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Keith Neilson. *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939.*

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Introduction by Sally Marks, Independent Historian

The history of Anglo-Russian relations, like that of Anglo-French relations, consists of a long period of hostility and rivalry followed by a brief era of rapprochement caused for the most part by the emergence of a united, increasingly powerful and power-seeking Germany. The British entente with Russia, unlike that with France, lasted only a decade, and the relationship after the First World War was both complicated and transformed by the advent of Soviet communism. But was this fact determining for Anglo-Soviet affairs in the twenty inter-war years? Keith Nelson says matters were not that simple.

In trying to use a case study (or “bore-hole”) of Anglo-Soviet relations to illuminate the broader topic of British inter-war strategic foreign policy in general, Neilson first devotes a chapter to what he terms the “period of persuasion...1919-1933.” (43) Three more chapters examine the era of deterrence (1933-1937). Neville Chamberlain’s two-year unilateral approach warrants two chapters before a conclusion which devotes considerable attention to Soviet ideology.

At the outset, Neilson declares that “...British policy experienced a failure of great expectations...This study is an attempt to explain why this failure happened.” (1) “...the second goal of this book is to show how Soviet Russia affected British strategic foreign policy-making generally. Thus it provides a new perspective on and explanation of London’s policy in the inter-war period.” (1-2) “...Anglo-Soviet affairs provide the organizing theme for the larger topic. In this way, a clear focus can be provided for a look at the larger subject.” (2)

Participants in the roundtable are not in full agreement regarding to what extent Neilson meets his goals, but there is substantial consensus that his book constitutes a worthy attempt containing material of value. All commend the exhaustive research in British archives and printed materials, and appreciate the inclusion of the Asian factor in what is often simply a European story. There is a good deal of applause for the absence of traditional stereotypes and of simplistic explanations in terms of British anti-communism as well as Neilson’s rejection of economically determined British decline as a broad, perhaps equally simplistic, explanation of events.

As the book focuses on the 1933-1939 period, an era when the primary British concern about the Soviets was whether Moscow would opt for stability or revisionism, so also do the roundtable’s participants. Sidney Aster is particularly enthusiastic, speaking of “remarkable success and originality...within a more ambitious theoretical framework.” He summarizes Neilson as saying that the legacies of the First World War shaped British policy, notably the collapse of four empires, the end of an Eurocentric balance of power, creation of the League of Nations, rejection of secret diplomacy and the balance of power, and a search for disarmament. Those individuals influencing British policy, whose mentalities require examination, were now more numerous and various than in prewar years.

Aster implies that the treatment of 1920-1933 is too brief, but otherwise finds little to criticize. He argues that in 1939 Britain's choice was appeasement or alliance diplomacy whereas Russia's was isolation or an arrangement with Hitler. He suggests that Chamberlain's negotiations amounted to too little too late and says that, in addition to secondary factors, "British and Soviet foreign policies were determined by ideology, a lack of shared goals, contending visions of how to display power...." In his view, the book is "densely documented" and "highly nuanced."

Robert Hanks agrees that the work is nuanced, especially in its rejection of the appeasement/anti-appeasement debate and the school of declinology and in its argument that options existed, including the possibility of cooperation. Hanks points out, however, that just as the USSR chose collective security, British Conservatives rejected both that and the Soviet Union, opting instead for bilateral arrangements such as the Naval Agreement with Germany and the Hoare-Laval Pact. Hanks notes as well the emphasis on Japan, which, he says, will "provoke debate," especially since Neilson contends that in 1934 Japan was perceived as a greater threat to Britain than Germany. Moreover, rapprochement with Japan was Chamberlain's preferred solution to the inadequacy of British power to meet global commitments, but domestic and foreign factors blocked that, leading him to turn to Hitler.

Hanks endorses Neilson's analysis of the failure of the 1939 Anglo-Soviet negotiations, but, aside from the material on Japan, sees little new in the book. He finds the parameters too narrow, the focus excessive on civil servants whose views were ignored, and inquires about other voices in and outside government who may have influenced policy. As Neilson omits the effect of the Depression on Britain's domestic politics and military establishment, Hanks finds the dismissal of the school of declinology unconvincing. He asks about Soviet analyses of Britain, particularly its military power, especially during the 1939 negotiations. He terms the book a study of British perceptions of the Soviet Union and not of Anglo-Soviet relations nor a new paradigm for understanding British foreign policy. Hanks ends by sharply criticizing the failure to use Soviet archives, printed documents, and secondary literature as well as documents of other powers which might help to illuminate the topic.

Alastair Kocho-Williams agrees with Hanks about the lack of Soviet sources, albeit more gently, pointing out that the book is supposed to be about Anglo-Soviet relations but instead examines the Soviet impact on British policy. The work provides no insight into whether Moscow was manipulating Britain. He also complains that the work scants the period of persuasion. Kocho-Williams says Neilson means that the 1920s were really a period of trying to persuade other powers to adhere to the Versailles Treaty, not a period of persuasion regarding Anglo-Soviet relations. He deems this misleading in view of Soviet efforts, especially in the 1920s, to broaden diplomatic relations. One obtains only a partial picture lacking the Soviet view.

Kocho-Williams finds much of merit, however, in Neilson's discussion of 1933-1936, when choices still existed. He commends the analysis of Foreign Office thinking and points out the importance of Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese War

in contributing to British perceptions of Soviet strength and, conversely, the importance of the purges in creating a British assumption of Soviet military weakness. He particularly likes the drawing together of European and Asian events, since London and Moscow both had interests in Germany and Japan. "This adds fresh insight" whereas the book as a whole makes a "valuable contribution" with "a new perspective."

Bruce Strang is also attracted to Neilson's discussion of the mid-1930s, an era when Britain and the USSR might have joined together against Japan and Germany. He thinks the bore-hole device works well, especially in allowing integration of Far Eastern issues. Like Neilson, he sees the period of persuasion in Britain both as an era of a moralistic policy and as a rejection of the "old diplomacy" and of balance of power politics, a view which perhaps may raise a few eyebrows. Thereafter, the crucial question was whether Moscow would opt for stability or expansion, a leitmotif which runs through much of the book. He notes that Chamberlain and Stalin misread each other and that Chamberlain did not understand German or Japanese revisionism (to which one might add Italian revisionism as well)

Strang considers the research superb and the book exhaustive about disputes within the British civil service and cabinet, though more soon the former than the latter. He commends the examination of the mental maps of the British elite and says Neilson's "command of detail is masterful." An enthusiastic reviewer, he deems the book thoughtful and very clear about Britain's difficulty of choice. In his view, inclusion of Soviet literature would be desirable but not essential, since what the book addresses is British perceptions of the Soviet Union.

