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Introduction by Peter Jackson, University of Glasgow

T he publication of Zara Steiner's two-volume history of European international relations between the wars is a true watershed moment in the study of this period. *The Lights that Failed*[1] and *The Triumph of the Dark* are the culmination of a monumental effort to understand both the impact of the First World War on the international system and Europe's tragic descent into a second and even more destructive conflict in 1939. The two books are such an imposing landmark on a vast historiographical landscape that no scholar will be able to ignore them when writing about this period.

It could be argued that *The Lights that Failed* and *The Triumph of the Dark* also bring to an end a long and exceptionally rich cycle of research and writing on inter-war international history. This cycle opened with the first self-consciously revisionist challenges to the post-war orthodoxy mounted by AJP Taylor and D. C. Watt in the early 1960s.[2] Successive revolutions in our understanding of the period were stimulated by the opening of relevant national archives in the 1970s. The emergence of 'revisionist' and 'counter-revisionist' interpretations of the origins of the Second World War defined a period that spanned the end of the Cold War and stretched into the twenty-first century. We are now at a point where further archival releases pertaining to the foreign or defence policies of European states are unlikely either to provide definitive answers to existing puzzles or to transform the parameters of key debates.[3] Historians may need to ask new questions and open new debates if they hope to push our understanding of this period forward. It is no coincidence that, in the essays that follow, all four historian-reviewers devote considerable time to speculating about possible fruitful new avenues of research for the international history of this period.

Steiner's careful narrative covers the two inter-war decades in unprecedented detail. It is based on a comprehensive survey of a truly enormous secondary literature. Any attempt to summarise it cannot hope to capture either the subtlety of the interpretation she advances or the carefully-balanced judgements upon which it rests. It begins with attempts to reconstruct the international system in the wake of the most destructive war in history up to that point. Steiner shows that this effort was compromised from the beginning by a combination of contending interests, conflicting principles, and ongoing structural imbalances in the distribution of power. These factors contributed mightily to 'failure' of

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[1] Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2] See esp. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London, 1961) and Watt, 'Appeasement: the rise of a revisionist school?', *Political Quarterly* 36:2 (1965): 191-213. It is worth adding that Taylor and Watt were both drawing on the research of other scholars at the time as well; and that they criticised the prevailing orthodoxy from very different perspectives.

[3] For a study that argues that archival releases have had little or no impact on the core structure of historiographical debates see Patrick Finney, *Remembering the Road to World War Two: International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (Routledge, 2010).

the internationalist 'lights' to illuminate the way forward to a more stable and peaceful international system.

The single outstanding achievement of Steiner's first volume may well be to have taken internationalism seriously as a potent and promising political force in its own right. Most surveys of twentieth century international history address the hopes placed in collective or multilateral action through the newly-created League of Nations. Fewer provide a systematic assessment of the politics of disarmament. And fewer still acknowledge the scale of internationalist ambitions or the variety of civil society initiatives aimed at creating a better global society. Steiner's first volume provides an illuminating discussion of these important issues and in so doing underlines the richness and importance of a new vein of research on the aspirations and achievements of transnational civil society networks between the wars.

At the same time, *The Lights that Failed* does not shrink from providing a fundamentally negative assessment of the 'poisoned chalice' of disarmament between the wars. The question of arms reductions divided the three victorious democratic powers throughout the 1920s in much the same way as the politics of reparations and war debts. There was no consensus as to the best means of preserving the basic structures of the post-1919 system, even, indeed especially, among those states that had dominated its construction. It is true that the new international norms that emerged out of the Great War had a common ancestry in pre-1914 internationalist doctrines of peace and co-operation. But among policy elites they were interpreted very differently depending not only on the national perspective from which they were approached, but also the character of the specific issue at hand.

Steiner emphasises the fact that Germany was integrated into a system whose legitimacy it refused to recognise. Very few Germans were willing to accept either the territorial losses or the status of their state as a second-rate power that had been imposed at Versailles. The chief division was between those committed to unmaking the system by force and those willing to work towards its overthrow through peaceful means. The fact that there was a lack of common purpose among the creators of that system did not bode well for its long-term viability. The structural defects in the post-1919 order were only exacerbated by the existence of the Soviet Union. The USSR posed an 'inside/out' challenge to its neighbours the likes of which had not been seen in Europe since the 1790s. The effects of this challenge within and among the western powers were division and discord; what was needed was unity and co-operation.

These fissures in the post-1919 liberal-capitalist order contributed mightily to the complete collapse of international co-operation caused by the great depression. Beginning with *The Lights that Failed*, and taking up the story in *The Triumph of the Dark*, Steiner illuminates the links between the Depression and the long international political crisis that culminated in war in 1939.[4] The effects of the Depression worked at both the domestic and

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[4] On this question see also Robert Boyce's recent *The Great Inter-War Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (London, 2009).

international levels. Enduring economic privation heightened ideological tensions and led to ever-greater polarisation in the internal politics of virtually all continental states. It is impossible to understand the rise of Nazism in Germany, the emergence of the Popular Front in western Europe, the surge in radical nationalist politics in many east European states, or the Spanish Civil War without taking into account the baleful effects of this economic crisis. At the international level, meanwhile, the most important effect of the crisis was the near complete collapse of financial and commercial co-operation. The world's most powerful economies took turns devaluing their currencies and imposing ever-greater barriers to the free flow of commerce. The domestic and international levels also inter-acted with one another. Internal tensions led directly or indirectly to aggressive external policies in a reciprocal dynamic of radicalisation that would destroy what remained of the system that had been established in 1919.

All of this provides the structural context for Steiner's analysis of the road to war from 1935 to 1939. "Pressures for collective action," she observes, "gave way to policies of self-defence, neutrality and isolation" (1043). As the machinery of international co-operation, in Geneva and elsewhere, ground to a standstill, the revisionist states were able to exploit the widespread fear of Bolshevism and a commondesire for peace within the western democracies. Japanese and Italian imperial ventures exposed the illusory character of the League's machinery of collective security. Italy also intervened with impunity to help destroy democracy in Spain. Hitler's Germany set about removing the safeguards built into the Treaty of Versailles. By late 1936 it had left the League, thrown off all restrictions on German military power, and remilitarised the Rhineland. This set the stage for the radical phase of Nazi foreign policy that opened in the spring of 1938 with the Anschluss.

At the centre of Steiner's interpretation of the coming of war is the role of Adolf Hitler. The conflict of September 1939 is characterised repeatedly as 'Hitler's war'. The course of European politics after 1933 was driven above all by the Führer's racially-charged vision of all international life as an endless struggle for domination. This highly distinctive belief system is allotted crucial importance in a narrative that specifically challenges various strains of 'realist' international-relations theorising. System-level explanations, Steiner argues, cannot explain the radicalising impact of Nazi ideology on international relations (1047-1050).

This is a judgement with which most international historians are likely to agree. It is worth noting, however, that Joseph Maiolo has recently advanced a persuasive argument that the international arms race, which gathered momentum from the mid-1930s onwards, had a radicalising effect of its own that helped determine the precise timing of the outbreak of war. 'System effects' interact with beliefs and domestic imperatives in complex ways that are formidably difficult to untangle.[5] Yet it is precisely this task of untangling that provides the clearest picture of the forces at work pushing the European powers towards the abyss of another world war.

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[5] Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: The Arms Race and the Second World War, 1931-1941* (London, 2010); Robert Jervis, *System Effects: complexity in political and social life* (Princeton, 1998).

In her analysis of the policy responses of the other European powers, essentially the debate over 'appeasement', Steiner offers a sophisticated articulation of the 'counter-revisionist' argument. As John Ferris notes in his review, for Steiner the 'appeasers' in London and Paris are depicted as 'inadequate men' facing an almost impossible task. In the end, however, Steiner is clear that the decision for war should have been made over the defence of Czechoslovakia in October 1938 rather than over Poland eleven months later. In abandoning Czechoslovakia, the Allies lost the potential contribution of its highly-motivated and well-equipped army and surrendered its modern heavy industry to the Reich. These are represented as decisive factors in the European strategic situation that placed the Allies in a much more difficult position when the decision for war was finally taken the following September.

Some critics will argue that Steiner presents a rather one-sided picture of the 'change in the European balance of power' in 1938-1939, drawing principally on the evidence provided by Williamson Murray, Hugh Ragsdale and other uncompromising critics of the decision to appease in September 1938. Others will remark on the fact that, despite the book's detailed discussion on domestic politics and elite decision-making in France, in the end its analysis of French policy in 1938-1939 tends to be collapsed into a detailed consideration of British appeasement under Neville Chamberlain. The story of the move from appeasement to war is dominated by decision-making in London and Berlin.

This is very different to my own understanding of how international politics works. But such disagreement is the lifeblood of historical scholarship. All important work tends to divide opinion and generate criticism. Yet there can be no question that Steiner has deployed an unrivalled mastery of the relevant literature to produce a highly-nuanced and carefully-argued interpretation of international relations on the eve of war. The reviews that follow are all, in different ways, a testament to her formidable achievement.

Jack Levy sets Steiner's arguments within the context of the core debates among international relations theorists. He underlines in particular the challenge the book poses to the system-level focus of structural realism. But he also posits that Steiner's analysis, with its emphasis on the agency of individuals and their 'core beliefs', does not fit easily within the constructivist approach. Steiner's emphasis, Levy judges, is 'individual' and therefore distinct from the 'social' construction of reality that is privileged by constructivists. This is an interesting point that bears serious reflection. A compelling response from the constructivist camp would need to show that all individual beliefs and predispositions are necessarily the product of social processes. They do not emerge from a vacuum.

Also interesting is Levy's critique of Steiner's assessment of British policy as having been driven principally by Chamberlain's overriding conviction that it was possible to negotiate a durable settlement with Nazi Germany. Decision-making in London was not motivated chiefly by the need to 'buy time' for rearmament. Levy accepts that Chamberlain was convinced that he could reach an agreement with Hitler that would preserve peace. But he also points out that the long-term strategic balance favoured Britain and France. This fact,

he argues, was a central consideration in what was essentially a policy of 'mixed-motives'. This is a debate that is unlikely ever to be resolved. The available evidence is exhaustive and open to contending interpretations. What is perhaps most interesting about this debate is that we see a political scientist advancing a multi-causal interpretation and an historian favouring a 'parsimonious' account that privileges one central motive. The lesson, I think, is that there is more methodological overlap between the two disciplines that many are inclined to admit.

Stacie Goddard also offers interesting insights from the perspective of political science. She stresses the implications of Steiner's analysis of the Munich Crisis for the vast strategic studies literature on deterrence. Goddard rightly points out that Munich has long occupied a central position in this literature as perhaps *the* classic example of a failure to deter. And yet, as Gerhard Weinberg demonstrated long ago,[6] at the very last moment, Hitler *was* deterred by French and British warnings that unprovoked aggression against Czechoslovakia would bring about a general European war. These warnings, it is worth noting, were backed by extensive mobilisation measures in France. By 24 September 1938, France had more than one million men under arms and the European squadrons of the French navy had been placed on twenty-four-hour alert. This is a much-neglected aspect of the Czechoslovak Crisis that bears consideration. The crisis was essentially a setback rather than a victory for Hitler, who was less interested in the precise territorial concessions he obtained at Munich than in mounting an isolated war in which Czechoslovakia could be swiftly overrun.[7]

Goddard extrapolates from this that 'the Munich crisis reads as a textbook case of successful deterrence'. On one level this is true. On another, it is difficult to deny that failure to deploy any kind of threat to German aggression during the spring and summer of 1938 badly undermined the diplomatic and military situation by the autumn of that year. Nor did the behaviour of either the British or the French during the Four-Power Conference do anything to convince the Axis leaders that future territorial demand would be resisted. If the prelude to Munich can be presented as a qualified success for deterrence, the proceedings of the Conference itself undermined the prospects for successful deterrence the next time Nazi Germany threatened war.

Talbot Imlay recommends engagement with this and similar debates within international relations as one of the principal means of moving study of the inter-war period forward. He stresses, in particular, the potential insights offered by liberal-institutionalist theories as a means of reflecting on alternatives to the Wilsonian conceptions of international order that were so influential in shaping not only the system established in 1919 but also post-1945 projects for stability and reconstruction. He argues that the institutionalist approach

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[6] Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, vol. II, Starting World War II* (Chicago, 1980): 460-97.

[7] On French mobilisation see Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: intelligence and policy-making, 1933-1939* (Oxford, 2000): 296-7.

also offers a useful framework for understanding the general failure of liberal capitalism to cope with the profound challenges it faced between the wars.

There is interesting overlap between the reviews of Imlay and Martin Thomas over the question of Empire as a framework for understanding the inter-war period. Both stress that creating or maintaining empires was a central motivation for all of the major actors in international politics at this time. Imperialism, Imlay submits, might be "placed at the very heart of the story" as a means to better understand the continuities in international relations before, during, and after what is often described as the 'thirty years war' of 1914-1945.[8] Deploying the "lens of empire," he argues, "reframes the period as one of multiple empire 'projects' whose origins lie in the decades before 1914 and the effects of which would be felt well after 1945." We are still living with the effects of European imperial projects today.

The 'lens of Empire' is very much at the centre of the future research agenda proposed by Thomas. He argues that the Second World War should be understood above all as "a war of imperialisms." As he puts it, "what was at stake was not simply the control of overseas territory, but the global networks of trade, communication, financial transaction, and capital flows made possible by imperial control." It follows from this that "the climax to Europe's inter-war crisis" cannot be explained "wholly or even primarily in European terms." Thomas argues for a new interpretive framework that places greater emphasis on the importance attributed to preserving the territorial possessions, markets and above all the liberal trading order upon which all industrial capitalism rested. "Just as the British Empire did not go to war for Belgium in 1914, it was not fighting for Poland France or even the green fields of the Home Counties in 1939." The key point, for Thomas, is that European international relations cannot be disaggregated from global context of Empire.[9] One does not have to accept entirely this bold statement concerning the centrality of imperialism to acknowledge its potential to enrich our understanding of the international dynamics that led to war in 1939. There is ample scope for future research along these lines.

Patrick Finney reflects on the fact that Steiner's analysis becomes progressively more state-centric as it moves out of the 1920s and into the pre-war decade. As the internationalist 'lights' began to fade with the onset of the 'hinge years', the impression one is left with is that they were pushed aside as the revisionist states forced a return to more traditional practices emphasising armaments and alliances.   He asks whether this is evidence of a deeper reality of international politics. Are transnational exchanges, internationalist projects for multi-lateral co-operation, and disarmament influential only under relatively stable international conditions? Do they become irrelevant when the anarchical character

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[8] For an assessment of this view see also PMH Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, 3rd ed. (London, 2007), 15-33.

[9] The centrality of imperial political economy to European politics and policy-making is the core theme of Thomas' *Violence and Colonial Order: police, workers and protest in the European colonial empires, 1918-1940* (Cambridge, 2012).

of world politics asserts itself in a less stable environment of "Hobbesian fear"?[10] This is of course a primordial issue for international theorists. It also raises what has long seemed to me to be perhaps the least well-understood aspect of international politics in the 1930s: the chief failure of both British and French policymakers was precisely that they did not adapt more quickly to the new situation created by the rise of aggressively revisionist powers. Statesmen on both sides of the channel were slow to realise that the system created after the First World War had been destroyed. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan were playing by different rules. The practices of the 1920s were no longer suitable for a more brutal era that emerged from the wreckage of the World Disarmament Conference. What was needed was a swift return to the traditional strategies of rearmament and military alliance that had characterised the pre-1914 era. This failure to adapt was the real problem with 'appeasement.' This point cannot be understood fully without thinking about the inter-war period as a whole. It was not merely collective dread at the prospect of another world war that prevented the necessary adjustment in French and British strategies. The experience of multilateral stabilisation and reconstruction in the 1920s shaped policy responses in the 1930s in ways that have long been neglected by historians of the origins of Second World War.

The longest, and many ways most challenging, set of reflections on Steiner's two-volume study is offered by John Ferris. There is no space here to address all of the subjects raised in this thoughtful essay. The most significant, I think, is the concept of "armed liberalism" Ferris argues that the measure of stability and prosperity that was achieved in Europe during the second half of the 1920s rested on the determination of the victorious liberal states to maintain a favourable balance of power in relation to potential "revolutionary states.." He is therefore even more unequivocal than Steiner in his assessment of the corrosive impact of the politics of disarmament. "Between 1927 and 1934' he submits 'the pursuit of disarmament destroyed the liberal coalition and unleashed its enemies."

An early episode in this process was the preparatory phase of the Geneva disarmament conference. Here the divergent interests and contending priorities of the Britain, France and the United States were laid bare. Another key moment was the negotiation of the 1930 London Naval Treaty, which "disarmed liberalism at sea" and saw Japan begin to move out of the camp of the liberal states. The most important development, however, was the abject failure of the World Disarmament Conference from 1932 to 1934. The divisions between the liberal powers were exacerbated during the conference as "Britain and the United States pursued disarmament proposals which would wreck French power in Europe." The chief winners in this process were the revolutionary powers bent on dismantling all international constraints on rearmament and expansion.

At the heart of the argument put forward by Ferris is the conviction that, between 1927 and 1934, the liberal powers "cannibalised liberalism," depriving it of the military credibility needed to preserve the existing order. Pursuit of internationalist doctrines of peace and security "subverted certainty by replacing power with trust, with faith in faith,

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[10] Quoted in Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London, 1951), 21.

substituting metaphysics for material." Central to this litany of errors was the increased reliance on international law which is "an arbitrary way to create rules for interactions between states and people … [that] …. governments remained free to abandon at will."

