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Introduction

The nature of international history; the foreign-policy-making groups in Britain and the United States; the concept of historical generations; particular problems in the contemporary historiography of Anglo-American relations in the twentieth century

The nature of 'international history'

The status of 'diplomatic history' today is not what it should be, or what it used to be. It enjoys a bad press both in Britain and in the United States.[1] It is supposedly devoid of intellectual content, a refuge only for painstaking plodders, 'dry-as-dusts', unable to see the wood for the trees. In France and elsewhere it comes under the general ban laid on all examples of *l'histoire événementielle*. Even in Britain, despite its metamorphosis over the last twenty-five years into 'international history' (the history of 'international relations'), it is dismissed as élitist by social historians, largely ignored by economic historians, and lies almost totally outside the ken of oral historians, psychohistorians and the various attempts now being made to adapt mathematical and statistical techniques to the study of historical data. It is equally a matter of contempt to many students of the new branch of the study of political 'international relations'. To them it is devoid of intellectual content; its practitioners are men who are afraid of any conceptual approach to the subject, persons only concerned with the study of minutiae.[2]

[1] See, for example, the introduction to Alexander de Conde (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of American Foreign Policy. Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, New York, 1978, vol. I. p. xii. For a recent, if somewhat distrait, discussion of the issues involved see Walter LaFeber, '"Ah, if we had studied it more carefully"; The Fortunes of American Diplomatic History', *Prologue*, 11, 1979.

[2] I remember particularly the contempt and ridicule which David Singer, the well-known advocate of a theoretical approach to the study of international relations, chose to heap upon the special subject, 'Anglo-German Naval Relations, 1933–1939' in the international history degree programme at the London School of

In view of this persistent hostility, and in view of the theme of these essays, it is worth while beginning with an exposition of the concept of 'international history' and a defence of the concept against its detractors. Historically speaking, the study of international history originated in the study of the relations between states; in particular, of the relations between the major European states in the nineteenth century and of the culmination of these relations in the First World War. The controversy over the origins of that catastrophe could not be confined to the history or the archives of any nation. The great historians who took part in that controversy had, however, already learnt their craft in the study of the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, of the Eastern Question, or of the wars of Italian and German unification. They were often nationalistically partisan in their approach; but rarely if ever did they ignore the legal, intellectual, social and political penumbrae of their subject matter.

Their preoccupation with the concept of the nation state, however, proved inadequate in itself to sustain the weight they wished to put upon it. Their successors, particularly since the Second World War, have come to look behind these formal constitutional–legal structures to the realities which underlay them, the sociopolitical groups which exercise power within individual states and maintain linkages with each other and with their supposed political rivals, both within their boundaries and across them. Once historians began to concentrate on the so-called decision-makers and their political alternatives, their attention was increasingly drawn to the exploration not only of what divided them from their presumed opponents but of what they shared in common. And as

Economics, not caring that its supervisor and originator was among his audience. David Singer has since earned a magisterial rebuke from Professor A.E. Campbell for his comments on Donald S. Birn, 'Open Diplomacy at the Washington Conference of 1921–1922. The British and French Experience', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12, 1970. Singer's comments, 'Popular Diplomacy and Policy Effectiveness. A note on the Mechanisms and Consequences', *Comp. Stud. Soc. Hist.*, are condemned for irrelevance to Professor Birn's article and for lack of any evidence to substantiate them. 'While in form a comment on Professor Birn's [article] [Singer's comments] made little reference to it ... Rather it was a restatement of what some students of public opinion believe that the effect of public opinion on the conduct of foreign policy has been. There are few areas in which large and unsupported generalisations are more freely advanced. Neither in Professor Birn's paper nor in the history of modern international relations is there evidence to support them.' A.E. Campbell, 'Open Diplomacy (Comment on Birn and Singer)', *Comp. Stud. Soc. Hist.*, 14, 1972.

soon as this problem was looked at within a national context, it became obvious that there were concepts and interests shared across national boundaries as well as within them.

Oppositional groups maintained links with those in power, and with those in opposition in other countries. The weaker they felt themselves to be within their own political system, the more tempting the linkages with their equivalents abroad. Literary and cultural historians emphasised the transnational links and relationships. And the historian of the great sociopolitical movements found it impossible to remain within the confines of a single nation.[3] Inter-war internationalism, of both the conservative and the revolutionary kinds, reinforced this approach, as did the growing study of international law at the customary as well as the formal level. The historian could hardly ignore the realities of international, multinational or transnational institutions whether political like the League of Nations, or economic, from the international flow of capital, trade, exploitation and investment through the private multinational companies to its attempted control and direction through the Bank of International Settlements, the International Monetary Fund or the League of Nations Economic Committee.