In sum, it seems likely that the roundtable participants would all agree that Neilson's book is mistitled and in fact addresses only one side of the equation. They all tend to focus on 1933-1936, when events might have turned out differently, and, in one way or another, applaud the integration of Far Eastern factors. Beyond that, their approaches are individual and their opinions varied.

Participants

Keith Neilson is professor of history at the Royal Military College of Canada. He is the author or co-author of five books, the most recent of which (with T.G. Otte) is *The Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854-1946* (New York and Abingdon, 2009). The focus of his work is British strategic foreign policy with an emphasis on Anglo-Russian/Soviet relations.

Sidney Aster is professor of British and International History at the University of Toronto, Mississauga. His latest publication is *Appeasement and All Souls: A Portrait with Documents, 1937-1939*. His current project is "Personality, Power, and Policy: The Life of Lord Salter, 1881-1975."

Robert Hanks received his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, at which he now teaches as well as at Wilfred Laurier University. He has published on the subject of Georges Clemenceau, whom he has examined in the context of Anglo-American relations. At present

he is focusing on the early twentieth century Franco-American relationship.

Alistair Kocho-Williams, who received his Ph.D. from the University of Manchester, is Lecturer in International History at the University of the West of England, Bristol. He has published on Russian and Soviet foreign policy, diplomacy, and the Communist International. His book, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900-1939*, is forthcoming, while he is now studying the Communist International and its agents in a comparative context.

Sally Marks holds the doctorate in international history from the University of London. She is the author of *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe, 1918-1933* (1976, 2003); *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (1981), which won the George Louis Beer and Phi Alpha Theta awards; *The Ebbing of International Ascendancy: An International History of the World, 1914-1945* (2002); and the forthcoming *Paul Hymans of Belgium* (2010) in the *Haus Makers of the Modern World* series. At present, she is revisiting Allied and American approaches to the German question, 1918-1921.

Bruce Strang is Dean of Arts and Professor of History at Brandon University in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada. He has published articles on British and Italian foreign policy as well as *On the Fiery March: Mussolini Prepares for War*. He is currently preparing a monograph on Italian foreign policy and reconstruction during the early Cold War.

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A study of Anglo-Soviet relations between the two world wars has never been fully written. To couple this within a more ambitious theoretical framework is the objective set by Keith Neilson. He has achieved both with remarkable success and originality. His methodology is to situate Anglo-Soviet relations against the backdrop of the 1919 Versailles settlement and within the larger framework of British and Soviet global interests. Closely related is his intention to assess the impact of the inter-war triumvirate of ideologies, communism, fascism and Nazism, but with a concentration on Bolshevism as the “bore hole” (p. 318) for the study of British “strategic foreign policy”. This he defines as a state’s “utilization of all the means – economic, financial, military, naval and traditional diplomatic – at its disposal to influence international relations” (p. 6). His theoretical agenda contends that existing conceptualizations, centred on appeasement, revisionism, and ‘declinism’, are inadequate because they rely too heavily on economic determinism. Thus with very few exceptions (e.g., p. 253), he avoids the word appeasement and prefers deterrence.

Neilson’s fundamental contention is that Britain’s foreign policy was structured by the systemic and structural legacies of the first world war. These included the collapse of four empires, the demise of the Euro-centred balance of power with the emergence of the USA and Japan, and the foundation of the League of Nations, albeit without the USA or the USSR. Equally important was the intellectual legacy of the war, including a rejection of secret diplomacy and the balance of power and a search for disarmament. Such an agenda requires an analysis of the mentalité of those responsible for, or influencing the making of British policy. This now included, beside the Foreign Office, various NGOs, a restructured military establishment and expanded intelligence services and key Whitehall and diplomatic corps individuals. With regard to Soviet foreign policy, he rejects the notion that Stalin was either a Bolshevik expansionist or a practitioner of *Realpolitik*. Neilson prefers the *Primat der Innenpolitik* approach that leads to a nuanced analysis of Soviet foreign policy as a “mixture of practical policy within the context of ideological presuppositions” (p. 39). In turn, as to whether ideology affected British policy towards Moscow, he suggests that here, too, each episode must be seen as a variation within a continuum.

From this springboard, Neilson’s opening chapter, “The Period of Persuasion”, analyses the years from 1919 to 1933. His contention that such brief treatment is sufficient for a period where the Soviet Union was “marginal” to British interests might, or might not, convince every reader (p. 42). One must agree, however, that by 1933 attempts to bolster the post-war settlements under the umbrella of liberal internationalism had failed. The following six chapters explore Anglo-Soviet relations from 1933 to 1939 and the two possible roles for the Soviets in British foreign policy – ally or threat? Soviet membership in the League of Nations in 1934 and its pursuit of non-aggression pacts suggested that Moscow might join

in resistance to the revisionist powers. What hindered closer Anglo-Soviet cooperation, however, were ideological differences, deepened by contrasting perceptions of Germany. Even more, Britain regarded the USSR “as a counterweight, not a roadblock to German power” (p. 272). By 1937, according to Neilson, the problems of deterrence had not been resolved nor did it exhibit any “intellectual coherence” (p. 330).

When Neville Chamberlain became prime minister in May 1937, he rejected alliance diplomacy in favour of bilateral negotiations with Germany, Italy and Japan, without reference to Moscow, to build a new international order. This policy was plainly evident during the Austrian and Czechoslovakian crises of 1938, but showed few results. In the following year, Chamberlain faced two choices, appeasement or alliance diplomacy; as did the USSR, isolation or an agreement with Germany. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in March forced the prime minister to begin consultations with the USSR which then turned into a wider search for an Anglo-French-Soviet triple alliance. Whether Chamberlain’s reservations regarding the USSR were derived solely from ideological antipathy is difficult to determine, however, he was intent on controlling foreign and military policy decisions and play for time. After four months of tortuous negotiations in Moscow, his government ended up agreeing to almost all of Soviet demands, but it was too late with the signature of the Nazi-Soviet treaty on 23 August. Neilson contends that failure in 1939 was due to the fact that “the mental and moral gap between the two states was too wide to be bridged” (p. 332).

The thrust of *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939*, that the inter-war period was an important transitional one, is argued in a densely documented and highly nuanced manner. It is thus clear that British and Soviet foreign policies were determined by ideology, a lack of shared goals, contending visions of how to deploy power, and variables such as chance and personality. Further a strong case is made in favour of abandoning a single over-riding theme, such as appeasement or ‘declinism’. In its place will come a more textured approach; further exploration of the notion of mentalité, including those of the revisionist powers, and the very complex legacies of the first world war. In its outcome, British foreign policy from 1919-1939 may have proven disappointing when contending ideologies became contending armies. In its wake, however, Neilson has given, what one can only still call ‘appeasement studies’, a new lease of life.