This is a powerful argument that has serious implications for all normative projects to remove or minimise the role of power politics in the practice of international relations. If even liberal orders must be defended with overwhelming force, projects for lasting peace cannot be divorced from the calculations of power that are, by their very nature, transitory and fraught with uncertainty. And yet, I am personally inclined to wonder whether there is a long-term incompatibility between liberal political orders and the practice of power politics. The history of the past century suggests that the more liberal the international order, the more likely it is to generate calls for disarmament and co-operation under the rule of law. Paradoxically, for Ferris at least, such developments undermined the viability of liberalism as an organising principle for international life. In sum, the concept of "armed liberalism" seems rich with possibilities for rethinking the nature of international relations between the wars.

The quality of the reviews on offer in this roundtable speaks to the importance of Zara Steiner's contribution to our field. The publication of her two-volume study is an 'event' in the historiography of contemporary international relations whose impact is likely to reverberate through the discipline for decades to come.

Participants:

Peter Jackson is Professor of Global Security in the Department of History at the University of Glasgow. He is the author of *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 2013); *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy-Making, 1933-1939* (Oxford, O.U.P., 2000) and numerous articles and book chapters on international relations between the two World Wars.

John Ferris is Professor of History at The University of Calgary, Honourary Professor in The Department of International Politics at The University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and Adjunct Professor in The Department of War Studies at The Royal Military College of Canada. He has written widely on intelligence, international and strategic history, and strategic studies. He is completing a book on intelligence theory, co-written with the late Michael Handel, and another on Anglo-American intelligence, Japanese deception, and the outbreak of the Pacific War.

Patrick Finney teaches international history in the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK. His most recent book is *Remembering the Road to World War Two: International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (London: Routledge, 2010). In 2012-2013 he will be a Visiting Fellow at St Peter's College Oxford.

Stacie Goddard is Associate Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College. Her articles have appeared in International Organization, International Security, International Studies

Quarterly, International Theory, and the European Journal of International Relations. She is currently working on her second book, which explores reactions to revisionist states in international politics

Talbot Imlay is a member of the History Department at the Université Laval in Québec, Canada. His publications include *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics and Economics in Britain and France, 1938-1940* (Oxford, 2003), as well as several articles in scholarly journals. He is finishing a book with Martin Horn on the Ford Motor Company in France during the Second World War to be published by Cambridge University Press; and is writing a second book entitled *Practicing Internationalism: British, French and German Socialists and International Politics, 1918-1960*, to be published by Oxford University Press.

Jack S. Levy is Board of Governors' Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University. He is past president of the International Studies Association and of the Peace Science Society. His most recent books include *Causes of War* (2010) and *The Arc of War: Origins, Escalation, and Transformation* (2011), each co-authored with William R. Thompson, and *Explaining War and Peace: Case Studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals* (2007), co-edited with Gary Goertz. His research focuses on the causes of war, foreign policy decision-making, and case study methodology.

Martin Thomas is Professor of Imperial History and a Director of the Centre for the Study of War, State, and Society at the University of Exeter. He has written extensively on French international policy and colonial politics. His most recent book is published with Cambridge University Press as *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers, and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940* (2012). He is currently working on a major study of the end of the French and British Empires for Oxford University Press.

Review by John Ferris, The University of Calgary

T he history of the interwar years, especially regarding the origins of the Second World War, is a complex issue, key to matters like the Holocaust, Decolonization and the Cold War. The end of the Cold War marked the opening of a new era in the historiography of international relations during this period. New archives opened that shed light on previously obscure issues such as Soviet decision making or the role of intelligence. Room emerged for a new history of the interwar years. Zara Steiner has now filled that gap with two thousand pages of text.

Her two books on the international history of the interwar years, *The Lights That Failed* and *The Triumph of the Dark*, rest on respectable research in primary sources, but Steiner essentially worked through the secondary literature in a host of languages, on even more matters. [1] She has not read everything ever written on the interwar years, merely more than anyone else, at a moment that is suited to a long view. Specialists have built mountains of analysis from mounds of documents, including some just released that never have been placed together as an ensemble. From those heights, Steiner saw the leading edge on the horizon all about her. She synthesizes evidence, interpretations, and issues which are usually treated in isolation—national political and diplomatic, international, strategic and economic histories. Her work towers over the literature, and that of any competitor. Thus, A.J.P. Taylor reshaped the subject by insisting that appeasement be seen as a reasoned and active policy, rather than a case of cringing before a bully. He placed the background to events in the forefront of analysis by treating developments between 1918-31 as causes of the Second World War. By challenging conventional views about the role of Adolf Hitler in starting that struggle, however, particularly in suggesting that it stemmed from a proximate cause ("he became involved in war through launching on 29 August a diplomatic manoeuvre which he ought to have launched on 28 August"[2]), Taylor was influential, but unsuccessful. His argument provided its own antidote. He bequeathed an analysis no one accepts, which unintentionally bolstered the thesis it attacked. D.C. Watt illuminated power politics in the months before the European war began, but failed to answer the "so what?" question.[3] Why bother reading so much detail about so many maneuvers and men, if this really was Hitler's war, during a time when he was unusually free to act, and to make others respond? Why focus on the squeezing of a trigger, rather than its making? Watt's research was formidable. He emphasized multinational archives, multilateral and reciprocal actions, and the paradoxical interplay of intention and effect, but this approach

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[1] Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed, European International History, 1919-1933* and *The Triumph of the Dark, European International History, 1933-1939* (Oxford University Press, 2004 and 2011).

[2] A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (Penguin, 1964), 336.

[3] Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came, The Immediate Origins of the Second World War* (Pantheon, 1989).

works best over a longer period than the one he adopted, such as that selected by Steiner. Few recent scholars have attempted systematically to explain the origins of the Second World War. The best works have been collections, where specialists discuss national and thematic aspects of the event, in a comparative fashion. Such works often have overturned accepted views and illuminated new avenues for analysis, but collections in themselves are unfocused as interpretation. [4]

Steiner's work is focused, yet far ranging. Her account of how the Second World War started is not new, instead being a thoroughly researched and sophisticated restatement of traditional theses, but she links that issue to a new explanation for its causes.

Since people first began to reflect on the causes of the Second World War, as they suffered its consequences, they have emphasized two factors, Hitler and western leaders, later joined by another pair of issues, decision makers in other countries, and the background to events. These ideas first emerged from the perspective of people who believed they had not wanted the war, and had been its victims, who viewed the event as unique and in moral terms. Those concepts have been joined in complex ways. Originally, the theses of "Hitler's war" and "guilty men" were linked, with issues of background largely serving as a backdrop to a morality play: Hitler started a conflict which could have been avoided, and was not, because of errors made by misguided, foolish, cowardly and/or corrupt, people. Winston Churchill's memoirs, still the dominant account of how this war began, proffer one combination of these ideas ("Hitler's war", "misguided men", "manly men" and a flawed but viable system of power politics). [5] The idea of Hitler's war rarely has been challenged, and never successfully. Scholars with otherwise distinct views, like Michael Carley and Greg Kennedy, still advocate strong forms of the "guilty men" thesis. [6] Most historians accept a weaker version, perhaps best called "inadequate men". From the 1960s, however, a sizable minority of scholars have rejected that view, on the grounds that western leaders made good decisions, or else that they could not help taking bad ones, and should not be blamed for doing so, because the devil (embodied in public opinion, ideology, fears for the economy, foolish behavior by foreign leaders, etc) made them do it. [7] Historians remain divided over where to rank the role of leaders in Italy, Japan and the USSR-- within the background, in a category of their own, or standing alongside statesmen in Britain, France and the United States. Scholars have driven the recent focus on the background to events,

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[4] The most recent collections are Gordon Martel (ed), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered, A.J.P. Taylor And The Historians* (Routledge: London, 1999) and Robert Boyce and Joe Maiolo, *The Origins of World War II, The Debate Continues* (London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

[5] Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1948).

[6] Greg Kennedy, "'Rat in Power': Neville Chamberlain and the Making of British Foreign Policy, 1933-1939", in T.G. Otte (ed), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher* (Basingstoke, 2002), 173-96; Michael Jabara Carley, *1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War Two* (Ivan R.Dee, Chicago, 1999).

[7] John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 1989).

which has taken many forms of argument—for example, war was inevitable because the Versailles system provoked a challenge which it could not surmount, or flaws in the international economic system destroyed the political one, or else, systematic collapse was not inevitable until the day the war began.

Zara Steiner advances a strong, but nuanced, view of Hitler's war and inadequate men. Despite its flaws, she argues, the political and economic system of the interwar years was not doomed to die after twenty years of life. It collapsed because of contingency, driven by a man with unusual leverage. Hitler was bound not just on mastery in Europe but on war, yet his position was weak. He could and should have been stopped, especially at Munich. In the category of "inadequate men," she includes the leaders of all countries confronting Germany, while recognizing that judgment on Joseph Stalin is difficult, given restrictions on records and his marginalization in power politics until 1939. So far, so traditional; but she links these views to broader analyses of policy, power and politics in the interwar system, and to the paradoxical workings of cause and contingency. Her masterly narrative of multilateral diplomacy is linked to an analysis of the power and military policies of all major states, and to the literature on the contested relationships between politics and economics, and the largely unwritten and partly unknown connections between intelligence and policy. She extrapolates powerful conclusions from specialist accounts, like Adam Tooze's analysis of the economic situation within Germany, or the London school's view of Britain's position in the world. [8] For a woman born in Manhattan, long resident in Cambridge, her interaction with scholars has given her something of a Canadian accent. She binds her book with powerful and precise generalizations about connections and causes, systems and people.

"Zara's version" will last fifty years, in part because any challenger will need that long to assimilate all the secondary works and write a competitor—if ever anyone again can bestride the narrow scholarship, as she has done . So, what has Zara Steiner left scholars of the interwar years to do, and how? Historians advance most easily by finding new sources, or connections between fields. Since 1970, links between strategic, economic, diplomatic, cultural and political history have shaped work on the interwar years. Much of the originality of Steiner's account lies in her reorganization of that relationship. More still can be done through this means, but low hanging fruit is scarce: future pickers must stand on ladders. During the 1990s, scholars achieved access to previously closed Russian records, intelligence archives in Britain, France and the United States, and many smaller collections. Much of that material has not yet been incorporated into specialist assessments, let alone standard accounts, and might shift views. We may discover other collections, as has just happened with the diary of Benito Mussolini's mistress, Clara Petacci, documenting their every orgasm, and the papers of his Chief of Staff between 1936-39, General Pariani, which reflect a less satisfactory union. Someday Russian archives will open fully. Nonetheless, historians of the interwar years no longer can rely on new releases to drive arguments. Nor can archives answer many of the key questions before us. Records cannot define what

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[8] Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (Viking, 2007); for the London school, cf. n. 18 below.

Joseph Stalin would have done had war occurred during the Munich crisis, because he could not have known himself, until he had to ask the question. Advances in the field must rest on new interpretation, rather than new evidence.

Such problems are not unique to students of the interwar years. In any mature literature, where the evidence long has been available and assessed by generations of historians, from different countries and perspectives, advances may occur in many ways: brick by brick, by altering structure (gutting an interior, removing a rotting bulwark, adding a strong one, or building a new floor) or by rethinking architecture: changing assumptions or adding new foundations, or capstones, or making extensions to other buildings. Such efforts, addressing multi-causal relationships, where people's actions may not create the consequences they pursue, nor effects be intended, require care in terms of causation. Scholars must criticize ideas about people, like the "great man" or "Cleopatra's nose" theories of history, and peoples; such as assumptions that great events require great causes, or social and economic issues rank above political ones, or deep "structures" and broad "forces" outweigh individuals. Words like "force" are mechanical metaphors for metaphysical processes (ideas of a spirit of the age, or base and superstructure) or else from social science theories about systematic relationships between humans: whether embodied in institutions, the ties which bind groups or shape economic and military competitions and collaborations, or those matters which drive many people, rather than one person, in any direction.

The interworking of causes, and levels of causation, is particular and complex. Any attempt to define them seems scholastic. Anything less leaves them slippery. Historical causes fall in four categories: irrelevant, without bearing on a process, though often coincidental to it; contributory, colouring but not essential to an event; necessary, factors without which a process cannot be completed; and sufficient, matters which must produce one effect and no other. Few historians expect to find single sufficient causes for complex events. They often combine several causes to form a compound cause that is sufficient, or more than so (over-determined). The primary concerns are to discard irrelevant causes, to distinguish contributory from necessary ones, and to show their links and significance. Historians rank causes through a counterfactual process. They identify those necessary to a phenomenon and then, through thought experiment, remove each alone from the whole, one after another, to determine its effect. Historians also may define a master cause, matters not merely more necessary than any other, but uniquely central to the structure of causation, though insufficient for the effect. Master causes may be simple ("Napoleon's mistakes caused his defeat at Waterloo") but generally take compound forms, involving some combination of issues.

Generally, historians approach cause either in an *ad hoc* fashion—history as one shaggy dog story after another—or through ordered, but arbitrary, models, inspired by the methods of social science. Thus, a standard explanation for historical causation involves conditions, or origins, which enable certain possibilities, and discourage others; causes, that determine probabilities and may create certainties; and triggers, which set events in motion. The term "trigger", a metaphor meaning anything that can lead a structure to move, generally is applied to proximate causes and often to tiny events. Bread riots or

protests by individuals may spark a revolution. Thus, many commentators believe that triggers matter little to events, certainly less so than several elements of the structures they unleash. Such concepts of causation rest on the model of a machine, like a gun, with just one trigger and action—a tightly interlocked system of conditions and causes, set in motion by some impulse. This model suits instrumental issues, but less so competitions or revolutions—and all three of these phenomena are involved in the cause of wars. If you want to assess how a car started, all you need know is whether the vehicle worked, and whether the driver sought to make it move. To gauge victory in a car race requires consideration of more variables, each driven by internal causes and external interactions, the entanglement of intentions, and accident. To understand a car crash is even harder, because so many details matter to the event—those that are unintended, created and desired by no single actor. To explain an instrumental issue requires an assessment of the capability and intentions of one actor. To comprehend a competition involves knowledge of an environment, and the capabilities and intentions of the competitors. To explain a revolution, one must see how a system might collapse, and which events and actors could trigger it.

Again, normally, triggers are seen as mattering less to events than to causes. When analysing the causes of a war, however, triggers matter more than the mechanical metaphor suggests, and are harder to fathom. Does a war occur by design, by competition, or through a revolution, the overthrow of a system in an unexpected and unintended fashion? The less stable the system, the more any hair may trigger events. Triggers take many forms and move at any moment. Their timing drives systems in different directions, because structures are not static— they shift. Differences in trigger or time may press a tsunami from one shore to another. Had Archduke Franz Ferdinand been spared in Sarejevo on 29 June 1914, there might not have been a First World War, or there might have been a different one.

None of these matters is self-evident. The conditions for any event may almost be endless, in theory, while each model of causation points toward distinct causes and orders them in different ranks. Marxian and liberal accounts of the outbreak of a war cannot be identical. Differences over these issues—whether something should or should not be ranked as a relevant condition, or a cause, and its force compared to peers—are fundamental to historical debate. Yet ideology alone does not determine interpretation. Historians talk more to than past each other. They are parsimonious in defining the conditions which are relevant to an event. Agreements about the nature of evidence and it contain disputes between them. Historians generally agree about what happened and how. Issues of why are more divisive, but not unbridgeable.

Comparison with the historiography of two related cases will help to put ours in context.

The first work of critical history involved study of how a war started. Its analysis has held the field for twenty-four hundred years. We should be so lucky. Until the past century or so, Thucydides' account of the origins of the Peloponnesian war was taken for granted. Since then, new sources have been found, changing our views of older ones and the events they describe. Epigraphic data provides a host of bricks. The discovery of the Oxyrenchus

historian shook our faith in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, a basic source for the end of the war, while bolstering the alternative account from Diodorus Siculus, a useful account for the start of the conflict. Revisionism regarding the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, however, is dogged by our dependence on one source. Thucydides provides most of our evidence on the matter, and our first model of it-- indeed, for all analyses of the outbreak of any war. Claiming to distinguish "real" from "immediate" causes, and to peer past rhetoric to those matters "most kept out of sight", he holds that "the growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta, made war inevitable". [9] One modern historian, Francis Cornford, denounced this account as fundamentally flawed, a "work of art" rather than science, but so skeptical an approach, applied consistently, destroys one's ability to know anything about the Peloponnesian War. [10] Our dependence on Thucydides cripples any attack on the architecture of his account. Attention, instead, has turned toward bricks and structure, where ample room exists for work. Despite emphasis on the interplay of intentions and effects, perceptions, and bilateral relations in a multilateral context, Thucydides makes the decisions for war sound rational and simple, in fact too much so. His list of its causes is small, consisting of a compound master cause and some proximate ones. His discussion of diplomacy before the war minimizes the role of contingency and uncertainty, unlike his assessment of operations, which foreshadows Clausewitz. His narrative of events in the forty years before the war ignores matters which illuminate the war's origins.

Historians have sought to reinterpret that event by reconstructing and analyzing those matters where Thucydides clearly is incomplete, during the long period before the war. They have done so by combining critical analysis of all ancient evidence, literary and epigraphic, interpretation by some modern theory of interstate relations beyond the realism coined by Thucydides, and by joining their analysis of causes to his. Most exponents of this approach, like Donald Kagan, add extensions to Thucydides' analysis.[11] The greatest challenges, reinterpretation of the origins of the Peloponnesian war from Marxian (G.E.M. de St Croix) or liberal mercantilist (Cornford) perspectives, adding a political economic dimension to its causes and focusing on forces before individuals, convinced few. [12] Thucydides' master cause endures. Modern scholars may challenge him on the origins of his war, but they agree that triggers are tertiary to it; treating the conflict as the rational consequence of a competition and intentions, with crises like those in Corcyra being more occasions for war, than causes for it. Long before 432 BC, the Peloponnesian war was an event just waiting to happen, driven by the intentions of actors, the forces which unified peoples, and the competition that bound them.