The distinguishing mark of the international historian, however (reflecting the origins of the subject in the study of the origins of wars), has been a bias towards the study of international crises, and towards the rôle and responsibility of individual decision-makers in those crises. The study of international history is traditionalist in this sense only, that it marries the traditional concern of the historian with history as the record of the actions of individuals and of the moral justifications advanced for those actions with the search for causal and consequential relationships and linkages between events and actions over time. The international historian today is concerned to understand why, at given moments in time, identifiable individuals in positions of power, authority or influence chose, recommended or advocated one course of action rather than another.

To understand this, he or she must look both for the external factors which limited the range of choices presented to the individuals and for the internal factors personal to each individual

[3] See, for example, James Joll, *The Second International*, London, 1955; or F.S. Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe, 1815–1914*, Leiden, 1963.

which indicated the choice actually made rather than any alternative choices which suggest themselves to posterity. In the search for understanding, the historian is led outwardly to look for those factors by which the individuals under study identified the groups to which they felt they belonged and to which they gave their loyalties, factors which can be political, ideological, sociopolitical and socioeconomic; and inwardly to those factors of psychological make-up, education and experience which condition the individual's perceptions. Since the historian is usually concerned not with a single individual but with the interplay between a limited but identifiable group of individuals, the approach employed must be multibiographical or prosopographical.

The historian of international relations, concentrating, as he or she must, on the activities of small and structured groups of individuals involved in the making of policy within and for the various political units, has always found it essential to base his or her study on the examination of a multiplicity of archives, both public and, where possible, private. And in working on these archives the historian's attention is very soon drawn to the different ways in which the individuals (both as individuals, and as members of the various structured groups of policy-makers which provide the reality behind the shorthand words, 'London', 'Washington', the 'Quai d'Orsay', the 'Narkomindel', 'the City', 'Wall Street', the 'Joint Chiefs of Staff', 'Britain', 'Japan', 'America' used for purposes of historical narrative) actually thought of, interpreted the actions of, in a word *perceived* those with whom they dealt as members of policy-making groups of other nations and interests than their own. The international historian deals, in fact, with perceptions as well as decisions; with how such perceptions arise, how accurate they are in the light of what can be historically ascertained, and where and how and why they were distorted. The international historian deals with misperceptions as much as perceptions, misconceptions as well as concepts, misinformation, mistiming and mistake, as much as with intelligence, deception, decision and execution.

To those whom the study of international history attracts, other forms of history today often seem to depersonalise history and thus to abandon historical reality; some even appear to be inspired by a psychological need for pseudo-scientific certainty. These practitioners appear afraid of ethical judgment, anchored in one or more

of the many forms of predestinational doctrine by which from time immemorial humanity has sought to evade consciousness of its own responsibility. Above all they seem to ignore the temporal, the evidential and the *événementiel* nature of their own everyday experience, and to judge the actors in the history they examine by different standards from those by which they judge themselves. The historian of international relations, in fact, neither can, nor wishes to ignore reality; that history, in short, happens over time, in succession, in the experience and memories not of statistically or conceptually identifiable abstractions, but of identifiable individual persons.

The relations of the historian with the social scientist who chooses to base his study on the same order of historical phenomena have been equally controversial in the past. But the historian should have nothing *per se* against the study by social scientists in abstract or conceptual form of aspects of those events; indeed he can profit enormously from such study, provided that it leads to the development of a workable language, easily recognisable in the realities of the historian's study, with which the nature, behaviour and observable actions and interactions of individuals and groups of individuals can be classified and analysed. Where he must object, however, is where each sub-discipline within the social sciences seeks to become more and more autonomous, evolving theories of causation which are entirely coherent within the terms of that sub-discipline alone. Such coherence is rarely observable in reality; and the very coherence of their models of causation may become a barrier rather than an illumination to the understanding of that reality.

The theme of these essays is to be the replacement of Britain by the United States as the major universal power on the periphery of the central Eurasian land mass (the 'heartland' of Sir Halford Mackinder) in the first seventy to seventy-five years of the twentieth century. Following the definition of international history already given, it is proposed to concentrate on the experience of this process and how it was perceived and conceived by those in each country who were responsible for the conduct of the political relations of the two states with each other and with the other states who were not part of their political systems. The concept of 'politics' and 'political' is here related to the making of policy; and that policy is interpreted as

including policy in the field of economic and financial affairs as well as the narrowly political and the military.