In *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939*, Keith Neilson sets an ambitious agenda. By focusing on the sub-topic or “bore-hole” of Anglo-Soviet relations, he hopes to illuminate the Britain’s role in the collapse of the post-Versailles international system. In so doing, he takes aim at the two dominant interpretative debates about British foreign policy in this period: the Appeasement/anti-Appeasement paradigm, which he rejects as overly moralistic and Manichean; and the school of declinology, which he feels is overly reliant on economic factors and hence overly-deterministic. Instead, by providing a detailed examination of the internal foreign policy debates in Whitehall, he hopes to show that British foreign policy was nuanced, and that options existed.

Neilson admits that Britain’s foreign policy mandarins uniformly disliked the Soviet Union, but argues that “there was no monolith of opinion about Soviet Russia ...” (41). British policy toward the USSR was never decided *a priori* on ideological grounds, but was debated and re-debated in an ongoing debate that reflected a complex matrix of domestic and international factors. “Soviet power had always to be considered” thus adding “to the complexity of British strategic foreign policy...” (202). Taking this approach, Neilson argues that the *possibility* of working with the USSR existed on those occasions when British and Soviet interests coincided. In other words, it was not inevitable that Anglo-Soviet relations would break down in the period between the Munich conference and the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Different choices could have led to different outcomes.

In many ways, Neilson’s study has the strengths and limitations of a conventional Anglocentric monograph. The footnotes and bibliography demonstrate wide reading, while the bulk of the argument rests on detective work in the relevant British archives. On a macro-level of the international system, his judgments about the inter-war period are generally sound and often persuasive, while within Whitehall, he demonstrates expertise with the personalities of the period as well the structures of the British bureaucratic policy-making apparatus. The Foreign Office, he notes, had been in decline in Whitehall since 1914. The “old diplomacy” of balance of power politics had been discredited by the outbreak of the First World War, while the new paradigms of the League of Nations and collective security were poorly defined. On the inter-departmental level, the FO had lost power to the chiefs of armed forces, the Treasury, and the Prime Minister’s Office. Within the FO itself, Soviet experts were shunted aside. The most prestigious unit in the FO was the Central Department, which focused on Germany and Central Europe, beside which the Northern Department, which covered the Soviet Union, was decidedly the second eleven.

According to Neilson, British foreign can be divided into several key phases defined by Britain’s Prime Ministers. After the bitter inauguration of Anglo-Soviet relations in the 1920s, Ramsay Macdonald (1929-35) sought to establish a working relationship with the USSR within the general context of a disarmament policy in a League of Nations framework. He thus established formal diplomatic relations with the USSR, severed in 1927, and made tentative steps toward a trade agreement, but was unable to make much headway against the legacy of Tsarist war debts to Britain; the distrust caused by Comintern propaganda in

the British empire; and the Metro-Vickers affair. Macdonald's successor, Stanley Baldwin (1935-37), took less interest in foreign relations but had a more hostile attitude toward not just the USSR and the Franco-Soviet Pact, but also the League of Nations and the United States. Baldwin's foreign ministers, Sir Samuel Hoare and Anthony Eden, took an even more hostile view toward the USSR, with Hoare warning the Soviet ambassador that: "it would be extremely difficult to persuade the Conservatives in this country to adopt a pro-Russia policy if the Soviet government failed to eliminate the sources of trouble that had often poisoned our relations in the past." (146) Thus, just as the USSR adopted a policy of collective security in the mid-1930s, Baldwin and Hoare turned their backs on both collective security and the USSR, seeking to secure British interests through bi-lateral security arrangements, including most famously the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the projected Hoare-Laval Pact in response to Italian aggression against Ethiopia.

Neilson's emphasis on the Japanese threat during the later Macdonald and early Baldwin years will surely provoke debate amongst specialists of the period. As he correctly argues, the post-Versailles order witnessed the rise of both Japan and the United States as world powers. British foreign policy decision makers had to cope with this reality. A significant faction in Whitehall pined for restitution of the Anglo-Japanese alliance of the good old days prior to the Washington Naval Conference, ultimately without success. Yet many in Whitehall were alarmed by Japanese aggression against China and the threat that this posed to British interests in eastern Asia. In contrast to the school of officials (such as Lord Vansittart) and historians (such as D.C. Watt) who have argued that Nazi Germany was Britain's most dangerous threat in 1934, Neilson contends that the primary perceived threat at that point was actually Japan, with Germany second. Lord Hankey's famous memorandum declaring Germany to be the "ultimate potential enemy" was, according to Neilson, a compromise formula that did not affect Britain's actual defense priorities (98-99). From this, he goes on to argue that Britain perceived a balance of power between the USSR and Japan. Given the possibility of a Russo-Japanese war, the Far Eastern Department of the FO preferred a Japanese victory, fearing that Soviet victory would push Japan into "desperate anarchistic communism." However, the Central and Northern departments disagreed, on the grounds that a strong Soviet presence in East Asia might protect British interests and that the USSR's defeat in Asia would weaken its ability to counter balance Germany in Europe. In other words, Foreign Office attitudes toward the USSR in matters pertaining to China and Japan were strongly influenced not by ideological distaste for communism, but by calculations of traditional Realpolitik. (100-01; see also 310-11).

Whitehall's overall view of the USSR during the Baldwin years was thus one of uncertainty, blending together a mixture of hostility in Europe and pragmatism in east Asia. The accession of Neville Chamberlain government (1937-40) inaugurated a new period of decisiveness in British foreign policy. Throughout the 1930s, Chamberlain had been hostile toward both the USSR and the United States. He was further opposed to the division of Europe into hostile alliance blocks as had been the case before 1914. He was thus suspicious of France's eastern alliance system and especially the Franco-Soviet Pact, association with which would restrict Britain's diplomatic freedom and might drag it into an unwanted war in eastern Europe. In conjunction with permanent secretary of the Treasury and the head of the civil service from 1919-39, Sir Warren Fisher, Chamberlain's

preferred solution to Britain's security problems was rapprochement with Japan. This view was echoed in the War Office, but the advocates of an Anglo-Japanese alliance were thwarted by hostilities between Japan and China, and the FO's consistent warnings that such a pact would have a deleterious impact on Anglo-American and Anglo-Soviet relations. Lacking faith in French reliability, Soviet intentions and the capabilities of the purge-weakened Red Army, Chamberlain could not find a European partner who he could trust, and thus chose to reach agreement with Hitler over Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938. Neilson nicely summarizes the subsequent historical and historiographical controversy by noting that: "the Munich crisis produced a vicious circle of contingency. The Soviets claimed that they would come in *if* the French did; the French claimed that they would come in *if* the British did; and the British claimed that they would have aided the Czechs *if* the Soviets and the French had been willing to save and capable of saving Prague." (252)