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[9] Robert B. Strassler (ed), *The Landmark Thucydides, A Comprehensive Guide to The Peloponnesian War* (Touchstone, New York, 1996), 16.

[10] Francis Cornford, *Thucydides Mythhistoricus* (London, Edward Arnold, 1907), 18.

[11] Donald Kagan, *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

[12] G.E. M. de Saint Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth, 1972).

The historiography of the origins of the First World War has a different history. For the first twenty years after it ended, much evidence was withheld, with the rest provided selectively. Debates were politicized, arguments were often dishonest, structure and architecture were contested, and new bricks and bombs were thrown. By 1940, however, Luigi Albertini formulated an analysis which gauged, with fair precision, the roles of men and states, and the paradoxical interplay of intentions and effects, in a multi-causal process lasting from 1870 to 1914.[13] During this period, he argued, the evolution of the system of power politics and the intentions of all states, particularly Germany, made a great war increasingly likely, but not quite inevitable. The July crisis was more than a trigger, rather a minor but necessary cause for war in itself, by housing an interaction between calculation, miscalculation, revolution, and many actors. He threw responsibility for creating that crisis on Belgrade, for escalating events primarily on Vienna and Berlin, and secondarily on Paris and St. Petersburg, and for failing to stop them, on London. Counterfactuals were fundamental to his arguments, and those of later scholars, regarding the impact of Britain. Thus, Paul Shroeder, drawing an analogy with "galloping gertie", the whipsaw collapse of a suspension bridge, starting with its weakest link and exported to the rest, argued that the stresses of the international system first struck its most exposed member, Austria Hungary, because of what the strongest and most autonomous power, Britain, did not do and then, reverberating through Vienna, wrecked the whole.[14] Albertini's architecture dominated the debate between 1950- 80, as the full base of evidence emerged, with the exception of Serbia. That debate focused on two elements of structure. The first was military and diplomatic decision making within individual states, and their contribution to a multi-causal whole, the key development being when debate over the Fritz Fischer thesis forced Germans to abandon provincial thinking. The second was the assessment of systematic issues, following contemporary fashion regarding how forces drove events.[15]

Since 1990, the concept of forces and structures has lost favour among international historians, but still they assign significance to empirical manifestations of those matters, like the relationships and competitions which bound states. They see a great war as being far from inevitable in 1914, though views on the degree vary. They view the July crisis not as a trigger, but a (or the) major cause for war. The friction generated by a collision between instrument, revolution, and competition ignited a furnace. All prior structures and intentions melted into shapes which otherwise would not have existed. Serbia, Austria-Hungary and Germany were more responsible for these events than other states, but a complex multilateral system transformed everyone's actions, preventing cause and effect from working as anyone planned. The dominant genre has become anthologies, focused on

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[13] Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914* (translator Isabella Massey, three volumes, Oxford University Press, 1952).

[14] Paul Schroeder, "World War I as *Galloping Gertie*: A Reply to Joachim Remak", *The Journal of Modern History,* 44:3 (197, 319-45).

[15] James Joll, *The Origins of The First World War* (Longman, 1992).

comparative decision-making by elites within specific nations, though new approaches may emerge in the several monograph accounts scheduled to coincide with the centenary of the event. [16] A new wave in the literature, full studies of the outbreak of the war, associated with the centenary of the event, has just begun to swell, but it appears to be returning arguments toward Albertini, placing more emphasis than general over the past generation on the significance of the roles of Serbia, France and Russia. One recent argument has emerged about structure, which combines competition, perception and power: the study of arms races as an empirical rather than a metaphysical phenomenon, the development of military programmes within states and their effect on each other, their links to policies, and their effect on attitudes and actions. [17] Arguments could be advanced by looking further at the intelligence record, such as how Austrian and Russian codebreaking affected decisions, or the role of Serbian subversion or German deception during the July crisis, or how the preconceptions of decision makers linked issues of structure to actions taken in 1914.

Explanations for the outbreak of the Second World War have evolved in their own fashion .The 'Hitler's war' interpretation has always been first of equals among them. Historians mistrust that interpretation because it is so personalized, a great man theory; yet all challenges to that idea, or its status as master cause, have failed. Resistance seems futile, yet surrender has consequences. It configures causation around Hitler, and his war, shaping the historiography in ways historians have not explicitly appreciated. The Hitler's war argument assumes the existence of some causal lever that he, and he alone, might pull, triggered by whatever event he choose to act upon. Conditions and causes become defined by two distinct but linked issues-- the making of a lever for war, and its pulling—which often are expressed as counterfactuals, focused on the failure to prevent either event from occurring. By the logic of this case, once Hitler was free to act as he wished—the moment when the lever was made, rather than when he pulled it, or the proximate cause which triggered the latter action -- the Fuehrer would make all rivals surrender, commit suicide, or fight (which some of them must do). His intentions made war inevitable, unless he was prevented from acting on them. That end could have been achieved by denying him a lever, though perhaps also by deterring his finger on the trigger. The creation of that lever made war not just possible, but probable, and governed by one impulse. Once the lever was forged, sooner or later he must pull it, unless others stopped him from doing so (if that was even possible) . From this point on, Hitler's intention and instrumental action determined whether war would occur. It waited on his will. Other causes became conditional, mattering only insofar as they influenced his decisions. Even good intentions and actions might have perverse consequences, because his response and logic defined the relationship between cause and effect. When a person is a cause, the personal becomes the political—whatever rocks his cradle, rolls the world.

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[16] Richard F. Hamilton and Holger Herwig, *The Origins of World War 1* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[17] David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

This logic has paradoxical consequences. Even if contemporaries should have understood that context, no simple assumption in itself, how could they know in advance what this lever would be and the moment when it could emerge, especially since its existence stemmed not just from external factors, but Hitler's perceptions? Historians still debate when the lever emerged, 1919, 1931, 1936, or 1938, and what the lever was. Hitler may have had different views of the matter. Moreover, to let a lever emerge, or to create it, unleashed a cause for war, yet arguably no one took this action; everyone did. This lever just happened, through the interactions within a multilateral system. When it did emerge, no one knew that it had. This cause was created by the system, but did this outcome occur by necessity, or by fluke? by anyone's intention, or by the accidental interworking of everyone's intentions? The situation becomes odder still when events are phrased as counterfactuals. Then, the moments when no one prevented the lever from being forged, or stopped Hitler from pulling it, were major causes for the war. Events which did not happen, enabled those which otherwise might not have happened. This logic begs the question: who created or could have prevented these counterfactual outcomes, which emerged from the interactions between individuals within a competition? To stop them would take wisdom and power, which was best—perhaps only—combined and used instrumentally by one actor. Yet no one state had this capability. Only had the greatest powers in Europe, Britain, France, the USSR, perhaps Poland and Italy, preferably backed by the United States, cooperated, and thus trusted each other, might this end have been achieved. Could that result have happened in so divided a system? And what condition created this cause? Consideration of these counterfactuals presses us down the chain of causation, to a place where all levels are tangled.

Steiner audited the architecture of international history during the interwar years and found it good; but reordered the structure, and added many bricks. Some of her judgments are controversial. Central to her interpretation, for example, is the view that the Western democracies could and should have gone to war during the Munich crisis, and in so doing perhaps breaking the fragile German economy and avoiding tragedy. She believes public opinion would have accepted that step. Other scholars will doubt that argument. I think that public opinion could have supported such a war-- indeed, that only the calculated intervention of Chamberlain saved peace in 1938 which, in hindsight, might have been a better time for war than 1939. I also believe that few contemporaries would have accepted so dire a picture, or understood the opportunity and the need to exploit it. That is, the democracies could have gone to war in 1938 had Hitler forced them into it, which Chamberlain precluded, but not through calculation. Nonetheless, by describing how things happened, Steiner has cleared space for new questions about why they happened.

For generations, historians have focused on the pursuit of guilty or wimpy men, or cutting manly ones down to size. This effort will continue, but Steiner's magisterial assessment reduces the returns to be expected from such work. Greater room for progress seems to lie in study of structure, by extending Steiner's analysis of the junction between international history and the origins of the Second World War. I will pursue this approach in several areas which she explores: intelligence, perceptions and ideas; and structures of power, and power politics, especially in that black hole of the historiography, the transition between stability in 1925 and uncertainty during 1935. Some of my arguments build on hers, while

others are inspired by Steiner's lead, though she might not share them. They move from a direct discussion of her work, to the edge of many areas which it illuminates. My analysis also exploits the advantages of our time, which is marked by the greatest economic contraction since 1931, coupled with unusual uncertainty about international structures of power, and the behaviour of states and economic actors. It provides an unusual perspective for that work, which is a relative advantage over other generations of scholars.

Though not a specialist, Steiner includes research on intelligence and power politics. In her view, and mine, intelligence shaped the structure of international relations and the causes and triggers for the outbreak of war. It did so by fusing contingency, knowledge and misperception, with the intentions and actions of individual states, within the competition between them all. Further work in these areas can illuminate all of these matters.

Since 1990, much data on intelligence has been released. Little of it has been analyzed. Focusing solely on the major powers, records are good on human intelligence for Britain, France, Italy, the United States and the USSR, and on communications intelligence for Washington, Berlin, London and Rome, but scarce elsewhere. Evidence for the assessment of intelligence is excellent on London, Washington, Paris and Rome; decent regarding Moscow and Berlin; and poor for Tokyo. Some evidence on human intelligence remains closed in Britain. Far more material may yet be hidden in Russia, perhaps also Italy, but probably not much in France, the United States, Germany and Japan. Altogether, the data is good on the liberal states and Italy, tolerable regarding Russia and Germany, and poor with respect to Japan. It is a decent base for work, far better than was the case in 1990. The sphere of what we know that we do not know has shrunk. Most of the evidence which survived the times is in the public domain, where it is enough to make informed judgment.

In order to aid that end, the intelligence record must be assessed, and integrated into the study of policy. A fair number of first and a few second generation works serve this purpose.[18] They provide a broad narrative, which is thin or absent in certain places, fair or fat in others, aided by illuminating analysis. The bottleneck once was the absence of evidence; now, it is lack of labour. Further work will matter, but its effect will not be simple. Intelligence specialists remain necessary, and more of them are needed. Diplomatic and strategic historians must account for their work. Debates over how intelligence affected statesmen and policy will continue, and will shape broader controversies, as with Italy during the 1930s, or the outbreak of the Pacific war. Yet we already may have passed that moment when the intelligence record most directly affected our understanding of the interwar years. The sample is sufficiently large that the general impact of intelligence on power politics can be gauged, at least provisionally. Intelligence is well integrated into the international study of war plans and strategy. Even considering the American, British and French records which have not been assessed, or Russian ones which are retained, the impact of intelligence on Neville Chamberlain, Édouard Daladier, Franklin Roosevelt and Stalin is well known. More could be done with Benito Mussolini. Material on similar issues

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[18] John Ferris, "Image and Accident: Intelligence and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-41", in John Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy, Selected Essays* (London, Routledge, 2005), 99-137.

in Germany and even more, Japan, seems largely to have been destroyed, which cripples our understanding of this topic, while leaving little hope for improvement.

Decision makers interpret data by preconception. Hence, the history of intelligence involves the study not just of data but also of perceptions and their roots, whether in psychology, ideology or unspoken assumptions. These matters illuminate questions that are central to power politics. Why, at key moments, did the leaders of every country overrate their power? Until 1938, liberal internationalists overestimated the strength of their states and the system, as Churchill did for that of the French army and Royal Navy until 1940. Chamberlain, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Japanese admirals and generals exhibited identical optimism regarding their own position. Why did decision makers overrate the power of Axis states, and underrate that of the liberal nations and the USSR? What assumptions shaped their views? Robert Boyce has attacked British and American policy for what he calls "racist" views toward France.[19] That term must be treated with caution because, strictly speaking, it does not fit the attitudes he describes, which better are called ideas of national character, with different roots and flowers than racism. Peter Jackson and Andrew Barros have shown how such ideas shaped French views of Germany.[20] In fact, stereotypes about national character were universal, and influential, among decision makers of the interwar years. To assess how such stereotypes, racism, and ideology, shaped policy, will illuminate events, though the most advanced element of the study—regarding western perceptions of Japan—shows the need for nuance, and to avoid over generalization.[21]

Study of data and preconception illuminates the particular and systematic effect of intelligence. It also enables the formation of a connection between intelligence and policy, to ideas, public debate and politics; to the impact of ideology on regimes, and on the clashes between them. Ideology and opinion had many effects on states. Within dictatorships, a narrow band of people and views dominated policy, and public opinion could be ignored or manipulated far more than was true with liberal nations. Thus, the need to gain support from a democratized and feminized electorate drove British governments in complex ways.

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[19] Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2009).

[20] Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy-Making, 1933-1939*, (Oxford University Press, 2000); Andrew Barros, «Les dangers du sport et de l'éducation physique: Une évaluation des forces allemandes par le Deuxième Bureau français (1919-1928)», *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 210 (2002): 113-13.

[21] Christopher Bell, "The Royal Navy, War Planning and Intelligence Between the Wars", in Peter Jackson and Jennifer S. Siegel, (eds) *Intelligence and Statecraft: the use of and Limits of Intelligence in International Society, 1870-1970* (Praeger, 2005); John Ferris, "'Worthy of Some Better Enemy?' The British Assessment of the Imperial Japanese Army, 1919-1941, and the Fall of Singapore", *Canadian Journal of History* 28 (August 1993): 223-56; Douglas Ford, "Realistic Caution and Ambivalent Optimism: US Intelligence Assessments and War Preparations against Japan, 1918-1941", *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21:2 (2010): 175-201; Greg Kennedy, "Anglo-American Strategic Relations and Intelligence Assessments of Japanese Air Power 1934-1941," *The Journal of Military History* 74:3 (2010): 737-73.

It made a focus on social reform central to policy, and thereby challenged military spending, and perhaps weakened support for realism in diplomacy. Nonetheless, rather than feeling constrained by a pacifist public, the belligerence of the British electorate alarmed Chamberlain's advisors, complicating their pursuit of appeasement. Meanwhile, in western states, opinion about power politics split more widely on ideological grounds than it had before 1914. Liberal internationalism entered its heyday, challenging realism, influencing unofficial elites, left wing parties and, to a lesser degree, foreign ministries. Its advocates, whether in Chatham House, the Council for Foreign Relations or the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, the Foreign Office or the Quai d'Orsay, interpreted power in legalistic terms, by projecting expectations drawn from internal politics to the international sphere. These tendencies caused problems when confronting countries where internal politics involved murder, which pursued militarized policies abroad, like the USSR, Germany, Italy and Japan. Those failings of liberal internationalism became the target for the Munich metaphor. Yet analysts must take care when assessing the influence of ideology on policy. Corelli Barnett, a pioneer in this area, oversimplified the power of liberal, romantic and "idealistic" thinking in Britain.[22] His critics demonstrated the significance of a counterweight, the enduring power of realist, militarist, and technocratic ideas. [23] One must watch for overgeneralization when addressing such a broad band of ideas, individuals and idiosyncrasies that is filled with cross currents.

Any international order combines power and ideology. It rests on a division between powers and a distribution of power, alongside ideas of what makes strength and status, and of which competitions may be conducted, under what rules. Such orders underwrite certainty for states and firms. When they shake, certainty flees, just as uncertainty subverts order.

International systems are jungles. In order to understand them, one must name their animals. Forty years ago, the rival schools of thought about international relations in liberal countries during the interwar years were labeled 'idealism' and 'realism.' Today, they are called 'realism' and liberalism,' usually located within a 'liberal realist' approach. Anti-liberal states viewed international relations more ruthlessly. States of the interwar era are described as revisionist and status quo powers, shaping our sense of how and why they behaved. Status quo powers often are defined as those with an interest in the survival of the system, a concern which they should have seen. While this is perhaps true in hindsight, states did not see matters that way at the time. The only status quo powers were weak ones. Perhaps the strongest of them was Czechoslovakia. Similarly, the German problem was not revisionism, but revolution, especially because Germany alone could enable other revolutionaries to act. States are better ranked as 'liberal' and 'anti-liberal,' and as 'revisionist' and 'revolutionary.' Liberal countries usually were revisionist, seeking to

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[22] Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London, Eyre Methuen, 1972);

[23] David Edgerton , "The prophet militant and industrial: the peculiarities of Corelli Barnett," *Twentieth Century British History* 2 (1991): 360-79, and John Ferris, "The Greatest World Power on Earth: Great Britain in the 1920s," *International History Review* 13:4 (1991): 725-250.

create an order, by revising what existed. They supported a process, not a thing: revisionists and revolutionaries attacked both matters. Anti-liberal states generally were revolutionaries, acting to overturn affairs. Britain and the United States rarely acted, or thought of themselves, as status quo powers. France came closer to doing so only from 1933 when, weakest of the great liberal powers, it was caught on the defensive, its policy exposed, carrying the burden of the liberal system as it had emerged in Europe. During the 1920s, Germany and Italy were revisionist but cautious, while Japan followed liberal lines. During the 1930s, all three states became revolutionary. In the 1920s, the USSR was a revolutionary power. In the 1930s, it remained so in principle but became cautious in practice, until Stalin relearned revolution from Hitler.

Economic regimes and systems of power politics affected each other.[24] This relationship remains unclear, not surprisingly, since it combined diplomacy and politics; technical aspects of economics and strategy, like the gold standard and the characteristics of warships; and an international system of unusual complexity. Four factors dominated this relationship and the interwar system as a whole: a fragile and atomized order, with fractures that only constant pressure could bind long enough to heal; the containment and climb of revolution; the rise and fall of armed liberalism; and the lack of a hegemon. The last led all of the rest.

