pevehouse and Leonard Seabrooke (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198793519.001.0001>; Phillip Dehne, *After the Great War: Economic Warfare and the Promise of Peace in Paris 1919* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
13. The literature is far too extensive to reference exhaustively. Select titles include: Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010); On the Second World War Evan Mawdsley, *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Andrew Buchanan, ‘Globalizing the Second World War’, *Past & Present*, 258/1 (2023), 246–281; Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins. The Last Imperial War, 1931–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2021); Julie Le Gac and Nicolas Patin, *Guerres Mondiales. Le désastre et le deuil, 1914–1945* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2022). It is notable that many advances in globalizing the World Wars have been made through collaborative publications. In addition to those referenced above see recently Ana Paula Pires, Maria Inés Tato, and Jan Schmidt, eds., *The Global First World War: African, East Asian, Latin American and Iberian Mediators* (London: Routledge, 2021) or Tosh Minohara and Evan Dawley, eds., *Beyond Versailles: the 1919 Moment and a New Order in East Asia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021); Shiferaw Bekele, Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, Alessandro Volterra, and Massimo Zaccaria, eds., *The First World War from Tripoli to Addis Ababa (1911–1924)* (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2018); Judith Byfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons and Ahmad Sikainga, eds., *Africa and World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); for a survey of the historiography see Anne Samson, ‘Unravelling the Past: World War I in Africa’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 57/1 (2022), 60–77. The project *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* has lent a significant impulse to research on global history, with, for example, no fewer than 57 articles specifically on Africa, and hundreds more which refer to Africa.
14. For example, Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War, 1911–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Overy, *Blood and Ruins*.

15. On the World Wars as total wars see Stig Förster and Roger Chickering, eds., *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Roger Chickering, Stig Förster and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War. Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On home fronts Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) was pathbreaking in this regard. Part of the new approach is the discovery of the topics of social and cultural mobilization and population displacement. See John Horne, *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War*, (Cambridge, 1997) and Peter Gatrell, 'Introduction: World Wars and Population Displacement in Europe in the Twentieth Century', *Contemporary European History*, 16/4 (2007), 415-426, and the corresponding special issue.
16. For example, a recent encyclopedia on the First World War provides only a brief two-page entry, but no chapter, on the blockade: Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, eds., *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014), English transl.: *Brill's Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). *To Arms*, the first volume of Hew Strachan's projected three-volume *The First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), contains valuable but brief scattered insights into blockade policy, mainly before 1914. For some of the rare efforts to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of blockade during the First World War, see Alan Kramer, 'Blockade and economic warfare', in: Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. II: *The State*, 460-489; Alan Kramer, 'Naval Blockade (of Germany)'. In: Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, Bill Nasson, eds., *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2020-01-22. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11451; Christian Götter, 'Von der militärischen Maßnahme zum politischen Machtmittel. Die Entwicklung der Wirtschaftsblockade im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift*, 75/2 (2016), 359-387; abridged English version: 'From a Militarily to a Politically Enforced Instrument. The Development of the Allied Blockade During the First World War', *Les Cahiers Sirice*, 26/1 (2021), 59-71. On the Second World War, Gerhard Weinberg mentioned blockades in passing in his magisterial *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); there is no chapter and scant mention of blockade in Mawdsley, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*. The fifth volume of the 'Total War' series, Roger Chickering, Stig Förster and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War*, largely ignored the blockade (exceptions: 12, 37), though there is a good chapter on naval warfare by Holger Herwig on 'Germany and the Battle of the Atlantic' (71-87), and Gerhard Weinberg's chapter 'Total War: The Global Dimensions of Conflict' (19-31) is an excellent condensation of his reflections on the Second World War as global war, which he regards as its distinguishing feature and thus a paradigmatic case of total war. Only recently has Richard Overy pointed to the role of the Allied blockade in the defeat of Japan in 1945, but he does not assess its weight in the Japanese government's decision to capitulate: *Blood and Ruins*, 587-593.
17. Montagu W. W. Consett, *The Triumph of Unarmed Forces (1914-1918): An Account of the Transactions by which Germany during the Great War was able to obtain Supplies prior to her Collapse under the Pressure of Economic Forces* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1923); Maurice Parmelee, *Blockade and Sea Power and its Significance for a World State* (London: Hutchinson, 1924); Louis Guichard, *The Naval Blockade, 1914-1918* (London: Allan, 1930); Archibald C. Bell, *A History of the Blockade of Germany and of the Countries Associated with her in the Great War: Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, 1914-1918* (London: HMSO, 1937 (1961)); Edward Keble Chatterton, *The Big Blockade* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1932); Gordon and Dangerfield, *The Hidden Weapon*; William N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, 2 vols (London: HMSO, 1952, 1959; rev. ed. incl. confidential source references London, 1978).
18. For more recent studies, flawed in argument and methodology, see C. Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915-1919* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985); Eric W. Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914-1919* (London: Frank Cass, 2004). For overviews on blockades, see the special issue on 'Blocus et guerre économique' in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 214/2 (2004); Davis and Engerman, *Naval Blockades in Peace and War*; Bruce A. Elleman and S. C. M. Paine, eds., *Naval Blockades and Seapower: Strategies and Counter-Strategies, 1805 - 2005* (London: Routledge, 2006), 117-130.
19. Lawrence Sondhaus, *The Great War at Sea. A Naval History of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (London: UCL Press, 1994).
20. See for example Marc Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande. Ein neutrales Land im politischen und wirtschaftlichen Kalkül der Kriegsgegner* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998); Samuël Kruijzinga, *Overleegconomie in Oorlogstijd. De Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2012); Wim Klinkert, Samuël Kruijzinga, and Paul Moeyes, *Nederland Neutraal. De Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914-1918*, (Amsterdam: Boom, 2014); Knut Ola Naastad Strøm, 'Between the devil and the deep blue sea. Trade negotiations between the Western Allies and the Scandinavian neutrals, 1914-1919' (PhD thesis, Göteborg, 2019); Christian M. Leitz, *Nazi Germany and Neutral Europe During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Eric Golson, 'The Economics of Neutrality in the Second World War', in Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, eds, *The Economics of the Second World War: Seventy-Five Years On* (London: CEPR Press, 2020 (online)), 81-85; Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson and Revolutionary Peacemaking 1918-1919*:

- Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); id., 'The Blockade of Germany and the Strategy of Starvation, 1914-1918: An Agency Perspective', in Förster and Chickering, eds., *Great War, Total War*, 169-188; Mary Elizabeth Cox, 'Hunger games: or how the Allied blockade in the First World War deprived German children of nutrition, and Allied food aid subsequently saved them: Childhood Nutrition in The First World War', *Economic History Review*, 68 (2014), 600-631; id., *Hunger in War and Peace. Women and Children in Germany 1914-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Alyssa Cundy, "'Weapon of Starvation": The Politics, Propaganda, and Morality of Britain's Hunger Blockade of Germany, 1914-1919' (PhD thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2015); Anne Roerkohl, *Hungerblockade und Heimatfront. Die kommunale Lebensmittelversorgung in Westfalen während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991); Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941-1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Melanie S. Tanielian, *The Charity of War. Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Tylor Brand, *Famine Worlds. Life at the Edge of Suffering in Lebanon's Great War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022); Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (London: Penguin, 2011).
21. Marcel Boldorf, 'Außenhandel und Blockade', in id., ed., *Deutsche Wirtschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 479-520, 511.
 22. Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany*, 4, 182. See also Bell, *A History of the Blockade*; Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger*; Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). For a different assessment, see for example Gerd Hardach, *The First World War, 1914-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 34.
 23. Davis and Engerman, *Naval Blockades in Peace and War*, e.g. 230, 246.
 24. For the lack of data, see Albrecht Ritschl, 'The Pity of Peace. The German Economy at War, 1914-1918 and Beyond', in Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison eds., *The Economics of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41-76. Alan Kramer has proposed a theoretical model and provided a provisional assessment of the impact of the blockade on Germany in 'Blockade and economic warfare', and 'Naval Blockade (of Germany)'. Mark Harrison has recently presented a more refined economic model: 'Myths of the Great War', in Jari Eloranta, Eric Golson, Andrei Markevich and Nikolaus Wolf, eds., *Economic History of Warfare and State Formation* (Singapore: Springer, 2016), 135-158, esp. 148-150. Generally, the scholarship on Imperial Germany's war economy is still rather sparse. For newer publications, see the special issue edited by Dieter Ziegeler, *Kriegswirtschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg/The World War I Economy, Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 56/2 (2015); Boldorf, ed., *Deutsche Wirtschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg*; Marcel Boldorf and Hervé Joly, eds., *Une victoire impossible? L'économie allemande pendant la Première Guerre mondiale* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2021). A preliminary qualitative, but not quantitative, assessment of the economic impact of the blockade on Nazi Germany, but not on Japan, was attempted by Gordon and Dangerfield, *The Hidden Weapon*, 199-211.
 25. Jonas Scherner, 'Lernen und Lernversagen. Die 'Metallmobilisierung' im Deutschen Reich 1939 bis 1945', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 66/2 (2018), 233-266; Jonas Scherner, 'Preparing for the next blockade. Non-ferrous metals and the strategic economic policy of the Third Reich', *English Historical Review*, 137 (2022), 475-512; Sheldon Garon, 'The Home Front and Food Insecurity in Wartime Japan: A Transnational Perspective', in Hartmut Berghoff, Jan Logemann, and Felix Römer, eds., *The Consumer on the Home Front: Second World War Civilian Consumption in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 29-53.
 26. Emily S. Rosenberg, 'Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World', in id., ed., *A World Connecting 1870-1945* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 815-996; Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Glenda Sluga, 'Remembering 1919: international organizations and the future of international order', *International Affairs*, 95/1 (2019) 25-43.
 27. See, e.g., the recent volume by Brigitte Leucht, Katja Seidel and Laurent Warlouzet, eds., *Reinventing Europe. The History of the European Union, 1945 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).
 28. We gratefully acknowledge the funding of the conference by the Norwegian Research Council and the Fate of Nations Project.
 29. See Jonas Scherner, "Preparing for the next blockade. Non-ferrous metals and the strategic economic policy of the Third Reich." *The English Historical Review* 137/585 (2022), 475-512.
 30. Matthew Seligmann, 'Competing Narratives', in this issue.
 31. Bell, *A History of the Blockade*.
 32. For some recent attention to the Japanese case as part of a broader narrative on 'oil coercion' in the 20th century, see Rosemary Kelanic, *Black Gold and Blackmail. Oil and Great Power Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), esp. 59-66.
 33. On the consequences of the First World War for the reconfiguration of international economic governance, see Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers. Sovereignty, Empire and the Birth of Economic Governance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

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