After Munich failed, Chamberlain agreed to alliance negotiations with the Soviet Union in the summer of 1939, but these were hindered by: by Chamberlain's unwillingness to surrender British diplomatic freedom; by Britain's inability (or unwillingness) to coerce Poland and Romania to agree to Soviet troops movements on their soil; by British concerns that the Red Army had been weakened by the purges; and by what the British considered to be excessive Soviet demands. Nevertheless, Chamberlain hoped to deter Hitler from a general war by guaranteeing Polish and Romanian security and by enhancing British defenses. His overall attitude resembled that of an accountant: as he explained to his sister, "You don't need offensive forces sufficient to win a smashing victory. What you want are forces sufficiently strong to make it impossible for the other side to win except at such a cost as to make it not worthwhile." (316) Ultimately, Neilson notes, Chamberlain choice between Hitler and Stalin was like that of Buridan's ass, "immobilized between two equally, here, unappealing choices." (317) The more ruthless Hitler and Stalin were not so restrained, and found that they could do business better with each other, at least in the short run, than with London.

In this reviewer's opinion, this is a sound judgment on a controversial chapter in British foreign policy. However, with the exception of Neilson's emphasis on the Japanese threat in the mid-1930s, neither this conclusion nor his overall argument appears to be as new or paradigm-shifting as he initially announced. For all of its technical skill and care, his overall approach is at times disappointing because the parameters of his argument, or as he prefers, "bore-hole" are too narrow. Much of his analysis focuses on internal debates within the Foreign Office, but it is often not clear to what extent these debates influenced the views and decisions made at the key levels. For example, Neilson gives considerable emphasis to the views of the head of the Northern Department, Laurence Collier, who consistently adopted a pragmatic non-ideological attitude toward British foreign relations toward the USSR. But to what extent did Collier matter outside of the FO's walls? In particular, his voice seems to have been marginalized during the crucial Chamberlain years. This problem is even more acute for various FO underlings. We are thus introduced to the views of such luminaries as S. G. Harcourt Smith (113, 151), Frank Ashton-Gwatkin (148, 155), and Avery Gascoigne (151), without being told who they were, what offices they held, or whether anyone cared what they thought. At times, it appears that Neilson's immersion in the FO has lost sight of the forest for the trees, and even the forest for the shrubbery.

All of which raises larger questions. Were some of the FO's anti-Soviet memos at times simply bureaucratic rationalizations of deeper atavistic attitudes toward the USSR? Did its official internal memos matter more than the anti-communist grumblings of backbench Conservative MPs in the foyers of the House of Commons or in London's clubland? Did they matter as much as the editorials in the leading newspapers? And what impact did the Soviet's Popular Front strategy have on British trade unions and the Labour Party? So while it is clear that British foreign policy was more complex and nuanced than was once thought by doctrinaire proponents of the anti-appeasement school, it is not clear what impact these deliberations had on the larger currents of British life or on the conduct of the prejudiced Neville Chamberlain. At the end of the day, it is hard to shake the traditional view that Chamberlain was the wrong man for the job and that his judgments as a statesman were both egotistical and superficial.

It is of course true that Chamberlain's hands were tied by Britain's reduced economic circumstances, but Neilson's dismissal of the school of declinology is even more unconvincing than his critique of the Appeasement/Anti-Appeasement model. Reading through his pages, one will find no discussion of the impact of the Great Depression on British domestic politics, the economy, defense spending, troop levels, available aircraft, or naval capabilities. Given these significant lacunae, Neilson's position in the debate on Britain's economic decline is an assertion rather than an evidence-based argument. No amount of careful analysis of Britain's internal foreign policy debates can change the fact that Britain's real military and economic capabilities had declined, and that its actual ability to move beyond academic analysis and discussion was limited. It is true that Britain had much prestige – perhaps more than it deserved – but again and again, it seems that its foreign policy deliberations were paralyzed by indecisiveness and ineffectiveness, or determined in reaction to moves made by the revisionist powers.

Did Britain actually have the ability to impress its allies and enemies? We are rightly informed on numerous occasions that Stalin's purges of the Red Army undermined the faith of British foreign policy makers in Soviet military effectiveness. But what were the Soviet perceptions of British military capabilities? Did Britain have the military credibility to be alliance-worthy in Soviet eyes? Was not Soviet truculence during the crucial negotiations in the late summer of 1939 inspired in part by Stalin's awareness that Britain lacked significant abilities?¹ Throughout the entire work, Neilson has systematically chosen not to

¹ The notion of Perfidious Albion was clearly well-established in the Kremlin. According to Richard Overy, Soviet military negotiators in August 1939 were stunned to learn that Britain could only field 16 divisions, which in fact was an exaggeration. When Stalin learned the truth – that Britain could only field two divisions – he shook his head in disbelief. Neilson does not discuss these conversations, but it is clear that Britain was incapable of a rapid, effective continental commitment. It was not unreasonable for the Anglophobic Stalin to conclude that Britain intended to fight to the last Frenchman or Russian. If one substitutes Chamberlain for Churchill, it is instructive to recall Stalin's complaints about the British at the end of the Second World War, when he remarked to Milovan Djilas: "Perhaps you think that just because we are the Allies of the English that we have forgotten who they are and who Churchill is. They find nothing sweeter than to trick their allies. During the First World War they constantly tricked the Russians and the French."

consult Soviet archives, published Soviet diplomatic documents or even to refer actively to secondary studies of Soviet foreign policy. Nor has he consulted diplomatic sources from other countries that might shed light on Anglo-Soviet mutual perceptions and conversations. Rather than setting a new paradigm for understanding British foreign policy, the net result is less a study of Anglo-Soviet relations than a study of British perceptions of the Soviet Union, or even at times, of what one British clerk said to another British clerk. This is not enough. To really try to understand the breakdown of the post-Versailles international system, one must leave the insular confines of the British archives and launch a research expedition onto the European mainland.

See: Richard Overy, *Russia's War. A History of the Soviet War Effort, 1941-45* (New York; Penguin Books, 1997), 46; Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York; Harcourt, Brace & World, [1962]), 73.

Keith Neilson's study of British foreign policy and how the Soviets fitted into it is a contribution to the debate on interwar British foreign policy. On one level this is a book about the relationship between Britain and the Soviets in the period. On another, far more original tack, it seeks to explain the effect of the Soviets on the formulation British policy, using the case-study of Anglo-Soviet relations to provide a 'core-sample' for the analysis (2).