The Great War killed some powers, wounded others, created still more, fractured the world order and left a new one to be patched together. What emerged was a fragile system under stress. The global economy was sick, though not dying. The structure of power was destabilized, as strength drifted to Japan and the United States from Europe, and shifted within that continent. Before 1914 the division of eastern Europe between three powers bolstered a balance of power; the destruction of Austria-Hungary and the Russian revolution broke it. Liberal and nationalist ideology, and the way power emerged on the ground during 1919, prevented the region from being shaped to suit the stability of the system. Eastern Europe was divided between Germany and the USSR, both of which were temporarily impotent, and a host of weak successor states; it no longer helped stabilize the European system. The Balkans extended to the Baltic. France, Italy, Germany or the USSR, could have easily expanded into this vacuum, and upset the greater distribution of power. So too, Japan with China, though only in 1940-41 did this threaten the system, as against one of its parts. Germany was prostrate but retained power and the will to it. Just two years of freedom to rearm would make Germany the greatest military power in Europe. France dominated western Europe, but lacked the capacity to do so for long. A pendulum of power would swing over the coming decades, passing many tipping points and exposing vulnerabilities. First, France would have greater strength than ever since 1812. Later, Germany and Russia would become more powerful than before 1914. From 1931, far more

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[24] Cf. Talbot Imlay, "Democracy and War: Political Change, Industrial Relations and Economic Preparations for War in France and Britain Up to 1940," *The Journal of Modern History* 79:1 (2007): 1-47 ; and the exchange in H-Diplo Roundtable Review, Vol. XII, No. 12, 1 April 2011, Talbot Imlay, Jonathan Kirshner, Sally Marks, Ken Moure, Stephen Schuker and Robert Boyce, on Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization*, http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XII-12.pdf.

states wished to overthrow the system than had been the norm between 1815-1914 -- four major powers and several smaller ones. Only three great powers fully supported a liberal order. The American return to isolationism left that order defended by two states that controlled just twenty percent 20% of the demographic and economic resources of the great powers. Nor did France and Britain easily cooperate.

Yet stability reigned during the 1920s, because liberalism was armed. Liberal powers won the war and dominated the peace. Britain, the United States, and France, fairly united, heavily armed, had overwhelming military power and loosely cooperated to support the status quo. Their diplomacy clashed, but their strategies coincided. Master of the seas and Europe, their strength attracted allies, stabilized eastern Europe, deterred threats, and bound the fractures in the world order. The revisionist powers, weak and isolated, had to play by liberal rules. Desire for revisionism occurs in most systems. Often it is part of the mechanism for survival—revisionists play or can be played against each other to check revisionism. The question is whether an armed challenge to the system may be deterred or defeated, and whether the system can absorb radical changes without collapsing. In the 1920s, the revisionists' aims were so contradictory that they could not cooperate, while the liberal system had strength. Supported to some extent by the United States and Japan, Britain and France provided a breathing space of a decade for the fractures in the international system to heal: to maintain a liberal order, and to modify it.

In order to understand how revolution succeeded, one must consider its condition: why armed liberalism and the effort to create a liberal order failed. Between 1919-33, both in politics and economics, three liberal powers, each with peculiar characteristics, shared and struggled over hegemony. All of the minor contests between them, especially Britain and the United States, shaped trends and tipping points in greater struggles. The literature on these points has fundamental flaws.[25] By dividing military from economic issues, it misconstrues strategic ones. It neither distinguishes trends from tipping points, nor treats the events between 1939 and 1941 as revolutionary. It overrates British weakness, and underrates a greater factor: the weirdness of the position of the United States. The latter combined industrial and demographic might, a remarkable geostrategic and political economic position (sheltered from conflict, thus attracting capital fleeing for safety, and uniquely able to ignore events abroad) with the greatest potential power on earth, an unwillingness and inability to use it, and an economy racing from boom to bubble to bust. Using the crude barometers of strength in fleets and finance, between 1932 and 1938, American power declined relative to Britain, just as much as it rose from 1927 to 1931. The stuttering rise of the United States—its wild swings in status and involvement in world affairs, the dichotomy between what it did and yet could do, combined with the slow cooking of British decline, confused rules, practices, and power within the international economic and political systems, and created systematic uncertainty.

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[25] See the essays by Gordon Martel, Keith Neilson, John Ferris and Brian McKercher, *International History Review* 13 (1991): 662-783, and B.J.C. McKercher, *Transition of Power, Britain's Loss of Global Preeminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia, and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Armed liberalism underwrote order after 1918, but slowly eroded, because of its successes, and its splits. The liberal powers sought to create an order, based on their principles—one which had existed in the world, until it was fractured during the war, but never in Europe. On the continent, the liberal powers pursued a revolution, in the world, they pursued a restoration. They shared interests in creating a foundation for a postwar order, but not over what structure to erect on it, nor the identity of ts designer. Each liberal power sought to shape an evolving system, in different directions. None would serve as power of last resort. None would protect the whole of the system, or most of the parts, save where its vital interests were directly involved. Unless all three states agreed on a change to the system, each would paralyze the others' efforts to move it anywhere. Had any of these states been accepted as leader, an effective order could have emerged. Their divisions hampered that outcome. To make these states agree and stay agreed was hard. Those structural problems, which were beyond anyone's control, or more precisely, that of any one actor, mattered more than whatever mistakes in policy any of these powers made. As they sought to build structures on the foundation of the liberal order, they became each other's greatest rivals, dividing themselves against common enemies. They also confronted hard problems, which shaped trends and tipping points in greater competitions, that they did not fully understand.

By 1927, this system seemed so stable that liberal internationalist statesmen felt free to take a great leap forward. Their first step was to attack themselves—to weaken their own military power. The effects were unintended. Far more than in 1815-1914, the liberal system rested on mobilized forces, which substituted for weakness in the system. The order was unusually vulnerable to minor fluctuations in military strength. Between 1927 and1934, the pursuit of disarmament destroyed the liberal coalition and unleashed its enemies. During 1927-28, the Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference and the Anglo-French naval compromise split the liberal powers. The London Naval Treaty of 1930 disarmed liberalism at sea: the Royal Navy scrapped more tonnage in battleships than Italy possessed, and the United States Navy almost as much. British and American strength declined, that of Germany, Italy, France and the USSR rose, while Japan became a greater sea power but no longer a liberal one—the London Treaty sparked the explosion which blew it toward revolution. Soon, Britain and the United States pursued disarmament proposals which would wreck French power in Europe.[26] Though this aim failed, the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1931-33 split the liberal powers, and trapped their policies in multilateral efforts to solve every world problem at once. They gave Adolf Hitler disarray to exploit. The focus on disarmament prevented liberal states from countering rearmament by revolutionaries.

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[26] John Ferris, "'It is our business in the Navy to Command the Seas': The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy, 1919-1929," in Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, *Far Flung Lines, Maritime Essays in Honour of Donald Schurman* (Frank Cass, London, 1996); James Morley, *Japan Erupts: The London Conference and the Manchurian Incident, 1928-1932* (New York, 1984); Andrew Webster, "'The transnational dream: Politicians, diplomats and soldiers in the pursuit of international disarmament, 1920-1938," *Contemporary European History* 14:4 (2005): 493-518.

Other struggles centred on transfer payments of money, and therefore of power. As Stephen Schuker argues, the battles over reparations and war debts raised the questions as to who would pay for the First World War and how that would that shape its winners.[27] France lost and Germany won the struggles of 1923-24 because Paris surrendered its freedom of action to Britain and the United States. Similar problems stemmed from efforts to reconstruct the liberal financial order, as dog ate dog. By pressing Britain onto the gold standard at its prewar par of $4.83 the Bank of England and the Federal Reserve Bank knew they were forcing pain on Britons, and cost. When leaving the gold standard in 1931, Britain stole value from every central bank holding sterling—and thus from its best friends. This process was confused because it involved new distributions of power, competitions, and systems of decision making. Before 1914, the world economy was dominated by a state which lacked a conscious economic policy, Britain, and loosely governed by The City, and the Bank of England. During the First World War, states and economic actors directed national economic blocs which conducted mercantilist warfare across the globe. As Britain's position in the international economy eroded and that of the United States rose, the two were equals in finance, and new means of coordination became necessary. After the war, the central banks of the liberal powers established dominance over international finance and the economic system. Their policies were hard-nosed in inclination and effect. The edge of rivalry was dulled because central banks, rather than states, dominated these issues, treated each other with consideration, and pursued the interests both of countries and capitalism. That edge sharpened from 1931, when governments took responsibility for such actions, and pursued national economic interests at each other's expense. The United States, Britain, and France all won and lost at various stages of this competition, angering each other, while transferring money and power to Germany. Meanwhile, by liberating capital flows across national borders while linking them all to a fragile version of the gold standard, this system enabled economic stresses which it could not handle.

By fighting over details and blocking each other's actions, the liberal powers weakened each other, cannibalized liberalism, and created instability. Increasingly between 1927-31, tensions arose between them, driven by an attempt to complete the construction of the liberal order during the sharpest period of British decline relative to France and the United States in the interwar era. All British elites attempted to defend their interests, but many accepted that something had to go. The Bank of England, the Foreign Office, the Treasury and liberal internationalists chose to preserve their interests by sacrificing a scapegoat: British sea power. Central banks fought each other. The Bank of England misled and manipulated all comers, while provoking virtual war with French authorities, who pursued gains at Britain's expense. The Federal Reserve Bank, unimpressed by Britain's inability to restore its competitiveness, became condescending toward it. American leaders, thinking Britain simultaneously too strong and too weak, sought to cut it down to size, in finance and fleets. President Herbert Hoover combined the pursuit of hard national interests with liberal internationalism in order to restructure the world around Washington.

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[27] Stephen Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe, The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1976).

In the 1920s, liberal powers were strong, and hopes were high. During 1929-31, all fell down. The guardians of the order assaulted the certainty and power which underpinned the international order. The American challenge to Britain, a classic exercise of power without responsibility, aimed to make London cut its navy to a size Washington could afford to match. It weakened the hegemon, without creating a new boss. The United States is usually described as isolationist and its role tends to be discussed in counterfactual terms, such as what would have happened had the Senate ratified the Treaty of Versailles. Between 1927-34, however, it behaved as a normal power, which had consequences. Above all, it refused to become a hegemon, or co-hegemon, while sabotaging Britain's efforts to act in that role. The United States made hegemony impossible. Attempts to turn the gold standard, the Geneva Disarmament Conference, and the London Naval Conference into capstones for the international order instead broke it. During the 1920s Japan loosely supported the liberal order.

In 1930, naval disarmament and the return to the gold standard, driven by the strongest and most autonomous members of the system, Britain and the United States, hit Japan with unique force. Combined with internal politics in Tokyo, they drove Japan to upset the liberal order, and defect from it. Foundations tottered, as liberals built on them. Their ability to cooperate declined, as each wrecked its credibility and challenged that of the others. The London Naval Conference was a tipping point for British seapower and the international system. The 1931 Invergordon mutiny and Britain's abandonment of the gold standard provoked a flight from the pound and the Royal Navy, challenging the credibility of these matters and therefore also shaking pillars for the international system. The gold standard drove the economic crisis. The Geneva Disarmament Conference, and all systematic efforts to solve the economic crisis, shattered liberal unity, convincing each state that it had been betrayed by the rest. They fostered Anglo-American mistrust of France, although its policies were restrained, leaving Paris alone to defend the system in Europe they all had created. The Depression splintered the world economy, invoking social unrest everywhere, and spurred anti-liberal states toward aggression. It further eroded the armed strength of the liberal powers, while that of every revolutionary group swelled. Together, liberal and anti-liberal states triggered a revolution in power. Revolutionaries armed and cooperated. Liberals disarmed and divided. On their own, either depression or disarmament would have rocked the system; allied, they wrecked it. Armed liberalism died as Hitler rose.

This strange death of liberal power had stranger causes. During the 1920s, liberal states dominated power politics, but liberalism did not triumph. Instead, conservatives collapsed, leaving a vacuum. Liberals failed to fill it. Despite the rhetoric of mutual security, the system was atomized. Atomization began with the collapse of the conservative empires. Liberalism boosted it, through support for national self determination, the divisions between London, Paris and Washington, the contradiction between international cooperation and national competition, the idealism of liberal internationalism, and the ruthlessness of capitalism. Death had no mercy in liberal economics. Liberal internationalism subverted certainty by replacing power with trust, with faith in faith, substituting metaphysics for material. International law was an arbitrary way to create rules for interactions between states and people, which governments remained free to

abandon at will. The gold standard, mutual security and the balance of power were assumed to work naturally, without human intervention. They rested on mystified assumptions. Thus, the Governor of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Ben Strong, wrote,

> Gold has become the money of international payment, partly as a result of custom and mutual understanding, but for other and even more important reasons which cannot be avoided or destroyed by legislation, its qualities as a metal, its commercial value, its beauty, its durability through freedom from corrosion, its great value in proportion to its weight, its distinguishing color and feeling and more important than all, its historical supremacy as a precious metal will, it seems to me, prevent anything like demonetization.[28]

At the high water mark of liberal internationalism, between 1929-33, the rationale for disarmament—to give everyone a substitute for security—prevented honest debate about it. When arguments were phrased as principles, opponents defended not their interests against those of others, but wrong versus right.

The lever for war emerged before Hitler took power. Ideological differences between states confused ideas about system, intentions and power, and thus actions.[29] Divisions between liberal and anti-liberal states gave Hitler an open door to conduct war in peace: the advantage of interior lines in a political and strategic geometry, where Germany could exploit superiority in bilateral relations against many states, with little intervention from third parties. Powers on the peripheries could not cooperate easily against Hitler; many wanted him to shake the system. Any German leader could have exploited these circumstances. None would have done so in the manner of Hitler. The only comparable period in Europe after 1815 occurred when greater internal and external crises (the revolutions of 1848 and the Crimean war of 1853-56) atomized a stronger system, which once had been backed by a preponderance of power. Between 1856-71, as with 1933-39, the system ceased to shelter its members, offering little support to any defender or counterweight to any aggression. The power of the stronger party in any bilateral relationship or the multilateral whole was multiplied. The weak stood alone. Only one power, and not one of the strongest of them, sought to sustain the system. Otto von Bismarck used this opportunity differently than did Hitler. He sought to revolutionize the position of Prussia but only to revise the system itself, behind which he recast a preponderance of power. After 1890, when Kaiser Wilhelm II broke this policy, in the absence of internal or external shocks across Europe, statesmen and the natural working of the system countered him. France and Russia aligned and Britain became an offshore balancer (extended inshore during 1905-14), creating the only period between 1815-1945 when a balance of power actually regulated the European system.

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[28] Strong to Mackenzie, 2.12.16, Benjamin Strong Papers, 1112.6, Federal Reserve Bank of New York Archives, New York.

[29] Ferris, "Image and Accident."

In 1933, the system simultaneously was viable for decades, yet vulnerable to Hitler. Simply by exploiting its natural working, he might pull a lever, which rivals could stop only by acting unnaturally. That lever might not have existed for any other leader, German or otherwise. That Hitler wanted to start a war or overthrow the system is not unusual. Leaders often have such aims. Sometimes, several of them have the means. Hitler's intentions and capabilities, however, combining rare autonomy for his era, with recklessness and reasons unusual for any time, were unique. Internal and external circumstances gave Hitler more initiative than any other leader. Had Stalin tried to start a great war, the system would have united against him; Mussolini dared not take such actions, because he knew Italy would lose. On its own, Japan could pursue revolution only in one country, China. Liberalism and public opinion inhibited liberal democratic powers from starting such a war. Hitler acted as he did because his opponents, caught in the system they inherited, could not change their interactions. They could not effect their intentions. Their actions had perverse consequences. These men were inadequate, but only if most of them had been strong and wise could they have overcome their system and stopped Hitler from squeezing the trigger. Their guilt was collective, not individual. Their problem was the system, and each other. Their significance is measured by how they conditioned Hitler. Mussolini and Stalin enabled him to act, in order to free their revolutions. Chamberlain prevented war from occurring at Munich, when the system first came close to resisting Hitler, and so made it inevitable later. Churchill was the enemy of Hitler. The Second World War stemmed from a synthesis between a unique system and person, each inert on its own, and the whole bigger than both of them-- a compound master cause. Had Hitler died in 1929, there would have been no world war in 1939. With Germany under anyone else, the outcome might have been innocuous. Had a preponderance of power backed the status quo, had the European system worked as it did during the 1890s, or had the liberal powers possessed a hegemon, Hitler would have been checked. Instead, he started war through a fool's mate, which made fools of all.

Review by Patrick Finney, Aberystwyth University

I
t is not surprising that reviews of Zara Steiner's second volume on European international history between the wars have generally been festooned with superlatives. The diptych represents a stupendous achievement, and this second instalment maintains the superb scholarly standards that hallmarked the first. This is truly a gargantuan work, offering the most detailed, richly textured and wide-ranging account of the origins of the Second World War in Europe currently available. It is a magisterial treatment, the culmination of a long career immersed in the history, the archives and the historiography of the inter-war period. The scale and scope is almost breathtaking, as the text ranges over more than a thousand pages, a triumph of organisation and controlled exposition. Steiner's bibliography is formidable, her prose is crisp and lucid and her erudition prodigious. It is absolutely essential reading for historians of the inter-war period and will be a key reference point in the literature for decades to come.