The foreign-policy-making groups in Britain and the United States

The analysis proposes to focus on the 'decision-makers' in each country, following the method first used by the author some twenty or more years ago.[4] It is proposed to define and identify these decision-makers in two ways, normatively and ostensively. That is to say, those formally responsible for the conduct of foreign policy in each country will first be identified according to the legal and constitutional doctrine of each country. Historical evidence will then be examined to show which individuals and groups within the formal structure of responsibilities actually played major rôles in formulating and executing the foreign policy of each of the two countries. Most previous analyses of the British group of decision-makers have agreed that over time the membership of this group has been continuous and socially coherent to such a degree that it could be considered not merely as a numerical grouping but to some extent at least as a self-contained sociopolitical group or system of groups. Popular belief has it that the American system, with its change of the political direction of the career bureaucracies with each presidential election, is much less coherent and consistent over time than its British counterpart. That there are considerable differences between the British and American systems of making and conducting foreign policy is hardly deniable. But an examination of the historical evidence must show that, in the period under discussion, these differences lie in other directions than in the presence or absence of continuous membership of the foreign-policy-making groups in each country.

By far the most important difference between the British and the American systems results from the difference between the presidential and the cabinet system of government.[5] The American

[4] In a paper given to the European Association of American Studies in October 1960, published in 'America and the British Foreign Policy Making Elite 1895–1956' in *Review of Politics*, 1960. This analysis formed the basis of the first two chapters in D.C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies, Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*, London and South Bend, Indiana, 1965.

[5] For an elaboration of this theme see Chapter 9 below.

system, originating as it does in the eighteenth century with its discussions of benevolent despotism, produced an ideal solution to the problems which exercised the political theorists of that era; a democratically elected monarch, embodying in himself the sovereign power of the electorate, limited in terms of office, limited by a written constitution the interpretation of which lies with the judiciary, and dependent in certain prescribed forms on the approval of a separate legislature which has complete budgetary control, must approve his appointments and ratify treaties. In the tradition of eighteenth-century absolutism, the ministers of the elected monarch, who is called the President of the United States, are his servants, his advisers and the executants of his decisions. He can, and frequently does, ignore them, override them or bypass them. Their authority is derived from him and from him alone. They are not elected, only approved. If they enjoyed political 'clout' before their appointment, it diminishes from the moment of their appointment.

In keeping with this the President can evolve or reject any system of cooperation or coordination between his various advisers that he chooses. He can employ a cabinet system or he can reject it. As a result, the lines of advice and communication within his administration run vertically rather than laterally. The American system is constantly open to discontinuities of thought and action within and between the various formal bureaucratic parts of the government and the personal advisory services of which the President avails himself. American bureaucratic politics resemble those of absolutist systems such as that of Imperial Germany in that the commonest form of conflict is over the demarcation of areas of responsibility and competence. In 1927 the US Navy evolved or was allowed to evolve (as it was prevented from doing in 1921 and 1929) a position on naval disarmament which was so rigid as to make international agreement impossible and conflict inevitable.[6] In 1930/31 the General Board of the US Navy campaigned in Congress against the ratification of the

[6] For evidence on this point see Chapter 3 below. See also W. Bickel, *Die anglo-amerikanische Beziehungen 1927–1930 im Licht der Flottenfrage*, Zurich Ph.D., 1970: David Carlton, 'Great Britain and the Coolidge Disarmament Conference of 1927', *Political Science Quarterly*, 83, 1968: Stephen W. Roskill, *British Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. I, *The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism*, London, 1962.

London Naval Treaty.[7] By contrast, in October 1944 the British Foreign Secretary objected in the plainest possible terms to a strategic appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff which considered the eventuality of post-war conflict with the USSR. It was withdrawn after a personal confrontation.[8] The British system had evolved machinery for reconciling military and political considerations and responsibilities in 1902 with the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence. It did not always function. But it existed. It was not until 1939 that the State–War–Navy Coordinating Committee was established in the United States. Its functioning even then depended on the use the President chose to make of it: as was to be equally true of its post-war successor, the National Security Council.

The American foreign-policy-making groups must be defined in the following terms. The President is advised by the Secretary of State, his ambassadors and ministers, whether political or career appointments, and by the personnel of the State Department and the Foreign Service. To these must be added the other cabinet officers whose work impinges on foreign policy, that is, the Secretaries of the Treasury, Commerce, War and Navy Departments, their political appointments and career public servants and senior military and naval officers. In Congress the chairman and members of the Committees for Foreign Relations, for the Army and the Navy, and for Commerce are the most important, with the Senate Committees outranking those of the House. To these must be added the officers of the Federal Reserve Banks after 1914. The 'attentive publics'[9] are more difficult to define; but apart from members of Congress an important rôle in leading and forming the opinions of these publics was played by the US press, especially in the inter-war years and after, by their long-standing representatives abroad as foreign correspondents and by the syndicated political columnists.