While Neilson has given the timeframe of the book as 1919-1939, this is really a book about the 1930s. Claiming that the relationship between London and Moscow was of little significance to the British during the 1920s, a disproportionately small amount of space is given over to the decade (24). The book gives little treatment to the 'period of persuasion' between the Russian Revolution and the rise of Nazi Germany. Given the Anglo-Soviet relationship during the 1920s and the tensions that emerged with the Curzon Ultimatum, Zinoviev Letter, General Strike and Arcos Raid, this seems surprising, not least given the volume of historical scholarship that has been given over to Anglo-Soviet relations in the decade.¹ Some of these areas are barely mentioned, others are passed over or dismissed as 'raucous outbursts' (1). This somewhat undermines the argument that British foreign policy, and the way in which the Soviets impacted on it, was forged through years of dialogue.

The problem here seems to stem from Neilson's treatment of the Versailles settlement in the 1920s. What is really meant is that the 1920s formed a period of persuasion for Britain with respect to attempting to have powers adhere to the terms of the treaty, rather than a period of persuasion towards cordial relations between Britain and the Soviet Union. This is a little misleading with respect to Anglo-Soviet relations in the 1920s, and indeed the 1930s, when the Soviets directed much of their efforts in diplomacy towards persuading Britain, and other powers, to deal with them and offer them a full and stable diplomatic relationship.² What we are left with then, is only a part of the picture, with the significance the Soviets attached to the relationship with Britain in the 1920s undiscussed, with only the viewpoint that the relationship at this stage was of little importance and fairly limited (1).

¹ See Gabriel Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce: Anglo-Soviet Relations 1924-1927* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Stephanie Salzmann, *Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union: Rapallo and after, 1922-1934* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2003).

² See for example Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*; Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*; Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 1984; Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Aleksandr Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations 1922-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Silvio Pons, *Stalin and the Inevitable War* (London: Routledge, 2002); Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900-1939* (forthcoming).

The chapters dealing with the period after 1933 are much more detailed. Particularly interesting is the discussion of the 1933-1936 period, when there were still alternatives to appeasement. The coverage of the Chamberlain years is perhaps less astounding, but this has received greater attention from other historians. While the full range of opinions of the Soviet Union are not necessarily considered, an incisive account of the intricate nature of the Foreign Office and the men involved in foreign policy formulation is covered in meticulous detail, allowing for a greater understanding of how Britain's foreign policy decisions were made during the crucial years before the Second World War.

One of the strengths of the analysis of the 1930s is Neilson's drawing together of both European and Asian events. Noting that both Britain and the Soviet Union had interests in both spheres, new light is shed on the formulation of policy based on a range of concerns. This adds fresh insight into a debate that is largely, although not exclusively, concerned with the formulation of policy as a product of European concerns in the period.³ In this context the impact of Soviet involvement in both the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese War take on great significance for British foreign policy, displaying British perceptions of Soviet strength. So too, we gain an insight into British perceptions of Soviet military weakness as a result of the purges, and the discussions between the British and the Soviets in the spring and summer of 1939. In an era in which the Soviets made efforts to draw Britain into a system of collective security, this is revealing and adds layers to the debate on why the Soviets were unable to draw Britain into an alliance in the decade before the Second World War.

The research in British archives is impressive, and detailed. The archival work does, however, lack a Soviet element that leads the source base to look a little one-sided for a book that is supposed to be about Anglo-Soviet relations. This rather leads to much being ascribed to Soviet foreign policy, but without a developed perspective from the Soviet side of things. This leaves much that would be of interest uncovered, (Haslam 1992) although it is understandable given that this is a book about British foreign policy rather than Soviet. Even so, we gain nothing more than a picture of the impact of the Soviet Union on British policy, with little information as to the extent that the Soviets may have been actively manipulating the British.

On balance the book is a valuable contribution to the history of interwar foreign policy. While it does have some weaknesses, not least through seeking to cover a great deal of ground while really focussing on the 1930s, Neilson has produced a detailed and interesting account of the British Foreign Office's formulation of policy while assessing the impact on it of the Soviet Union and the role of the ideology. It goes beyond accounts preoccupied with Munich, 'guilty men', and the inevitability of appeasement, adding a new perspective on a period about which much has been written.

³ Notable here is Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the threat from the East, 1933-41: Moscow, Tokyo, and the prelude to the Pacific War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1992).

Britain's relations with the Soviet Union formed a vital backdrop to the troubled diplomacy of the 1920s and 1930s and an important element of the Cold War. Unfortunately, the heightened rhetoric of the Cold War has bedeviled historical study of the question, as dispassionate history has all too often given way to one-sided polemics seeking either to condemn Britain's elites or to exculpate them. Throw in the contentious issue of appeasement, with its commonly drawn caricatures of guilty men cravenly allowing Hitler to wage an unnecessary war, and the field is littered with books that represent less than the best that the historical profession has to offer.

Keith Neilson's *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order* is a welcome change to this dynamic. This extensively researched, thoughtful, and persuasive monograph adds much needed depth to our understanding of British imperial strategic policy in the 1920s and 1930s. It offers a useful corrective to recent polemics that have simplistically condemned Britain's elite for its anti-Communism – arguing that this ideological class interest destroyed the last chance for peace. Neilson's more nuanced work suggests that anti-Communism was part of the intellectual make up of Britain's foreign policy makers, but that they had a more reasoned and flexible approach to policy than harsh critics would allow. But Neilson aims toward a larger purpose. He examines how Russia affected British foreign policy more generally. As Russia found itself a potential victim and enemy of both Japan and Germany, Russian and British interests could align. At the same time, however, the Soviet Union had potentially great revisionist aims of its own. Would it seek stability or would it seek expansion? This theme runs as a leitmotif through Neilson's monograph. This expanded aim allows Neilson to reach some broader conclusions. In his view, Wilsonian internationalism and collective security through the League of Nations proved poor tools for stabilizing Europe and the world after the Great War. After their evident failure and the dramatic rise of Japanese, German, and later Italian revisionism, British Foreign Office officials and Cabinet members turned to a deterrent model, albeit one plagued with difficulties and potential contradictions. This model too ultimately proved inadequate to keep the peace. In the end, Neilson seeks to steer a middle course between structuralist explanations of decline and imperial weakness, on one hand, and reliance on personalities and ideologies as the sole motivator of action on the other. This more subtle approach divides British leaders not into groups of craven appeasers and heroic anti-appeasers, but rather into those who thought it possible to work with Russia and those who thought it wiser not to do so. The result is a series of portraits of individuals and debates about policy reflecting the difficult, often intractable sets of problems confronting British decision-makers.