Adolph Hitler lies at the heart of the story: "this was his war," Steiner concludes (1057). The tentative reconstruction of the international system essayed in the 1920s – which was the subject of her first volume – had been derailed by the onset of the Great Depression.[1] More specifically, however, "the demise of the Weimar republic and the triumph of Hitler proved the motor force of destructive systemic change" (1043). Hitler came to power in 1933 with a set of clear objectives that wererooted in his Social Darwinist political philosophy; Germany would seek to secure continental and then global domination, *via* a war with Soviet Russia to secure 'living space' in the east and a decisive vanquishing of the Jewish enemy. Despite the fixity of these goals, , and conscious that he would have to take account of internal and external contingencies and constraints, Hitler had no predetermined blueprint for action; hence he "was an opportunist who knew where he was going" (13). Yet while this ensured that the road to war was a twisted one, war was always the aim of his policy. "It was only through war that the trauma of … defeat could be overcome and that Hitler could achieve the position of the Reich to which it was entitled" (863). Too often Hitler's democratic opponents failed to realise that far from sharing their abhorrence of violence, war for him "was the ultimate goal of all politics and the primal condition of life" (823).

The relationship central to European international politics in the 1930s was that between Hitler and the leaders of Great Britain and France. In general, the latter lamentably yielded the initiative to Hitler. Of course, there were numerous factors constraining their freedom of action and inhibiting the adoption of a robust policy towards Germany, including the oppressive memory of the slaughter in the trenches in the First World War, post-Depression economic weakness, financial orthodoxy, incipient imperial over-stretch and ideological divisions at home. Yet this did not mean that the policies they adopted were inevitable or correct, and it cannot excuse their fundamental misreading of Hitler's intentions. British military planners concluded in 1938 that war over Czechoslovakia was

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[1] Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). I reviewed this first volume in *Rethinking History* 12:1 (2008): 142-7.

unthinkable, but in fact the military balance was then more favourable for the British and French than it was a year later, given German unpreparedness. Moreover, while the Munich settlement in one sense represented a victory for British premier Neville Chamberlain – in that war was averted as Hitler was compelled to accept his ostensible goals and forsake his actual ones – the Germans made much better use of the time gained.

From Munich, Hitler learned the lesson that he must never again allow himself to be constrained by diplomatic consultation and compromise: "the Führer was determined on his war and would not endure a second Munich" (645). Yet Chamberlain came away convinced that he had brought a general European settlement closer and that he had established a personal relationship of trust with Hitler. Hence while he continued his dual policy of rearmament and conciliation, he sought to limit the former, partly out of financial considerations but also to avoid antagonising Hitler. True, post-Munich the Anglo-French relationship became closer and the two nations made significant steps forward in the adoption of a more robust deterrence policy, especially after the annexation of Bohemia-Moravia in March 1939. Yet here Chamberlain lagged far behind his own public opinion and many of his colleagues, and also behind the French who were much less encumbered by illusions. In September 1939, as Hitler determined to press on with his war against Poland, the British and French finally took up the gauntlet and declared war to forestall German domination of the continent. Yet even though Hitler did not precipitate quite the war he had expected – Anglo-French resolve surprised him – it is hard to give the British and French much credit for their management of the Nazi challenge. "Even given what was known, Chamberlain could have taken a stronger line. If war had come in 1938, it is highly doubtful whether Germany would have achieved the kind of victory won in 1940" (1053).

This sketch of course seriously underplays the breadth and sophistication of Steiner's treatment. She explores the diplomacy of the whole period from 1933 and charts the long unravelling of the Versailles-Locarno settlement. So although she devotes considerable attention to Munich and the last twelve months of peace – for this was when the "critical shifts" (1052) occurred – the earlier years are certainly not neglected. She deals adroitly with the Ethiopian crisis which "irreparably damaged the League of Nations" (134) and has a superb long chapter on the domestic and international aspects of the Spanish Civil War. The roles of other leading great powers, and especially Benito Mussolini's Italy and Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union, are carefully delineated, but Steiner does not ignore the lesser players on the continent – she is particularly good, for example, on the dilemmas facing the small states of South Eastern Europe as they became enmeshed in Nazi economic and political expansionism. Although the predominant focus is, naturally, upon Europe, there are also sections dealing with the international crisis in the Far East, and tracing the interconnections between developments in the two hemispheres. She also steps outside her chronological framework from time to time to explore thematic issues such as the demise of internationalism. Finally, the text is accompanied by a formidable array of maps and statistical tables, and a glossary of key actors and a chronology, which will prove immensely useful to readers.

There is much more that could be said to explicate Steiner's argument in detail or critique this or that aspect of it. But in the remainder of this review I would like instead to reflect on

some of the larger issues that the book raises about the state of the historiography of this subject and, more generally, the current state of the art in international history.

Where does Steiner take us in terms of our broader understanding of the origins of the Second World War? While she has produced a vast and detailed panorama of the road to war, with myriad pungent judgements and nuanced formulations, there is not a great deal here that is fundamentally novel in interpretive terms or which will really surprise informed readers. It is telling, for example, that the final paragraph of her conclusion quotes and endorses Donald Watt's much earlier conclusion - from his 1989 masterwork *How War Came* - that "what is so extraordinary in the events which led up to the outbreak of the Second World War is that Hitler's will for war was able to overcome the reluctance with which everybody else approached it" (1057).[2] Her characterisation of Nazi foreign policy is very much in line with an established consensus, synthesising aspects of both 'intentionalism' and 'functionalism' but insisting on the over-riding importance of ideology. Similarly, her view of Neville Chamberlain is trenchantly 'counter-revisionist,' largely following the interpretation advanced by R. A. C. Parker in his landmark 1993 study.[3] This is emphatically not to cavil at her achievement, which is precisely to have synthesised a massive literature from several decades – no mean technical feat - in order to provide an authoritative restatement of the current orthodoxy. It is unfortunate that 'synthesis' is so often deployed as a snide pejorative term, since a text such as this performs an invaluable scholarly service and is certainly preferable to one advancing spurious or tendentious claims to novelty. Yet every text has the vices of its virtues. Steiner's work will inevitably draw comparisons with her illustrious forerunner A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*, and while hers will serve as a reliable reference point for a long time to come, it does not set a new agenda through a provocative reframing of the subject or the posing of radically novel questions.[4]

Despite her mastery of the latest historiography, there are also certain features of Steiner's account that are a little dated, such as her decision to end the story in September 1939. Taylor's selection of this as his terminal point in his classic treatment was long ago condemned as Anglo-centric and Euro-centric.[5] Now, unlike Taylor's account, Steiner's is explicitly limited to the European dimensions of the conflict (as indicated by its sub-title and its location in the *Oxford History of Modern Europe* series) and in that respect the same charge cannot stand. Yet this foreclosing does have unfortunate interpretive consequences. On the one hand, given Steiner's emphasis on the centrality of Nazi ideology, and the twin

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[2] Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 610.

[3] R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

[4] A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 1963 rev. edn).

[5] Edward Ingram, "Epilogue: A Patriot for Me," in Gordon Martel (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: The A. J. P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-Five Years* (London: Routledge, 1986), 244-58.

obsessions of race and space, it is curious to conclude in 1939 as it was in the subsequent two years that this essence was fully revealed.[6] Similarly, 'counter-revisionists' have claimed that Chamberlain's continued machinations for appeasement during the Phoney War strengthen their critique. On the other hand, it was in the period culminating in December 1941 that the conflict became truly global. Steiner herself insists on the escalating inter-relationship between the European and Far Eastern theatres, and wants to locate her account within a longer story of global transition ("Europe would never again be at the centre of world politics"1067), so it is equally strange that she should stop before these processes too were consummated. To be fair, any attempt to narrate the story of European international relations in this period will face significant challenges of selectivity in terms of how much wider a global context to include, and even as it is, this text is a behemoth. Moreover, Steiner is clearly conscious of the issue, admitting in her prologue that she might have dealt more extensively with the European empires and the United States. Yet there lingers a sense in which her traditional framing does not quite fit with her core assumptions and the problem is not entirely defused by the inclusion of an epilogue dealing with 1939-1941 and the frank admission that the chosen end point is "unsatisfactory and inconclusive" (2).

What does this book tell us more generally about the writing of international history today? In her prologue Steiner explains that she has "tried to write 'international history' and not restrict [her] narrative to the exchanges between foreign ministries" (3); this is only to be expected as she was one of the pioneers of the broadening of the field in the 1960s and 1970s that saw narrow 'diplomatic history' (in the British sense of the term) transformed into a more thematically expansive 'international history'. So, while she certainly does reconstruct the diplomatic exchanges in painstaking detail, she also attempts to give due weight to the significance of domestic political determinants, economics and finance, intelligence, propaganda, and military and strategic factors. Other reviewers have been divided over her success in this regard. Richard Evans, for example, declared that the book was "as impressive in its breadth as it is in its depth, covering economic developments and relations, arms production, diplomatic negotiations, politics, and war with equal authority."[7] Yet Vernon Bogdanor lamented that it was "old-fashioned international history, barely discussing the ideological and sociological forces lying behind diplomacy." It

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[6] This point was made some time ago in P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (London: Longman, 1986), 268-9.

[7] Richard J. Evans, "The Mistakes," *The New Republic*, 1 September 2011, http://www.tnr.com/book/review/the-triumph-dark-zara-steiner. Evans praises the book highly but also points out that it contains a considerable number of factual errors, grammatical confusions and solecisms that should ideally be eliminated before any paperback reprint. Of course, even the most careful proof-reading is probably not going to eliminate all errors in a work of this scale, but given the authoritative mien of the book as a whole the ones that remain are especially noticeable and jarring. I would add that there are some odd decisions about chapterisation (see, for example, the rather anomalous Part B in chapter 6).

is "all foreground; there is far too little background."[8] Evidently, much depends here on the yardstick being employed for judgement.

Directly after stating the aspiration quoted above, Steiner actually admits that her account remains very state-centric and focused on the agency of elite decision-makers; yet she argues that this is simply a reflection of the realities of international politics in the 1930s, when traditional power politics resurged. The rise of the revisionist powers relegated internationalist currents and non-state actors to the margins, and precipitated a revival of pre-First World War diplomatic practices: "by the end of the 1930s, bi-lateral treaties, alliances, and arms races dominate the scene. ... [R]earmament, arms races, and alliances were the common diplomatic currency of 1939" (3-4). This raises interesting questions about the relative validity and applicability of traditional, state-centric approaches as against those focusing on transnational processes, internationalism and non-state actors. Are the latter perennial phenomena, consistent focus on which might fundamentally recast our understandings of international history as a whole, or are they of more restricted pertinence, important at certain select conjunctures but otherwise irrelevant?[9] On the one hand, Steiner's claim that in the 1930s rampant power politics cast the League of Nations and internationalist forces into abeyance seems self-evident. Yet on the other, as sophisticated historians we know that the past cannot dictate the stories that are told about it. Shifting disciplinary fashions, generational change, and new sensitivities arising from observation of contemporary international politics generate an inexhaustible capacity for historians to go back to the past and return bearing entirely new accounts. So while Steiner's traditionally-focused narrative is powerful and important, this does not mean that other stories cannot be told by historians operating with different organising principles and concerns.

Steiner's account of the nature and dynamics of policy-making also speaks in interesting ways to recent work unpicking the role of discourses of race, class, gender and identity in foreign relations. First, she insists that this was an age of ideology where incompatible belief systems palpably mattered: "even when combined with *realpolitik* policies, ideological assumptions affected the way statesmen and their advisors saw the world about them ... Core beliefs, not only about the nature of international politics but also about the human condition, to an important extent created reality as it was perceived by statesmen ..." (1048). In some respects this claim is neither remarkable nor novel, but Steiner – second – yokes it explicitly to a rejection of 'realist' theorising that views policy-makers as "rational actors, aware of their external environment and making strategic decisions about how to survive in it" (1049). One lesson of the 1930s is that it is impossible to argue that "the structure of the international system determines the behaviour of states, whether seeking to protect their security or aiming at hegemony in order to survive"

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[8] Vernon Bogdanor, "Hitler's Willing Executioners," *The New Statesman*, 18 November 2010, http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2010/11/war-history-hitler-british.

[9] Of course, posing this as an 'either/or' question may be somewhat misleading in so far as the issue is rather about the balance to be struck between the two.

(1049). Domestic determinants – especially belief systems, rooted in cultural specificities and historical experience – also mattered enormously. Moreover, "room must be left for the irrational and the accidental, which produce unforeseen and inexplicable consequences" (1050). Consequently - and third - in tracing the twists and turns of policy in the 1930s, Steiner endeavours to remain sensitive to the formation and consequences of the *mentalités* of her protagonists, and how "personalities, upbringing, education, and beliefs" (1051) fed into the misunderstandings and misperceptions of the decade. The insightful pen portraits she offers, and the intimate understanding she demonstrates of the lives and attitudes of leading policy-makers, testify to her assumption that "personality, beliefs, national and racial stereotypes, and historical experience all entered into the diplomatic equation" (1048-9).

'Culturalist' international historians might well agree with a great deal of this manifesto. But by the same token, it perhaps lends force to the argument of their critics that 'culturalism' is itself "not actually very novel" because it adds little to what sophisticated mainstream practitioners such as Steiner already do.[10] Does 'culturalism' add anything to existing work on 'mental maps' and 'unspoken assumptions' except modish and pretentious jargon? Again, judgement here is dependent upon vantage point, but it has always seemed to me that 'culturalists' obviously do take the roots of policy within broader systems of meaning more seriously than 'mainstream' historians, exploring them more extensively and conceptualising them more rigorously. This view is not seriously shaken by the approach that Steiner takes in this text. The way in which she delineates the context of policy-making and the personalities involved is, to be sure, superb on its own terms, but it does not have the depth or intensity of cognate 'culturalist' work. This is an issue of focus, linked to aesthetic preferences and theoretical investments: to put it crudely, Steiner seems interested in constructing a narrative of events and then working backwards from it in order to provide a more detailed background to policy-making; 'culturalists', animated by a conviction about the constitutive power of discourse, rather seek to place systems of meaning at the heart of their account and to proceed from there to the narrative. So while Steiner certainly touches on a wide range of ideational factors she does not explore them as fulsomely and explicitly as 'culturalists' would, and some – such as gender – are not really broached at all. She makes a great deal of the fallacies of liberal thinking in Britain and its inability to come to terms with the challenge of Nazism, but this worldview is adumbrated rather than fully elaborated. Similarly, while her account is far from bloodless, there is considerable distance between it and 'culturalist' work on the affective dimensions of international politics – on lived experience, emotions and the interface between public and private - that has been pioneered by Frank Costigliola.[11]

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[10] Quote from David Reynolds, "International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch," *Cultural and Social History* 3:1 (2006): 87.

[11] For example, Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

It might seem that these observations simply amount to criticising Steiner for not writing a different book. Yet there is an important larger point here about how the historiography of this subject might be moved forward onto new terrain. Amongst the surest ways of generating historiographical innovation are the deployment of new conceptual tools and inter-disciplinary borrowing – bringing diverse literatures into unwonted conversation; and there would seem to be manifest mileage in applying the tools, conceptual apparatus and interpretive concerns of 'culturalism' more systematically to the history of this period.

What exactly this might entail in detail, and where it might take the subject, obviously remains to be seen. Steiner's book, however, prompts a few preliminary suggestions. One persistent problem in the historiography of this subject has been how to reconcile the diplomatic history of Nazi foreign policy with the history of the Holocaust.[12] While 'intentionalists' long ago recognised the motive power of Hitler's anti-Semitism, international history narratives of the 1930s have nonetheless tended to marginalise it in practice by their focus on diplomatic manoeuvrings, geopolitical calculation and power politics. Steiner skirts this danger, not only by her unusually fulsome insistence on the anti-Semitic essence of Nazism but also by dedicating a chapter to the persecution of the Jews and the dilatory response of the international community to their plight. There is, however, more that could be done. A recent edited collection on the origins of the war included an essay by Mark Levene on the 'Jewish question' between the wars which located the incipient Holocaust in broader systems of liberal antipathy to ethnic difference and the international political management of ethnic and racial minorities.[13] Further exploration of this would be most welcome, and it would be facilitated by forging closer connections with the flourishing contemporary literature on the Holocaust and genocide pioneered by Levene himself, Donald Bloxham, A. Dirk Moses and others.[14] Integrating the insights of international history and comparative genocide studies could prove enormously fruitful.

Similarly rewarding would be a more serious engagement with the cultural history work on 'perpetration' by Alon Confino and Dan Stone that is opening up important new ways of thinking about the roots of the Holocaust within the Nazi worldview.[15] International historians already recognise the significance of Nazi Jew-hatred in principle, but if the

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[12] I have discussed this elsewhere: Patrick Finney, *Remembering the Road to World War Two: International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 72-109.

[13] Mark Levene, 'The "Jewish Question" and its Impact on International Affairs, 1914-39', in Frank McDonough (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War: An International Perspective* (London: Continuum, 2011), 342-59. Despite the excellence of some of the individual essays, this collection fails to deliver on its promise to offer a radical reassessment of the subject.

[14] See, for example, Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[15] For an overview, see Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 245-83.

Second World War really was at heart for the Nazis "an apocalyptic battle against their enemy," designed to realise the "fantasy" of "a world without Jews," then we should probably devote more attention to it in practice.[16] Certainly, and at the very least, reading this work will profitably enlarge our understandings of the nature and dynamics of Nazi ideology.

Much of this review has been concerned with drawing attention to the limits of what Steiner has done and suggesting ways to move the historiography of the subject beyond where she has taken it. I want to conclude, however, by underlining that it is a tribute to her book that it can trigger such large-scale and wide-ranging reflections, not only on its specific subject but also on the practice of international history itself. This book is a virtuoso achievement, wise, pithy, measured and an accomplishment of a scale and kind that few historians could hope to match in their lifetimes. It is essential reading for historians of the period.