In this practice the element of continuity of membership is much

[7] See US Senate, 71st Congress, Second Session, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings on the Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armaments*, Washington, 1930: Raymond G. O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium. The United States and the London Naval Conference of 1930*, Lawrence, Kansas, 1962, pp. 112–17.

[8] Julian Lewis, 'British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942–1947', Oxford D.Phil., 1981.

[9] As defined in J.N. Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, New York, 1961, 'opinion holders who are inclined to participate [in the foreign-policy-making process] but lack the access or opportunity to do so'.

stronger than American political mythology allows for.[10] In the first place, although by comparison with his British equivalent, the American career public official is outweighed by the political appointees, this is far from true of the military advisers to the President. The Chief of Staff to the Army and the Chief of Naval Operations, the General Board of the Navy and the General Staffs of both Services play a continuous and coherent rôle throughout much of the history of American foreign policy in this century. In the second place, and despite the various reforms of the State Department and the Foreign Service, the East Coast Ivy League provenance of the senior officials in the State Department, at least until the 1930s, is very striking indeed. Harvard graduates lead the field, with Yale, Amherst and Princeton prominent among the also-rans. In birth and upbringing the majority stem from the states of New England and the Old South, with a group from the industrial Middle West coming a very poor third. A very similar pattern shows itself when the political appointees of successive Presidents to State Department posts are examined. To this must be added the oligarchy of inherited wealth with the dynastic orientation towards public service so strikingly made their own by such *nouveaux riches* as the Kennedys. The established families of the Gilded Age, the bold bad industrial 'robber barons' of the later nineteenth century, left heirs as devoted to public service as their progenitors were to private banditry.

This element of continuity is enhanced when the swings of American politics between 1900 and 1975 are considered. The first twelve years are Republican, the next eight Democratic, the next twelve again Republican, the next twenty Democratic. Thereafter the see-saw continues with an octennial swing. But in the first half of the century each party remained long enough in power to attract its permanent camp-following of foreign affairs experts. And after 1920 the Council of Foreign Relations in New York was to give them a permanent forum for the discussion and analysis of current foreign policy problems. From 1950 onwards university schools of international studies and research institutions such as those run by the Rand Corporation, the Brookings Institute in Washington, the

[10] E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment, Aristocracy and Caste in America*, London, 1966. See also Morton Keller, *Affairs of State. Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America*, Cambridge, Mass., 1977.

Johns Hopkins Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research were to provide similar places of retirement and return.

The American élites were, however, never quite so sure of their position as their British equivalents. The personnel of the State Department found it difficult to enjoy (save on a personal basis) the same cosy relationship of distant contempt towards their political overlords as was apt to tempt their colleagues in the Foreign Office. Few Presidents, or for that matter Secretaries of State, bothered to cultivate the kind of relationship which, for example, Eyre Crowe enjoyed with Austen Chamberlain or Harvey with Anthony Eden. No American career ambassador (or for that matter political appointee either) dared to take a President to task as, for example, Clark Kerr did Churchill on his visit to Moscow in August 1942.[11] And where Congress was concerned it is difficult to imagine any MP, even the late Richard Crossman, informing a Foreign Secretary that his information on world affairs was better than that of the Foreign Office, as Borah did Hull in Roosevelt's presence in July 1939.[12] (He was wrong.) The parallels between the British foreign-policy-making élites and their American equivalents are in real terms much closer than political myth allows. But the manner in which each perceived his own position, and the degree by which the legitimacy of his position and his views was accepted by others, differed enormously. Colonel House's position was acceptable to all so long as he held the President's support. No one would have dreamed of rebuking him in the way that Balfour was to rebuke Philip Kerr at Paris.[13] But when Wilson broke with him he became a political nonentity, a fact it took the British some time to realise. Not that the position of the Foreign Office and the professional diplomatist was ever as strong as its defenders would have us believe.[14] But at its weakest

[11] On which see Inverchapel Papers, FO 800/300; Graham Ross, 'Operation Bracelet: Churchill in Moscow, 1942' in D. Dilks (ed.), *Retreat from Power. Studies in British Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, vol. II, *After 1939*, London, 1981.

[12] See Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, London, 1948, pp. 649–51; Robert James Maddox, *William E. Borah and American Foreign Policy*, Baton Rouge 1969, pp. 239–41.

[13] See Blanche Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour*, London, 1939, vol.II, p. 200.

[14] See Alan Sharp, 'The Foreign Office in Eclipse, 1919–1922', *History*, 61, 1976; Roberta Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916–1918', *Historical Journal*, 15, 1972.