The introduction lays a solid foundation for the work. It clearly delineates the historiography and Neilson's own methodology. He uses an extended metaphor, the concept of drilling a core sample of British strategic foreign policy. This essay allows Neilson to examine multiple aspects of Britain's imperial defence without undertaking the Herculean task of examining in minute detail the worldwide scope of Britain's commitments and foreign policy. Ultimately, the success of the book will rest on readers'

acceptance of this approach. Given that it allows Neilson to integrate both European and Far Eastern questions into his analysis, it seems an eminently reasonable choice, allowing a deep discussion of one aspect of Britain's policy, but incorporating a much broader view, and assessing British policy toward Germany and Japan as well as the Soviet Union.

Neilson's largely chronological chapters serve well to trace the evolution of British strategic foreign policy. In the 1920s and the early years of the 1930s, Britain relied primarily on soft power, seeking to exercise its moral authority through the League of Nations. British strategic policy emphasized disarmament, collective security through the League of Nations, and liberal visions of international peace and a comity of nations. British leaders of all political persuasions tended to reject the old alliance diplomacy and balance of power politics, generally accepting the widely held view that policy rooted in those discredited notions had plunged Europe into a terrible war and had dragged an unwilling Britain into the fray. Russia became peripheral in this new thinking; Britain's relations with the Soviet revolutionaries veered between sporadic intervention, fractious rhetoric, and diplomatic recognition and trade depending largely on the political stripe of the party in power in Westminster.

In the 1930s, cracks appeared in the façade of Britain's moralistic foreign policy, and British political leaders and officials faced a series of tough choices. Japanese, and after January 1933, German revisionism threatened to overthrow the various agreements of the Paris Peace Conference and collective security as defined in the League Covenant. Britain's imperial defence forces, weakened by years of neglect and undermined by an economy in relative decline against its major competitors, found themselves stretched beyond the breaking point. The twin threats sparked the creation of the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee to address British military deficiencies, but financial exigencies and political deal-making meant that the deterrent power of Britain's forces would remain weak for years. Accordingly, Neilson characterizes the period from 1933 to mid-1937 as years of deterrence, but he suggests that experimentation, and perhaps even vacillation ruled Britain's elite. What role would the Soviet Union play? Would it guarantee the peace? Would it seek to exploit European tension for its own ends? Would it abandon its rhetoric (and occasionally practical steps) seeking to subvert the empire? Should Britain base its policy on alliance with France and the Soviet Union or seek accommodation with the various revisionist powers? Although some officials and politicians advocated a new form of alliance diplomacy, the Cabinet largely rejected too close a political association with Soviet Russia. It preferred to seek political arrangements with the revisionist states, seeking to reduce the number of potential enemies rather than to divide Europe into hostile blocs, recognizing that it could not pursue both alliances and accommodation with the dictators; the two choices were very much mutually exclusive.

With the accession of Neville Chamberlain to the Prime Minister's Office, Neilson argues that the experimentation largely ended, as the vain, conceited, and domineering Chamberlain imposed his will on foreign policy. He would seek to conciliate the dictators, making approaches to Hitler and Mussolini. He aimed to do so with Japan, but found himself blocked by Japan's relentless assault on China. He largely cast aside the Soviet Union, aided in no small part by Stalin's purges that undermined Soviet military

effectiveness and western observers' confidence in Soviet power. In the Czechoslovak crisis, Hitler showed his disdain for British sensibilities, threatening war to acquire new territory. Mussolini too showed little genuine desire for British friendship, placing victory for the Nationalists in Spain above ratification of the Easter Accords. In Neilson's view, Chamberlain's policy "paid few dividends." (p. 253) After Munich, a widespread reappraisal of policy provided few easy answers. Attempts to conciliate the German and Italian dictators continued, but to little avail, and relations with Japan remained blocked. Viscount Halifax, Chamberlain's chosen Foreign Secretary, began to assert more independence, calling for improved relations with the Soviet Union, however difficult the task.

Chamberlain seemed sanguine, even sometimes ebullient about the prospects for peace, but the German occupation of the rump of Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March 1939 shattered his illusions. Still, the Prime Minister hesitated to establish too close an association with Russia, about which he expressed "his profound distrust." (p. 278) Chamberlain, most of the Cabinet, and much of the Foreign Office found the Soviets' proposal for a tight military alliance problematic, as it carried the risk of precipitating war. Nevertheless, when it became clear that the alliance was the only way to secure Soviet support in the event of war, the vast majority of the Cabinet opted to pursue an alliance. In the end, of course, the alliance negotiations failed. Neilson rejects the unsophisticated conclusion that British anti-Communism killed the prospect of an alliance. In his view, British leaders maintained their moral concepts of liberal internationalism that made it difficult to sanction unwanted Soviet guarantees to Eastern European states and that would leave the decision for peace or war in the hands of Stalin. Most British officials and politicians rejected the Soviet definition of indirect aggression that would potentially allow the Soviets to threaten the independence of the very Eastern European states that Britain had pledged to support. He pointedly asks whether or not the Soviets would have lived up to their commitments. The answer, of course, is impossible to determine. For Neilson, the blame for the failure of the alliance negotiations needs to be shared equally by multiple parties, however impotent and unsuccessful Neville Chamberlain's vision of strategic foreign policy may have proved.

Neilson's conclusions are solid, responsible, and properly founded on the evidence. He calls for historians to root their analysis in the mental maps of the 1920s and 1930s, eschewing the passionate but often inaccurate rhetoric of the Cold War. He carefully ascribes an ideological worldview to Stalin, but it is not the simplified view of anti-Communism found in many screeds. For Neilson, communism conditioned Stalin's reflexive distrust of western capitalism, but it suggested that he would be able to deal with any capitalist state, as Marxist doctrine held that capitalists would inevitably fall out over the spoils. Accordingly, Stalin had options and flexibility within a communist ideological framework that saw Britain, Germany, and Japan as inherently hostile to the revolution. Neilson's conclusion that British power, whether soft or hard, was insufficient to achieve its aims is similarly sound. Stalin's penchant for interpreting British attempts at appeasement as deceitful means to channel German aggression eastward highlights the difficulty of achieving any durable agreement between these highly different systems of government. Ultimately, Neilson rejects purely structural explanations entrenched in Britain's decline and, at the same time, the reductionism inherent in the guilty man thesis. For Neilson, both

Chamberlain and Stalin misread the other, and both misread their mutual power relationships. Chamberlain's views of strategic foreign policy proved impractical, and his dogged pursuit of appeasement showed little genuine understanding of Japanese and German revisionism. Chamberlain's and Stalin's errors, decades of mutual distrust, and the structural constraints under which political leaders labored meant that an Anglo-French-Soviet agreement was impossible to realize.