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[16] Alon Confino, "A World Without Jews: Interpreting the Holocaust," *German History* 27:4 (2009): 531-59, quotes at 549.

Review by Stacie Goddard, Wellesley College

T here is no doubt that Zara Steiner's two-volume set on the creation of collective security institutions in the 1920s, their subsequent collapse, the rise of Adolph Hitler and coming of World War II is a masterpiece. If a political scientist were to read one work on this period, I would place Steiner's books at the top of the list—not only do they reflect decades of meticulous research, they are also exceedingly well-written and a pleasure to read.

And international relations theorists should read these books, not only because they provide a comprehensive overview of a significant period in world history, but because Steiner's arguments have serious implications for our understanding of World War II and for international relations theory more generally. In the discussion below I focus particularly on British policy in the period surrounding Munich and directly after. This approach admittedly, does a bit of violence to Steiner's work: Steiner's narrative is expansive, both temporally and geographically; it is a true international history. But narrowing the discussion has the benefit of highlighting issues of particular concern to international relations scholars, as well as making it possible to discuss thousands of pages of history in just a few paragraphs.

I will address three questions.   First, in light of Steiner's arguments, what hypotheses should political scientists abandon: if we accept Steiner's narrative, what arguments now accepted as plausible should no longer be considered sustainable? Second, what puzzles should political scientists considering revisiting? In what ways does Steiner's work shed new light on old debates? Finally, what new questions does Steiner's work propose for international relations theorists? While World War II, particularly the question of appeasement, is well-worn ground, these volumes demonstrate that there are still significant unaddressed puzzles surrounding the causes of World War II that should be of interest to international relations theorists and historians alike.

First, if we take Steiner's claims seriously, then scholars cannot reduce Britain's decision to appease Hitler to assessments about the military balance of power, Britain's dire economic situation, or even domestic public opinion. This has significant implications for debates in security studies, particularly for recent work that has stressed the strategic sources of appeasement. Jack Levy and Norrin Ripsman, for example, see appeasement as a strategy of 'buying time,' an attempt to build up enough military and economic resources to face the German menace and inevitable war. Other suggest that appeasement was a rational response to uncertainty in the international system, that British leaders were 'hedging,' hoping to avoid conflict, but making sure they were prepared if major power war came.[1] In

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[1] See for example Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s," *International Security* 33:2 (Fall 2008): 148-181; Ripsman and Levy, "The Preventive War that Never Happened: Britain, France, and the Rise of Germany in the 1930s," *Security Studies* 16:1 (January 2007): 32-67; John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 185. Christopher Layne, "Security Studies and the Use of History: Neville Chamberlain's Grand Strategy Revisited," *Security Studies* 17:3 (2008): 397-437.

general, these political scientists draw from a revisionist school of appeasement historiography, which argues that British foreign policy towards Germany was rational given the economic, military, and domestic constraints.[2] Economically, Britain was still recovering from the international depression of the 1930s, and militarily, "the fighting strength of the British Empire was weaker in relation to its potential enemies than at any time since 1779."[3] The British could do nothing to stop German rearmament, the remilitarization of the Rhineland, and expansion into Czechoslovakia. The best they could hope for were temporary agreements, which were not meant to secure a lasting peace, but to postpone the inevitable conflict until the British were ready to fight.

Steiner, however, is unequivocal in her position that Neville Chamberlain believed peace with Hitler was possible, and that this conviction, not strategic assessments, underpinned British appeasement policy. From the moment Chamberlain took office as Prime Minister, he approached Hitler with the belief that the Nazi leader was interested in a "comprehensive settlement," (329) and he thus "searched for ways to establish 'good relations' in order to persuade the Fuhrer to be a 'good European'. In other words, Chamberlain hoped to convince Hitler to use peaceful means to achieve his ambitions…" (335). Chamberlain was not alone in his assessment. No one, Steiner argues, "questioned the need for a fresh start with the Germans," and most thought a general peace settlement was possible, indeed probable (336). It was the belief that Germany could be brought back into the "comity of nations" that led Chamberlain to argue against expanding and accelerating Britain's anemic rearmament program (698). It was Chamberlain's conviction that Hitler could be made a good European that led him to eschew alliances, lest Germany feel it was being encircled (436).

This is not to say that Chamberlain or his cabinet were blind to Germany's revisionist intentions, but it is to say that appeasement's foundation came, not from strategic concerns, but from the belief that Hitler could be sated and Germany could be folded into Europe's collective security institutions. It was this assumption that guided Chamberlain's approach to Germany even at the height of the Munich crisis. While it is true that Chamberlain pointed to Germany's perceived strategic superiority, particularly in the air, to justify his appeasement policy, Steiner notes that "[w]hile Chamberlain was not fundamentally motivated by strategic factors, the emphasis on British unpreparedness for such a war, and German strength provided strong support for the policies he intended to adopt…but even had British rearmament been further advanced, Chamberlain would have opted for a diplomatic rather than a coercive solution to the Czech crisis" (605). Chamberlain, in other words, "did not go to Munich to win time for rearmament; he went to prevent war and to lay the basis for a future continental peace" (648).

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[2] For a useful overview of the historiography of British grand strategy, see Patrick Finney, "The Romance of Decline: the Historiography of Appeasement and British National identity," *Electronic Journal of International History*.

[3] Paul M. Kennedy, *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945* (George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 99-100.

Second, Steiner's work suggests that international relations theorists should revisit an old puzzle, and ask what the Munich crisis suggests about the process of deterrence in international politics. Under what conditions do attempts to dissuade action through threats of force succeed or fail, and how do successful deterrent efforts prevent war? Much has been written about the British failure to deter Germany during the Munich crisis, with scholars basically split over whether the failure was born of capability (Britain's inability to project power onto the Continent) or credibility (Britain's reluctance to project power onto the Continent).[4] Steiner's work, however, raises a different question: was Munich a deterrence failure at all? For international relations theorists, the idea that Munich was a deterrence success might seem preposterous, given that Britain and France basically gave Hitler what he demanded in Czechoslovakia, and in light of Hitler's subsequent actions in Prague and Poland.

Yet the Munich crisis itself reads as a textbook case of successful deterrence. Steiner's account makes clear that, as much as Chamberlain hoped and believed a peaceful settlement with Hitler was possible, he and his Cabinet were resigned to war if Hitler would not agree to a negotiated settlement over Czechoslovakia. After Hitler rejected British and French terms at Godesberg, in September 1938, the British warned Hitler that Britain and its allies would respond to an invasion of Czechoslovakia with force. Faced with opposition from his advisors, a last-minute defection by Benito Mussolini, and a public reluctant to embark on an unnecessary war, Hitler was cowed: he "bowed to the Anglo-French threat that they would move against Germany if Hitler's forces crossed the Sudeten frontier" (644). Paradoxically, it was precisely because deterrence worked that Hitler became even more determined to get the war he desired. "Munich was decisive for Hitler," Steiner writes. "He was determined never again to be deterred by others from his decision to fight" (646). After Munich, Hitler would embark on a propaganda campaign to mobilize the Germans for war, and swore never again to negotiate over Germany's demands.

In other words, what seemed a case of successful deterrence ultimately increased the likelihood of conflict over time. This observation should raise a host of new questions about deterrence for international relations theorists. Under what conditions does deterrence in the short-term fail to prevent conflict later on? Is the case of Munich unique, best explained by Hitler's insatiable appetite for destruction, or does it shed new light on old questions about deterrence and war? Recasting the vision of Munich as only a case of appeasement, and seeing it as a fascinating case of deterrence, could thus prove fruitful ground for future security studies scholarship.

Finally, Steiner's work suggests new puzzles for international relations theorists. Why is it, most notably, that Chamberlain believed Hitler could be sated, that his demands could be accommodated within the existing international order? Steiner, as I read her, is not asking us to return to the traditional understanding of British foreign policy, in which Chamberlain is portrayed as a naïve dupe, completely blind to Hitler's revisionist demands.

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[4] See e.g., Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

But Steiner is vague as to how one might explain Chamberlain's fundamental belief that Germany could be brought into a general European settlement. At times, she seems to suggest that the answer lies in Chamberlain's personality—his arrogant belief in his acuity as a statesman, his overwhelming confidence that he could bring peace to Europe once and for all. Although there is no doubt that Chamberlain's foibles play a role in his decision-making process, this explanation seems less than satisfying. After all, as Steiner herself stresses, it was not just Chamberlain but a majority of the British government and public that believed a peaceful settlement with Nazi Germany was possible.

Towards the end of her book, Steiner offers a different and intriguing explanation. British appeasement, she argues, was shaped by "the ideological assumptions of those in power. Core beliefs, not only about the nature of international politics but also about the human condition, to an important extent created reality as it was perceived by statesmen who enjoyed remarkable autonomy in deciding the most important issues of the time" (1048). Chamberlain and others were not naïve, but their understandings of Hitler's intentions were informed by a shared frame of reference, one that stressed the promise of collective security, and a Whiggish faith that Germany's grievances could be addressed through liberal institutions.[5] This observation, I think, suggests promising avenues for new international relations scholarship. Where, exactly, do such collective beliefs come from? Did this shared frame of reference stem from British participation in international institutions, or was it rooted more in British culture, and its domestic experience with liberal institutions?

And finally, what explains the *change* in British collective beliefs after the Munich crisis. After Munich, the British came to see Germany as seeking not the accommodation of its limited demands for self-determination, but complete domination of the European continent. It was this change in the understanding of Hitler's intentions, Steiner suggests, that drove massive shifts in British diplomatic and military strategy. In the five months following the Munich crisis, the British expedited and expanded their rearmament program, strengthened their alliance with France and sought out an alliance with the Soviet Union, and mobilized their public behind a national service campaign. The British, in short, abandoned their grand strategy of appeasement, and embraced a policy of confronting the German state.

Yet, why did British beliefs change? Steiner is clear that this cannot be attributed to changes in the strategic balance, nor does she seem to think that new intelligence drove this shift—it was not new intelligence *per se*, but the fact that intelligence was now filtered through this new frame of domination, that informed the change in British policy. Steiner suggests, but does not fully explore, potential reasons for this change in collective beliefs: Hitler's violent rhetoric in his propaganda campaign following Munich; British horror over the vicious attacks of *Kristallnacht*. International relations scholars should take up this question of British policy transformation, not only to answer a key puzzle of diplomatic

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[5] See e.g., Keith Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006)

history, but to develop more general theories of when and how collective beliefs might change, and how this affects grand strategy.

On occasion, international relations theorists have been charged with using, even abusing, history in service of their own ends. Steiner's work is so rich, so expansive, and so full of fascinating propositions, that there is no doubt it will be of significant use to international relations theorists. Hopefully we will be able to build productively off of her insights, without committing too much abuse in the process.

Review by Talbot C. Imlay, Université Laval

*T*he Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933-1939* is a remarkable achievement. The second instalment of a two-volume history of European international relations during the inter-war period, *The Triumph of the Dark* is the product of several decades of research, reading, personal encounters and reflection on Zara Steiner's part. Indeed, anyone who works on the period and who has met Steiner has almost certainly been subject to a friendly interrogation. The result is a study that will appeal to specialists and non-specialists. For the latter, the two volumes will doubtlessly become an indispensable reference work, offering not only a wealth of information but also a broader understanding of the people, events and dynamics of the inter-war years. They will be cited in the bibliographies of monographs, articles and term papers for decades to come. Specialists, meanwhile, will come away from the two volumes with a profound admiration (and perhaps some jealousy) for the scope of the project – for Steiner's incomparable familiarity with the historiography; for the broad palette of actors, countries and factors she deftly deploys; and for her ability to weave together the numerous strands into such a readable narrative. To be sure, as is always the case with such an ambitious work, specialists will sometimes disagree with her judgments and emphases. But everyone, I suspect, will agree that *The Triumph of the Dark* and its predecessor, *The Lights that Failed*, are magisterial.[1]

Given their magisterial quality, a standard review of the two volumes risks becoming a dithyramb. And so I propose to consider a question which the two volumes, I think, indirectly raise: where do we go from here? There is certainly more work to be done on the political, military, economic and strategic policies of the various powers, and scholars will no doubt continue to probe these subjects, using new and under-exploited archives or by re-examining well-known sources. To take the case of France, the vast military archives at the Château de Vincennes have only been partially plumbed and doubtlessly still contain a few surprises. And there are always the Soviet archives to which access remains limited. Perhaps in a half-century from now a sufficient body of new scholarship will exist to justify a new synthesis on the scale of Steiner's.

But perhaps not. Predicting the future is a risky business, but it is possible that the two volumes will pass the test of extended time. Their very solidity will make them difficult to replace. But part of the reason might also be found in the cogency of the general narrative that Steiner's presents: the manifold difficulties of the post-war years, the groping for stability during the mid-to-late 1920s, the growing domestic and international tensions exacerbated by the economic crisis during the 'hinge years'; the Nazi seizure of power in Germany and the emerging menace of war; the hesitant and confused responses of Britain and France during the mid-to-late 1930s; and the final scramble into war in 1938-1939.

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[1] Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Obviously, such a sketch cannot do justice to the richness of the narrative in Steiner's two volumes. But thanks in no small part to Zara Steiner, the larger narrative is firmly and convincingly established.

This being so, it is perhaps worth asking if more detailed studies are likely to alter this narrative. I suspect not. We will certainly learn more, but will it not be largely a matter of filling in small holes? To take the example of the origins of the First World War, can we reasonably expect anything approaching a Fritz Fischer type thesis, one that forces us to reconsider the way we think about the international history of the period and especially the 1930s.[2] One might answer that paradigm shifts of this type are not what drives professional history. What matters more is the steady accumulation of knowledge – an accumulation that fuels the careful development of historiography. Evolution and not revolution is the formula. Perhaps. But it is also possible that a situation of diminishing returns will set in, leading in turn to the growing neglect of a period as scholars turn their attention elsewhere.

Where, then, might we look for contributions that possess the potential to alter our overall understanding of the international history of the inter-war years – assuming, of course, that such a search is a worthy enterprise? In what follows I will discuss three possibilities. My comments are meant to be suggestive, a means of stimulating discussion; they are not confident pronouncements about what other scholars should be doing.

A first possibility is related to work in political science/international relations. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the inter-war period among IR scholars, particularly those adopting a self-defined neo-classical realist perspective.[3] These scholars use the interwar period (and the 1930s in particular) as a laboratory to examine various theories concerning the balance of power, preventive war and ideas or ideology as a source of conflict. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this. Yet testing various political science theories and propositions is not something that most historians are likely to find very appealing. The instrumentalist thrust of the endeavour contradicts the ethos if not always the practice of professional history, which is to strive *not* to impose interpretations on the evidence. Even if this ethos or stance is in theory illusory, it does have some practical effects, among them a general suspicion of theory-driven scholarship.

But this does not mean that political science/IR has nothing to offer. How might the international history of the inter-war period benefit from the work of political science/IR? The latter is an immense field, with many sub-fields and specializations. Rather than try to do justice to this variety, which would require a familiarity with the specialist debates that I lack, I will limit my comments to what I see as the three broad schools or perspectives in

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[2] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's War Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967).

[3] For example, see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman and Steven E. Lobell, eds., *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

IR: realism, institutionalism and constructivism. Although each perspective houses a wide variety of different approaches, each one is also united by similar views of what drives international politics.

For realists it is power: its distribution, relative weight and methods of application. This focus lends it an obvious pertinence because power is always important in international politics. All states are not the same: the United States is far more powerful than Holland and this difference has repercussions in a variety of policy domains. Had the United States been willing after 1918 to play the activist role it did after 1945 (or perhaps 1947), the course of international history during the 1920s and 1930s would surely have been different.

That said, I think the potential of a realist perspective for reframing the international history of the interwar period is limited. One reason is that it has been used before. Even if perhaps not as rigorously or as explicitly as political scientists would like, there are any number of studies that place military and economic power at the centre of their analysis. Indeed, Steiner's two volumes accord a prominent role to these factors. But another and more important reason is that the general tendency of realism to downplay intentions and ideology arguably limits its utility. To take the case of Nazi Germany, in some ways power was decisive: Nazi Germany lost the war because it was over-powered by a global coalition that dwarfed it in terms of economic resources. And yet, as Adam Tooze has recently argued, Nazi Germany's relative economic weakness was evident at the time for those who wished to see it.[4] Germany simply did not possess the resource base needed to win a European and then global war. This meant that from the beginning the entire enterprise amounted to an immense and lop-sided gamble, a reality that Nazi Germany's initial and stunning military successes obscured for a time. From a realist perspective, in other words, Germany should never have embarked on a war of conquest. And yet it did.

What of an institutionalist (or liberal-institutionalist) perspective? For institutionalists, formal and informal institutions are created in order to reduce the obstacles to cooperation: through a variety of mechanisms they encourage trust and confidence among potential partners, thereby allowing common interests to emerge and develop. This perspective is potentially useful for the 1920s and the efforts to construct a stable and peaceful international order. The purpose of the League of Nations and its associated organizations such as the International Labour Organization was to foster international cooperation in the security, economic and labour realms among others. But in order to work institutions require a minimum of goodwill between members. There must be some shared desire to overcome the obstacles to cooperation, however difficult this may be in practice. And this is precisely what was lacking in the 1930s, when Europe grew increasingly divided between competing democratic, fascist/Nazi and communist regimes.

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[4] Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

At a broader level, liberal institutionalists draw attention to the inter-war period as one which experienced a marked decline in the ties and connections between states, particularly but not solely in the economic-commercial realm. Indeed, the inter-war period appears as an exception, located between the pre-1914 years, which are often portrayed as an initial era of globalization, and the quarter century or so after 1945, which has been labelled "embedded liberalism" to designate a time of prudent and calibrated economic liberalization.[5] That the inter-war period stands apart is certainly interesting, but perhaps not only for the reasons given by liberal institutionalists. The period also saw the strengthening of political-economic blocs across the globe in which the internal growth of exchanges between members was obscured by (and perhaps even compensated for) the drop in global exchanges. What the developments of international and inter-continental blocs suggests – and what Mark Mazower's recent work points to[6] – is the possibility of alternative international orders to the liberal capitalist one embodied in Wilsonianism. Perhaps the inter-war period – and interwar international history – needs to be seen not as an interregnum on the route towards the liberal, globalized world of the late twentieth century but as a search for and partial experiment in other ways of organizing international relations. Just as importantly, if political leaders and leading officials played a role in developing these alternatives, so too did a host of other state and non-state actors.

This final broad perspective is constructivist. Generally speaking, constructivists are interested in how actors collectively imagine and therefore make/construct the world around them. This process involves more than simply responding to external and objective conditions. More concretely, they investigate the rules, norms, practices and meanings that govern international politics and that make the latter something other than the dangerously anarchic world of the realists or the rationally-negotiated one of the institutionalists. In some ways, constructivists are the closest to historians. The attention they pay to social and cultural factors, for example, is something many historians would find familiar. The same can be said for the idea that the definition of national interests is not a given but the product of negotiation and contestation between various state and non-state actors. For a period as ideologically charged as the 1930s, constructivism appears to be better equipped to capture the dynamics at work than does its competitors.

Constructivism, however, arguably suffers from a normative bias. Many constructivists appear to want the world to be a different and better place, and this desire creeps into their analysis. For constructivists, contact and communication help to forge – or construct – commonalities or a sense of "we-ness" across national and other borders. The ultimate ideal is the forging of one world, even if reality obviously falls short. Despite their differences, together states (or those speaking in the name) can imagine and therefore build a better practice of international relations. There were certainly many people who

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[5] John G. Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic System," *International Organization* 36:2 (1982): 379-415.

[6] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

thought or at least hoped that this was so during the inter-war years. One only has to think of the proliferation of pacifist groups during the 1920s. But there were also many people and groups who had other ideas about 'we-ness', ideas that were notably exclusionary. To be sure, these people and groups came in vastly different guises, ranging from proponents of a stronger British empire/commonwealth to champions of more ethnic or race-based collectivities. But whatever their differences, these people and groups sought to recast not only national but also international politics. Just an importantly, their projects often entailed a rejection of liberal internationalism and the more inter-connected world it supposedly encouraged. Put differently, inter-war international politics was about efforts not just to construct a new international relations but also to deconstruct a vision that began not with Wilsonianism but with the rapid political and economic developments in the decades before 1914.

Leaving political science/IR, another possible approach to the international history of the inter-war period involves empire. In her two volumes Steiner is certainly aware of the importance of empire, especially to the British but also to the French. Still, it might be worthwhile to attempt to place empire at the very heart of the story. After all, all the major powers were empires or aspiring empires, which meant that international politics was all about creating, maintaining and consolidating empire. This is not to say that all empires or conceptions of empire were the same.   They obviously were not. Nazi German practices in Eastern Europe during World War II cannot be likened to British and French imperial practice, even if both the British and French were, at various times, prepared to use massive violence against local populations. The notion of development, which became a leitmotif of British and French imperial policies during the 1940s, was entirely absent from those of Nazi Germany. That said, empire is arguably critical for understanding why the different countries went to war, how they conceived of (and eventually) waged war, and what they were fighting for.

Placing empire at the centre of international politics might also provide a way of integrating the inter-war period into to what came before and after. Rather than seeing the inter-war years and especially the 1930s as an interregnum in the development of a globalized, inter-connected world, the lens of empire reframes the period as one of multiple empire "projects" whose origins lie in the decades before 1914 and the effects of which would be felt well after 1945.[7]

The third and final possibility I would like to discuss concerns domestic politics. Admittedly, this is a not an aspect that Dr. Steiner neglects. In both volumes she takes great pains to describe the domestic political context in which the various political leaders operated. As Dr. Steiner shows, in many cases domestic politics were a constraint, limiting the practical options of Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand or of Édouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain.

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[7] For one example, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 369-442.

It is, however, possible to conceive of domestic politics in another, larger sense. One example that is perhaps worth thinking about is the work of Arno Mayer on the years 1917-1919 which he portrays as a clash between revolution and its opponents reaction – a clash that played out in both the domestic and international spheres.[8] Indeed, developments in the two spheres interacted with one another, shaping outcomes in both. More recently, MacGregor Knox underscored in a different way the inter-twined relationship between the domestic and international spheres. Examining Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Knox argues that a radicalizing dynamic existed in the two regimes/states in which revolution at home became a precondition for revolution abroad by means of war which, in turn, further fuelled the revolutionary process within.[9] Interestingly, such a radicalizing dynamic seems to have been absent in the Soviet Union before, during and even after the war. Despite the Cold War fears of many Western observers, Stalin succeeded in exercising a measure of prudence in the international sphere that was completely alien to Mussolini and Hitler. If so, the peculiarities of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy make the 1930s a unique moment in modern international history: neither before nor after did a great (or super) power possess the combination of powerful means and revolutionary aims. One problem, however, is that this uniqueness was far more apparent afterwards than at the time.

No one, I think, would claim that a radicalizing dynamic of the kind Knox identified existed in the democratic states: France, Britain and the United States. Nevertheless, it might be worth examining more closely the relationship in these countries between developments in the domestic and international spheres. Scholars often talk of liberalism or liberal internationalism to describe the type of international order the British, French and Americans envisaged during the inter-war years – and afterwards. But such terms barely hide the important disagreements between these countries on various policies. Peter Jackson's forthcoming monograph explicitly links French conceptions of the post-World War I international order to internal French debates and dynamics.[10] It would be worthwhile to extend this promising approach to other countries, and to Britain and the United States in particular. In so doing, we might get a better understanding of why the collective work of Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson at Versailles quickly proved so divisive.

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[8] Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959); and *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919* (New York: Knopf, 1967).

[9] MacGregor Knox, "Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 56:1 (1984): 1-57.

[10] Peter Jackson, Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War (forthcoming); and idem, "Politics, Culture and the Security of France: A Reinterpretation of French Foreign and Security Policy after the First World War," *French Historical Studies* 34:4 (2011): 579-610.

None of the above is meant as a criticism of Zara Steiner's two volumes. They are truly magisterial. But if the international history of the inter-war period and of the 1930s in particular is to remain a vibrant field, the very success of *The Lights that Failed* and *The Triumph of the Dark* raises the question: where do we go from here?

Review by Jack S. Levy, Rutgers University

*T*he Triumph of the Dark* is a landmark study of the period from Adolph Hitler's rise to power to the outbreak of the Second World War. Together with Zara Steiner's earlier study in the Oxford History of Modern Europe series, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933*,[1] it constitutes the definitive analysis of the interwar period, the standard against which all subsequent work will be evaluated. Indeed, the two volumes should be read together. Steiner makes a compelling argument that the road to war in 1939 cannot be fully explained without an understanding of the consequences of the First World War and of the period that followed.

The 1930s have been explored at length by historians. What distinguishes *The Triumph of the Dark* is not so much new documents that definitively settle old debates, or a path-breaking new interpretation, but instead a grand historical synthesis based on both archival sources and a comprehensive and unmatched coverage of secondary sources. One thing that breaks new ground is Steiner's treatment of all of the relevant minor powers, based on new archival sources that became available only after 1990. Other particularly important contributions include Steiner's analysis of the impact of the Sino-Japanese conflict, the Spanish Civil War, and divergent ideological and cultural perspectives on the escalating European conflict. It is the fusion of many separate pieces into an integrated narrative, however, that makes *The Triumph of the Dark* so distinctive.

I leave it to others to set *The Triumph of the Dark* in the context of the extensive historiography of the 1930s. I focus primarily on the implications of the book for theories of international conflict.[2] In the last decade international relations scholars began to devote considerable attention to the 1930s, using the period as a laboratory for examining theories of balance of power, preventive war, appeasement, and domestic and ideological sources of conflict.[3] I begin with Steiner's view of the constraining effects of the international system; turn to her analysis of the role of individuals, ideology, and domestic politics; and then analyze the implications of her work for the "buying time for rearmament" interpretation of appeasement and for rationalist theories of war. I will refer more to the international relations literature than to the historiography of the period, on the assumption that the former is less familiar than the latter to most readers of H-Diplo.

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[1] Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2] For reviews of the theoretical literature see Jack S. Levy & William R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (Chichester, UK: Wiley- Blackwell, 2010); and John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[3] See the collection of essays in Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell (eds.), *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Steiner places considerable weight on the constraining effects of the international system on the foreign policy behaviors of states. The basic structure of the European system, she argues in *The Lights that Failed* and summarizes in *The Triumph of the Dark*, was shaped by the Great War, the Versailles treaty, the 1920s, and particularly by new developments in the 'hinge years' (1929-1933). She argues strongly that the peace of Versailles did not cause the Second World War (1037). The political, economic, and diplomatic structure that had emerged by the end of the 1920s was relatively stable and "not inevitably doomed to collapse" (1043).

That structure was seriously weakened, however, by developments during the hinge years. First and foremost was the global economic depression, which had profound consequences for politics and diplomacy through its adverse effects on economic prosperity, international cooperation, and attempts to forge limitations on armaments. "Well before Hitler took power," Steiner argues, "the 'lights' of the previous years – reconstruction, internationalism, multilateralism, and disarmament—had dimmed and the dark undercurrents of explosive nationalism, authoritarian rule, autarchy and militarism had surfaced…. Pressures for collective action gave way to policies of self-defence, neutrality and isolation…. The balance of power shifted steadily away from the status quo nations in the directions of those who favored its destruction" (1043).

The lights had certainly dimmed, but they had not been extinguished. The system could have survived, Steiner argues, but "the demise of the Weimar Republic and the triumph of Hitler proved the motor force of destructive systemic change" (1043). This comment, and the analysis from which it springs, makes it clear that Steiner does not treat the international system as an autonomous shaper of national behavior, as neorealist international relations scholars do,[4] but instead as a product of domestic as well as international factors. Steiner's conception of international stability comes closer to a liberal view that emphasizes the role of international and domestic institutions, patterns of economic relations, the rule of law, and liberal values, than to a realist perspective that emphasizes the overriding importance of the distribution of power and balancing strategies, though she certainly does not ignore the latter.[5]

I interpret Steiner as arguing that the collapse of Weimar and the triumph of Hitler were necessary but not sufficient conditions for war, though she is not this explicit. For Steiner, as for many others, this was "Hitler's war." Although she does not define exactly what this means in causal terms, Steiner strongly implies that without Hitler the war would not have occurred. She argues that "Domestic pressures did not force Hitler to go to war" (1031), that Hitler had reached a position where "his decision was the only one of any importance" in Nazi Germany (823), and that "without Hitler there could have been no Nazi party" (12).

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[4] The classic statement is Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[5] On liberal international theory see G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); on realist international theory see Waltz, *Theory*.

She also suggests that only someone with Hitler's charisma and political skills could have overcome the resistance of the German generals and of many in the finance and foreign ministries, who believed that the rate of rearmament demanded by Hitler was economically unsustainable and that his timetable for military expansion was dangerous (579). Through these arguments Steiner basically challenges some of the leading alternatives to the argument that Hitler was a necessary condition for war. I think, however, that her argument would have been even stronger had she dealt more explicitly and systematically with the counterfactual of a Germany without Hitler in the 1930s.[6]

The triumph of Hitler was not a sufficient condition for war because there were numerous points at which the path to war could have been diverted. Steiner emphasizes "the contingent nature of much of Hitler's successes" (1051) and the many intriguing counterfactual possibilities that might have led to a different outcome. The operative word here is "might." Steiner is cautious in making counterfactual judgments – for example, about what Joseph Stalin might have done if Britain and France had taken a stronger stand at Munich, or what Hitler might have done had the Soviet Union joined the Anglo-French alliance in 1939. Steiner argues that French and especially British leaders fundamentally misjudged Hitler, and that they could have done more to head off this "unnecessary war" (as Winston Churchill called it). She recognizes, however, that such actions would have required an "enormous psychological leap," and that the Godesberg and Prague crises may have been necessary occurrences for a decision to confront Hitler (1052-58).

Steiner's emphasis on the "Hitler's War" concept makes it clear that she gives enormous weight to causal variables at the individual level of analysis.[7] She gives particular weight to the "core beliefs" and ideologies of political leaders in all of the major powers. She argues that personality, beliefs, national and racial stereotypes, and historical experience exerted an "equal if not stronger force" as military and economic strength on "decision-making at the top" (1048-49).[8]

This is a revealing phrase, because for Steiner it was decision-making at the top that really mattered. Steiner emphasizes that political leaders enjoyed "remarkable autonomy" from societal-level forces (1048). This was true not only for Hitler, Stalin, and Benito Mussolini, but also for Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier, despite the constitutional and

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[6] For a good example of such an analysis see John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 54-65For criteria for evaluating the use of counterfactual arguments to support historical interpretations, see Jack S. Levy, "Counterfactuals and Case Studies" in Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, and David Collier, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 627-44.

[7] On levels of analysis see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 1.

[8] Individual-level factors mattered much less in France. Steiner argues that French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier did not share Chamberlain's illusions about Hitler, and that French policy was driven by realpolitik in the context of severe external, economic, and domestic political constraints (651-52).

political constraints in the British and French systems. Steiner repeatedly emphasizes the importance of ideology, but it was the world views of top-level political leaders, not the ideologies or political cultures of entire societies, that shaped the actions of states. Steiner notes, for example, that ideological differences between Britain and the Soviet Union seriously complicated efforts to form an anti-German alliance, but for Steiner it was largely Chamberlain's belief system, not the ideology of his constituency or of business interests, that played the major role.[9]

True, it is not entirely possible to separate the belief systems of political leaders from the societal-level attitudes and ideologies of the times. Shared attitudes, ideas, identities, norms, and meanings, and how they are socially constructed, reproduced, and changed though repeated interactions, are central to constructivist theories of international relations.[10] Steiner says that "core beliefs … to an important extent created reality as it was perceived by statesmen" (1048), but I interpret Steiner as giving more emphasis to the *individual* construction of reality that to the *social* construction of reality. She clearly emphasizes individual agency, something international relations constructivists have not fully embraced.[11]

Norms, rules, and assumptions have a place in Steiner's analysis, but she emphasizes that these were not fully shared by statesmen and that differences in perceptions and experiences contributed to important misperceptions. Steiner argues that "while the democratic leaders felt they were playing a common game with one set of rules, in fact everyone was playing a different game with the same pieces" (1050).

The key to understanding British policy along the road to war, Steiner argues, is through the experiences, world view, and personality of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. More specifically, it was Chamberlain's abhorrence of war in reaction to the horrendous experience of the First World War, and his determination to avoid another European war at all costs, that shaped his strategies for dealing with Hitler and the crises of the late 1930s. With respect to Munich, for example, Steiner writes that "Chamberlain did not go to Germany to win time for rearmament; he went to prevent war and to lay the basis for a future continental peace" (648).

Chamberlain's hatred of war affected his judgments as well as his policy goals. Steiner argues that Chamberlain's "obsession with preserving the peace marred his judgment" and contributed to a "fatally flawed" image of Hitler's intentions. Chamberlain believed that he

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[9] For recent work in political science on the impact of leaders' ideological differences see Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[10] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[11] Steiner's discussion of "core beliefs" is captured by the concept of the "operational code" of political leaders as defined by Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decisionmaking," *International Studies Quarterly* 13, 2 (June 1969): 190-222.

had "created a bond" with Hitler and "won his respect" and "trust" (651). He also believed that Hitler shared his own abhorrence of war, that his aims were limited, and that it was possible to work with him to secure a European peace.[12] These beliefs were not entirely unreasonable early on, in Steiner's view. The problem, she implies, is that Chamberlain failed to revise his beliefs in response to Hitler's actions. Chamberlain continued to be optimistic about the prospects for peace after Munich, after Prague (766), and even in late August 1939 (1066).

In emphasizing the belief systems and perceptions of individual political leaders, Steiner devotes relatively little attention to the causal role of class or sectoral interests and divisions, or to public opinion as a whole. This will disappoint those international relations scholars who in the last decade have developed societal-level explanations for "underbalancing" (or delayed balancing) and applied these explanations to Britain and France in the 1930s. One argument is that Chamberlain adopted appeasement and a relatively limited pace of rearmament because his government represented a domestic coalition that benefited from low taxation and free market policies, and was unwilling to pay for significant increases in defense spending or tolerate the increased regulation of the market economy that would likely follow.[13] Although Steiner generally minimizes the role of broad-based public opinion, she argues that after Munich and Prague "public pressure helped to push the [British] government to war" (765-66, 1056), in part by helping to isolate Chamberlain within the Cabinet.

Steiner's minimization of the role of these factors is somewhat at odds with her remark in a separate essay that "the domestic determinants of foreign policy were as important as the external environment and … political and moral factors were more critical than the economic and military determinants of policy-making."[14] Perhaps Steiner is defining "domestic" broadly to include individual as well as societal and governmental-level factors,

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[12] Steiner makes a strong case, but she fails to acknowledge the other side of Chamberlain – his fairly frequent statements that Hitler could not be trusted and that a European war was probably unavoidable. This is clear from his private correspondence, especially with his sister Hilda. See *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, 4 vols., ed. by Robert Self (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000). A complete psychological portrait of Chamberlain needs to come to terms with this duality.