Clearly, this monograph is an important and thoughtful book. Neilson's research is superb. He has encyclopedic knowledge of British archives, collections of personal papers, and the secondary literature. The list of secondary sources alone runs thirty pages, indicating the vast mound of material on British policy in the 1920s and 1930s. Neilson seems to have mastered it all.

Neilson has situated his argument carefully in the broader historiography, and he displays deep knowledge of the personnel of the Foreign Office, Cabinet, and the Treasury and their views. His comprehensive research enables him to integrate complex material into a strong narrative, and he covers British foreign policy at a deep level, explaining the extensive disputes and discussions within the civil service and the Cabinet about how to try to stabilize Europe and the Far East. Neilson provides compelling characterizations of these debates. Neville Chamberlain, for example, the politically powerful Chancellor of the Exchequer in the National Government, hoped for improved relations with Japan, even at the risk of alienating the Soviet Union and the United States, two powers with potentially important roles to play in resisting aggression. Chamberlain's views, and those of his Permanent Undersecretary, Sir Warren Fisher, provoked frequent conflict between the Treasury Department and the Foreign Office; Chamberlain and Treasury officials frequently annoyed their Foreign Office counterparts who thought approaches to Japan both naïve and dangerous, as they could alienate the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. Another flashpoint occurred between Laurence Collier, the Head of the Northern Department through much of the 1930s, and Sir Orme Sargent, the Assistant Undersecretary of State. In brief, Collier thought, on balance correctly, that good relations with the Soviet Union were both possible and vitally necessary, in spite of the ideological differences of the two countries' leaders. For his part, Sargent categorically rejected any close association with the Soviet Union, and he deeply resented the Franco-Soviet Pact that threatened to draw Britain into Eastern European commitments. Neilson presents these conflicting views clearly and compellingly, ably demonstrating the interrelationship of Britain's imperial commitments.

Neilson's explanation of the mental maps or *mentalités* of Britain's elite is a useful addition to the debate, and it provides a strong counterpoint to those who simplistically ascribe British policy to knee-jerk anti-Communism. The framework of liberal internationalism, which rejected war as a conventional tool of foreign policy, is vitally important for understanding appeasement and Britain's relations with the Soviet Union and Germany. Chamberlain did distrust the Soviet Union, but his rejection of an alliance had as much or more to do with the fear that the alliance would precipitate a war as it did with anti-Communism.

Neilson makes the most detailed argument to date about debates within the Cabinet and Whitehall about British strategic policy and its relations with the Soviet Union. His command of detail is masterful. It is doubly impressive that he integrates Britain's world commitments into a readable narrative and into a productive analytical framework. The attention paid to the extensive debate within Britain's foreign policy elite suggests that options were available in the 1930s, but few of those options were easy or particularly palatable. Association with the Soviet Union carried risks. It would alienate Germany, Italy, and Japan, while it might not garner a robust Soviet commitment to Western European defence. Getting on good terms with the dictators could prevent a horrible war, but the concomitant rejection of Soviet overtures risked a Soviet turn to Germany and Japan, as ultimately happened in the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact and the 1941 Soviet-Japanese non-aggression agreement. Neilson captures the difficulty of these choices exceptionally well, and he skillfully explains the resulting hesitancy for most British officials and politicians. He also clearly delineates Chamberlain's changed approach after mid-1937. His explanation of the strategic choices facing Great Britain is very strong, establishing a firm basis for his ultimate conclusions.

In spite of these real strengths, Neilson could have made an excellent book even better. It is certainly not unreasonable to base a book on British foreign policy primarily on British sources. Integrating the available Soviet literature, however, would have allowed Neilson to incorporate the other, Soviet, side of the hill to a greater degree. Granted, such sources are not essential, as Neilson needs to explain *British perceptions of the Soviet Union* rather than Soviet policy itself, but deeper context here would have given this book an even greater weight in its assessment of the historiography. Neilson reaches balanced and reasonable conclusions about the nature of Soviet policy, but these would have carried even greater weight had he incorporated Soviet literature more fully into the body of his analysis.

On a deeper plane, Neilson roots his analysis in the papers of the Foreign Office, supplemented heavily with personal papers and diaries. Still, his analysis tilts heavily towards internal debates within the civil service, and he spends relatively less time dealing with the civil servants' political masters in the Cabinet. Politicians, of course, often drift in the shifting winds of public opinion. It would be unfair to suggest that Neilson ignores this aspect of British decision-making, but it does play a lesser role in his monograph than the extensive assessment of debates with the Foreign Office. Extending the analysis to include a broader cross section of the public would have been a difficult task, but one that would have been worth making.

These caveats do not undermine the foundations of Neilson's work. This excellent monograph represents an important and impressive work of scholarship by a senior historian in the field. As such, I am certain that it will exasperate some warriors in the historiographical debates on both appeasement and the Cold War, but I also expect that *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order* will become a standard work on the subject for years to come.

Author's Response by Keith Neilson

Let me begin by thanking both the Roundtable Editors for choosing my book as a topic for discussion and the reviewers for their thoughtful remarks and careful reading of my book.

There are two broad areas to which all the reviewers, to a greater or lesser extent, have referred: the first of these is the fact that I have written the book from the British standpoint and not utilized Russian-language material to provide an international perspective; the second is that I have devoted too little space to the period before 1933. Before turning to a consideration of each review individually, I will deal with these commonalities in reverse order.

The structure of this book was determined by what points I wanted to make. If the book were solely about Anglo-Soviet relations, it would have been logical to cover the period from 1917 to 1941. However, as the title suggests, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order* is concerned with why the international order created in the period from 1919 to 1923 failed to prevent a second world war. It was clear to me that the interwar period divided neatly into two time periods and that these, from the British perspective, were quite different in nature. In the period from 1919 to 1933 there were no regimes opposed to the Versailles settlement that had sufficient hard power to threaten the terms reached in Paris – thus, I termed it the ‘period of persuasion’ and gave it much briefer treatment than the ‘period of deterrence’ from 1933 to 1939, a time when physical force was the determinant of international relations. In some ways, then, the first chapter serves as a second introduction, one that provides the setting for the main portion of the book.

This, of course, is not to say that the period from 1917 to 1933 is not a significant subject in and of itself. Zara Steiner’s first volume has made this point very clear, and I share her conclusions. Indeed, I intend to write a book dealing with the creation of the Versailles order, a volume that will deal with the period from 1917 to 1925 in the depth that it deserves. Further on this subject, I think that Alastair Kocho-Williams’ makes an excellent point when he notes my statement that the 1920s ‘formed a period of persuasion with respect to attempting to have powers adhere to the terms of the treaty [of Versailles], rather than a period of persuasion towards cordial relations between Britain and the Soviet Union’. I perhaps should have made this clearer in the book, as I agree with it. However, I make no apologies for not giving Anglo-Soviet relations in this period greater space, if only, to turn a second remark of Kocho-Williams’ against him, because of ‘the volume of historical scholarship that has been given over to Anglo-soviet relations in the decade’. I felt it more useful merely to link up this literature and put it in the perspective of my own aims than to attempt to deal with it in depth at the expense of devoting lesser space to analyzing the later period.

To turn to the second general concern, my choice of looking at the subject from an Anglocentric perspective reflects both my own area of expertise and a belief that Britain was the lynchpin of the new order. I agree that I could have integrated Russian-language literature into my account. This would have allowed me to make some remarks about that literature itself and provided deeper insights into Soviet policy. However, as Bruce Strang perspicaciously notes, what I attempted to do was 'to explain *British perceptions of the Soviet Union* rather than Soviet policy itself'. Thus, I leave it to sharper pens than mine to delve into the subterranean depths of Stalinist foreign policy.

These general matters aside, let us consider each of the four reviewers' contributions in turn. I am gratified that Sydney Aster, a well-known authority on the issues of appeasement and the origins of the Second World War, finds so much to agree with in the book. In particular, I was heartened by his judgment that my rejection of a 'single-over-riding theme, such as appeasement or "declinism"' to explain British policy is a useful approach that will give a 'new lease of life' to what he rightly calls 'appeasement studies'. I had hoped to inject, in Aster's words, 'a more textured approach' to the analysis of British strategic foreign policy in this period, and am much gratified that he feels that this has been achieved.

Bruce Strang, whose work on Anglo-Italian relations in the inter-war period is exemplary, has written a review that would be hard to better from an author's perspective. I doubt that I could have written as succinct a summary of the main points of the book as Strang has done and am very happy with his warm praise. I am particularly pleased that he emphasizes the fact that I have used Anglo-Soviet relations as a device (what I called a 'bore-hole') to provide a narrative spine for my examination of British policy generally, since that method is an essential component of my book. I am not surprised that he finds my emphasis on the need to understand the ideological and personal factors in British policy agreeable, since his own work puts a similar emphasis on the difficulties involved for London in coming to terms with Italian fascism. I am also happy that he shares with Professor Aster a belief that my insistence that neither appeasement nor declinism is an adequate explanation for understanding British policy. His mild criticism that I might have taken my analysis further by giving more weight to the debates of politicians and the views of a 'broader cross section of the public' and their impact on policy is perfectly valid, and I can only plead that lack of space prevented my doing so.

Alastair Kocho-Williams, whose recent work on the formation of Soviet foreign and the Narkomindel adds considerably to our understanding of that arcane world, has been quite gentle in chiding me about my lack of Russian-language sources, and I thank him for his restraint. The review is generally favourable and I would only like to note that it was heartening to see that he approves of my attempt to link the European and Asian aspects of British policy. I would hope that he himself might amplify his remark concerning the possibility that 'the Soviets might have been actively manipulating the British'. I saw no evidence of this in the British archives, but that might merely mean that it was done so skillfully as to avoid detection. It is an interesting point, worthy of study.

The least favourable review is that of Robert Hanks. As would be expected of someone whose own expertise lies in Anglo-French relations in the early 1920s, Hanks is particularly critical of my relative neglect of that period. I have dealt with that point above. However, his major criticisms are much more profound. Hanks, in sharp contrast to the other reviewers, feels that my dismissal of the appeasement/anti-appeasement and the 'declinology school' is 'unconvincing'. I have made arguments in the book as to why I think that these two models are merely labels rather than explanations. I will deal with his belief about appeasement below, but let me rebut one of his remarks, i.e. that, due to the Great Depression nothing 'can change the fact that Britain's real military and economic capabilities had declined, and that its actual ability to move beyond academic analysis and discussion was limited.' Of course the Great Depression affected Britain's abilities and capabilities; however, it also affected those of all the other Powers. Britain, France and the USA were similarly mired in the Depression, Italy's economy was weak to begin with and Germany's emergence from the collapse of 1929 was widely believed to be unsustainable (British plans to fight against Germany were based on this belief). Indeed, by 1937 the British economy was emerging from the Depression faster than any of Western democracies. And to assert, as Hanks does, that Britain did not have the military wherewithal to affect events because of 'decline' is wrong and misunderstands the nature of the basis of Britain's traditional ability to affect events internationally. Throughout the nineteenth century, when the Pax Britannica was thought to exist, Britain never possessed an army capable of determining events on the Continent. Britain's strength resided in its ability to tap the world's resources and the Royal Navy. The latter had a margin of superiority over the German navy in 1939 far surpassing what it had in 1914.

What had changed to the detriment of Britain's ability to affect events was not decline, then, but the international situation. There was no balance of power in Europe (and even to talk about such matters was considered to be old-fashioned and warmongering in the post-Versailles era when disarmament and collective action were thought the essence of the new international order) and so Britain could not constrain potential aggressors with the diplomatic tools of the nineteenth century. Similarly, the emergence of a hostile Power (Japan), outside the European states system, meant that Britain had to find a means to deal with both an Asian and a European threat to the status quo. This also would have been beyond Britain's abilities in 1914; however, at that juncture Japan was an ally and the issue did not emerge. British power in the 1930s had not so much declined relative to that of other Powers or to its position prior to 1914 as British power faced many more challenges (in different regions) than before and was constrained by changed intellectual currents from dealing with these challenges by means of alliances and the balance of power.

As to the appeasement/anti appeasement model, Hanks' remarks reflect our sharply different philosophical approaches to the study of international relations. He thinks that I spend too much time discussing the views and opinions of those in the Foreign Office, that I am merely writing about, in the old saw, what one clerk said to another. I do not believe this to be the case, since it is my contention that the politicians (whose views I do cite at length, when they had views on foreign policy, which was not often) generally tended to debate the arguments generated in the Foreign Office by the 'clerks' whose business it was to provide their political masters with them. The views of the backwoodsmen in the House

and newspapers provided only the political context in which the politicians discussed matters, and other people have written at length about this impact. None of the people involved fall neatly into 'appeaser' or 'anti-appeaser' categories. Instead, there is a spectrum of opinion that requires nuanced analysis.

It is my belief that 'objective realities' of the sort that, according to Hanks, seems to explain things in a more direct and straightforward fashion, is merely the first level of historical analysis and that, for a true understanding of matters, perceptions and mentalités must be studied and understood. Indeed, the truth of my assertion is illustrated very aptly by the quotation that Hanks employs. Stalin's remark to Djilas underlines how the Soviet leader's policies were shaped by his perception of the perfidious nature of the English and English policy in the Russian past. Who are we, as historians, to disagree with the 'vozhd'?

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