[13] Steven E. Lobell, "The Political Economy of War Mobilization: From Britain's Limited Liability to a Continental Commitment," *International Politics* 43:3 (July 2006): 283-304. See also Kevin Narizny, "Both Guns and Butter, or Neither: Class Interests in the Political Economy of Rearmament," *American Political Science Review* 97:2 (May 2003): 203-20; and Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). For a primarily system-level explanation of underbalancing see Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "The Preventive War that Never Happened: Britain, France, and the Rise of Germany in the 1930s," *Security Studies* 16:1 (January-March 2007): 32-67.

[14] Zara S. Steiner, "British Decisions for Peace and War 1938-39: The Rise and Fall of Realism," in Ernest R. May, Richard Rosecrance, and Zara Steiner (eds.), *History and Neorealism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 129-54 at 130.

just as some international relations scholars aggregate these into a single "unit level" of analysis.[15]

I now turn to Steiner's critique of the argument that appeasement was a strategy for buying time. British aims, in this view, were to allow the combination of its own rearmament and the slowing of the German arms buildup to move Britain and its French ally into a position from which it could deter future German aggression if possible or defeat Germany in war if deterrence failed.[16] As noted above, Steiner explicitly rejects this view. It seems to me, however, that Steiner underestimates Chamberlain's mixed-motives at Munich: to lay the grounds for a lasting peace if possible while recognizing that because time was on the side of the Western allies it was imperative to delay any confrontation with Hitler.

The buying time for rearmament interpretation (whether applied to British behavior at Munich or to British appeasement policy in general) includes a number of assumptions: (1) by the time of Munich British leaders believed that Germany was too strong and that it would be too risky to confront Hitler, but that (2) the longer-term trends in the balance of power favored the Allied powers, in part because (3) German rearmament was slowing down because of resource, financial, and foreign exchange constraints. In addition, (4) Britain made a serious effort to accelerate rearmament after Munich, and (5) these factors were the primary motivations for the strategy of appeasing Hitler at Munich. Although Steiner rejects the last point, she provides a substantial amount of evidence in support of the first four assumptions.

One can find numerous statements throughout *The Triumph of the Dark* that Chamberlain and other British leaders believed that Germany was already too strong to confront at Munich. Intelligence reports repeatedly emphasized British and Allied inferiority. Britain was particularly vulnerable to a "knock out blow" from the air. In fact Steiner states that "the imbalance in the air was the most decisive strategic factor in dissuading the chiefs of staff from any attempt at deterrence" (608). She argues correctly that British estimates of German strength in the air and on land were both considerably exaggerated (607),[17] but what is important for the buying time hypothesis is leaders' perceptions, not reality.

France was also vulnerable. By fall 1936 the *Deuxième Bureau* was arguing that Germany had already achieved a decisive superiority over France on the ground and in the air (416). France began to rearm, but by 1938 rearmament was already beginning to strain France's industrial base and finances, and the French government faced serious internal divisions

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[15] Waltz, 79-82.

[16] Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s," *International Security* 33:2 (Fall 2008): 148-81; Christopher Layne, "Security Studies and the Use of History: Neville Chamberlain's Grand Strategy Revisited," *Security Studies* 17:3 (July 2008): 397-437.

[17] Wesley K. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

(600, 652). Steiner argues that a realistic sense of French vulnerability, along with the need to solidify the Anglo-French alliance, was a major factor behind French caution at Munich (599-603).[18]

On the second and third points, Steiner documents the financial and resource constraints on German rearmament, including shortages of oil, other raw materials, and labor; a balance of payments problem and a shortage of currency to purchase raw materials; pressures on German gold reserves; and the difficulties of securing foreign loans (674-75).[19] She also demonstrates that by the time of Munich or soon thereafter British and French intelligence had accurately recognized these economic constraints and their implications for trends in relative power. These assessments were also shared by the German military, which as late as spring and summer 1939 expressed concerns about the difficulty of sustaining the rearmament effort and about Germany's lack of readiness for war against Britain and France (834-38).

The fourth point presents a greater challenge to the buying time interpretation because, as Steiner correctly notes, Britain's rearmament was somewhat restrained. Germany exploited the delay in war after Munich more than the Allied powers did, both through its own rearmament and also through its ability to secure an alliance with the Soviet Union (655). Chamberlain also rejected the pleas of many to substantially accelerate British military spending. Steiner traces this to Chamberlain's abhorrence of war and in particular to his fear that rearmament might very well provoke the war he wanted so much to avoid.[20] This was undoubtedly a contributing factor, but it is not at all incompatible with a buying time interpretation.

In addition, there are good reasons to believe that British rearmament may have been restrained even in the absence of Chamberlain's idiosyncratic beliefs. As Steiner notes, the British economy was under severe pressure (700). Many shared the Finance Ministry's repeated concerns that an excessively rapid pace of rearmament might impose further strains and undermine the economic foundations of British military power, and the belief that the 'fourth arm of defense' was critical for Britain's ability to fight a long war of attrition based on naval power and blockade. Chamberlain's earlier experience as Chancellor of the Exchequer undoubtedly reinforced these concerns.

It is also important to emphasize that the relevant criterion for evaluating British rearmament is not necessarily its ability to narrow the gap with Germany in terms of aggregate military power, but rather its effectiveness in dealing the greatest threats posed

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[18] Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy Making, 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[19] See also Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Viking/Penguin, 2006).

[20] The belief that arms provoke rather than deter fits the "spiral model" image of international politics. Jervis, chap. 3.

to British interests. The primary British interests involved (in descending order) the security of the British Isles, the protection of trade routes necessary for survival, preservation of the empire, and the defense of allies. The key immediate threat was German airpower. Thus rearmament was focused on air defenses and the navy. In these terms, British rearmament was reasonably effective.[21] Steiner notes that British rearmament was driven by a defensive strategy involving the protection of the home islands and the ability to sustain a long war of attrition. She notes the substantial improvements in British radar and other defenses (605, 772), and concludes that in terms of its ability to defend itself Britain was "better off in 1939 than in 1938."[22]

Motivations are always difficult to assess, but there is much in *The Triumph of the Dark* to suggest that the logic of buying time had a significant impact on British policy. Steiner argues that "the Allied sense of military inferiority was a major factor in British and French decision-making at Munich,"[23] and that British Foreign Office and service ministries "viewed Munich primarily as a means of postponing war" (684). Steiner argues that in early 1939 "The service chiefs wanted to postpone war until 1940 when British defences would be much improved."[24]

It is interesting to note that although Steiner argues that Chamberlain was not driven by the strategic logic associated with the expectation that the German military advantage was only temporary, she makes a strong case that this was precisely the logic that motivated Hitler. The Führer pushed for a rapid rearmament program that his military and financial advisers warned could not be sustained, and he decided on a war in September 1939 that his generals said he could not win – both because he believed that time was running out. *The Triumph of the Dark* is full of evidence of Hitler's belief that "time was not on Germany's side" (1031), that underlying economic trends favored the Allies, and that Germany had to act before the Allies could make up for their slow start in rearming.[25] As

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[21] See Steven E. Lobell, "Bringing Balancing Back In: Britain's Targeted Balancing, 1936-1939," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36:1 (February 2013); and Ripsman and Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time," 20-23.

[22] Steiner, "British Decisions," 138.

[23] Ibid., 131.

[24] Steiner makes the interesting comment that "while Chamberlain was not fundamentally motivated by strategic factors, the [military chiefs'] emphasis on British unpreparedness for war in 1938, and German strength, provided strong support for the policies [Chamberlain] intended to adopt" (605). One possible way to interpret this is to say that British appeasement policies under Chamberlain were overdetermined, in the sense that buying time logic and Chamberlain's belief system were each sufficient causes of British appeasement at Munich.

[25] Contributing to Hitler's short time horizons was his obsession with his own health problems and mortality (568, 995)

Steiner says elsewhere, it was "Germany's dubious economic future that led Hitler to gamble on war …."[26]

This leads me to the final decisions for war and the judgments and calculations upon which they were based. What is striking, particularly in the context of an international relations literature that is dominated by rational models of conflict, is that Steiner draws a picture of decision-making processes that are far from rational.

There is no single, widely accepted conception of rationality,[27] but some significant deviations from rationality stand out in Steiner's narrative. One is that political leaders' assessments of adversary intentions and capabilities – and hence of the likelihood of various actions and outcomes – were often significantly influenced by their own policy goals. Steiner argues, for example, that because the European peace that Chamberlain so badly wanted was feasible only if Hitler shared that goal, Chamberlain judged Hitler's aims to be limited and consistent with the goal of peace. What was necessary to achieve his ends, Chamberlain saw as possible and even likely.

In terms of psychological theories of judgment and decision-making, Steiner is arguing that Chamberlain engaged in wishful thinking driven by motivated reasoning (or motivated biases).[28] The same can be said of Hitler. The necessity of war for achieving his goals distorted his assessments of the likely economic consequences of his rapid rearmament effort and of the likely outcome of war itself, despite repeated warnings from his financial and military advisors.[29] This pattern runs contrary to any conception of a rational decision-making process, which requires independent assessments of the utilities (values) of outcomes and their probabilities of occurrence.

Compounding this problem was the failure of Chamberlain and other leaders to update their beliefs in response to new information.[30] As Steiner notes, Chamberlain's assessments of Hitler's character and intentions changed only marginally after Munich and Prague, lagging significantly behind the changes in public opinion and in the beliefs of his advisors. The problem was exacerbated by Chamberlain's own "excessive self-confidence" (651).

[26] Steiner, "British Decisions," 131, 142. This argument reflects the underlying theoretical proposition that a potent cause of war is the combination of relative military strength and relative economic weakness that undermines future military potential, creating strong incentives for preventive war. Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[27] See James G. March, "Limited Rationality," in March, *A Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen* (New York: Free Press, 1994), chap. 1

[28] On psychological biases see Jervis, Parts II & III; and Rose McDermott, *Political Psychology in International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

[29] Hitler's obsession with what he saw as an international Jewish conspiracy strangling the Reich (990) is still another indicator of Hitler's deviation from rationality.

[30] Rational updating of beliefs is defined by "Bayesian updating."

Hitler's attitudes towards war, as portrayed by Steiner, clearly depart from a Clausewitzian conception of war as an instrument of policy to advance political objectives. For Hitler, "war was the ultimate goal of all politics and the primal condition of life. The fixation on the idea of struggle as an end in itself was a leitmotiv that ran throughout his political life." (823) "Hitler willed, desired, lusted after war" (1057). In terms of utility theory, Hitler attached positive utility to war itself, and not just to any more tangible benefits that war might bring. This is not easily reconciled with rationalist conceptions of war as a costly mechanism for the resolution of disputes.[31]

With respect to the final decisions for war, Steiner argues that neither the German nor British decisions to go to war over Poland were based primarily on strategic calculations.[32] As Hitler had been repeatedly informed by his generals, Germany was not in a position to conduct a successful offensive against France and Britain; it had no military plans to do so (1030); and it could not mount a successful war of attrition. Steiner argues that Hitler understood this. For Hitler, war was an obsession and a matter of will (1034), with the timing decided by his awareness of adverse trends in relative power.

As for Britain and France, Steiner argues that this was a "necessary war," given the reality of the German threat to dominate the continent and the need for a great power to "act as one."[33] France in particular had no choice. Steiner argues, however, that "British grand strategy had become divorced from all the normal calculations of costs and benefits in the last months of peace."[34] For Britain, war in 1939 was, "as Hitler had so often insisted, a matter of will rather than a careful weighing of the military and economic balances….Most did not think in terms of balances; they just assumed that Britain and its empire would prevail." Steiner concludes that "It was fortunate … that it was this assumption of victory and not its calculation that determined the choice for war" (1035).

This is an interesting argument, but it is problematic on a number of grounds. First, it is not clear that the assumption of victory was a cause of war as opposed to a consequence of the

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[31] James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49:3 (1995): 379-414. For a more rationalist interpretation of Hitler see Joseph Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: How the Arms Race Drove the World to War, 1931-1941* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

[32] Steiner emphasizes, however, that Hitler wanted to localize the war against Poland, and she documents his extensive efforts, through bribery and coercive threats, to keep Britain out.

[33] This last point is consistent with a constructivist emphasis on the "logic of appropriateness." Steiner repeatedly emphasizes the importance of honor, prestige, status, and self respect for great power behavior in the 1930s (e.g., 1024), but she never analytically distinguishes these factors from reputation, which is rationalist and realist. On status and honor as a cause of war see Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[34] Steiner, "British Decisions," 153.

decision for war, a psychological coping mechanism.[35] Second, the existence of terrible choices and the bad outcomes associated with them does not necessarily preclude rational calculation. One can rationally go to war without expecting victory if the alternative is likely to lead to a worse outcome. Steiner may be right about the relative absence of strategic calculation in the British decision for war, and I remain open to that possibility. Before I could be fully convinced, however, I would need a more detailed analysis of British assessments of future trends, including the probability and likely outcome of a future war.

I have gone on too long, though I could have said ten times more about this magnificent book. It is an enduring contribution to a subject of enduring interest. There is little doubt that all future work on the international history of this period and on the causes of the Second World War will have to engage Steiner's complex arguments and the massive amount of evidence she has compiled to support them.

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[35] For an argument, based on social psychology, that decision-makers shift from underconfidence to overconfidence after making a decision for war, see Dominic P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney, "The Rubicon Theory of War: How the Path to Conflict Reaches the Point of No Return," *International Security* 36:1 (Summer 2011): 7-40.

Review by Martin Thomas, University of Exeter

It is no surprise that the metaphor of the light of reason and restraint inexorably fading, which Zara Steiner used so effectively in the first of her two monumental volumes charting European international politics between the wars,[1] recurs in this, the follow-up history of the 1930s, the darker of the two pre-war decades. But if a sense of impending doom provides a certain linearity to *Triumph of the Dark*, Steiner avoids the trap of writing history backwards. Wisely, she eschews the presumption that the horrors that we all know would come were readily foreseeable and commensurately avoidable. That is not to suggest that she lets her subjects, essentially the leading political, diplomatic, and military actors of Western Europe's democracies, off the historical hook. The weight of evidence she deploys against them is too heavy for that. It is rather to point out that Steiner's historical judgements evaluate her historical subjects on their own terms and always within the immediate context in which landmark decisions were taken.

To be sure, the villainy of the dictatorships remains as such, their excesses underlined in a searing penultimate chapter on the persecution of Europe's Jews that also demonstrates how ineffective and unsympathetic the European international reaction to the maltreatment of minority groups could be. Indeed, one of the book's many strengths is to place some of Europe's less prominent regimes, notably in the Continent's south-western and south-eastern fringes, in the dock alongside the usual German, Russian and Italian suspects. Perhaps the more interesting questions asked and answered here relate to the witnesses for the prosecution. Steiner's analysis is most piercing with respect to those who had to deal with odious regimes, whether as neighbours or negotiating partners, as bargaining levers, or, even, as allies. Here, in the responses of supposed moderates, for the most part liberal democrats of one political stripe or another, one finds some of the most shocking instances of immoderation and realist calculation. Put differently, if one is to isolate a primary achievement of this gargantuan work, a challenge for any reviewer, it perhaps lies in the clarity with which Steiner examines how a changing normative environment of international diplomacy could – and did – make war the most probable outcome of Europe's 1930s. Far from something that caught Europe's democracies by surprise, the recurrence of global conflict was something predicted, planned and presumed as the probable consequence of the continent's increasingly dystopian international relations.

What should we conclude from this? That the governing elites, strategic planners and diplomatic specialists of Britain, France and other non-revisionist states should join the more notorious revisionists, plus their Iberian and Balkan mimics on the list of the accused? Or that Europe's broken international system was the real culprit? To a degree at least its fractures had been concealed. The fault-lines beneath the institutional architecture of the League of Nations, although evident from the start, had yet to widen into fissures.

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[1] Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

The redistribution promised by reparations and the antagonisms nourished by its failure were cumulative, not instant. The bureaucratic apparatus of disarmament, for all its labyrinthine complexity, indeed, perhaps because of it, was remarkably slow to collapse. But the hidden defects became obvious once these running repairs disintegrated. Even the putative alliance-making of the 1920s in which France played the leading role was always a prelude to the more substantial realignments likely to take place once war became imminent.

Here, too, the book is unequivocally clear. Steiner is surely right to place the Depression front and centre of her analysis as the 'hinge', the game-changing experience after which the fabric of inter-dependent connection between European societies and states was ripped to shreds. In treating the global economic meltdown as an international political crisis as much as a financial one, what is now her completed two-volume inter-war history has a 'before and after' quality. The severity of the economic shock did more than anything else to radicalize European societies. What was previously unconscionable for so many depleted families across the Continent – a recasting of that broken international system in the furnace of war – became something else: if not quite accepted, then expected nonetheless. Another European conflagration, always historically imperative to the fascist ideologues and logically pre-determined in the minds of the Marxist-Leninists, became the operating assumption of the western democracies as well once a renewed global arms race gathered momentum.

The Triumph of the Dark, then, has both differing levels of analysis to pursue and a comprehensible framework on which to build its narrative. In the former respect, it connects the European diplomacy of the pre-war decade to what remained of the international checks and balances on forcible territorial aggrandisement that were erected in the aftermath of 1919. In the latter respect, it demonstrates how the transformations in European political cultures wrought by the economic crisis changed the rules of diplomatic engagement and inter-state alignment. Steiner, a pioneer in determining the linkages between cultural presumptions and political choices, never loses sight of these deeper forces. But her book is first and foremost a narrative, a multi-perspective account of how and why European political leaderships acted as they did.

Most elements of the story are, in their broad outline, very well known. To take a couple of examples, few scholars would contest the argument that the Spanish Civil War reverberated through Europe (and well beyond it, of course), hardening ideological positions and rendering Germany and Italy less amenable to compromise. Fewer still would take issue with the suggestion that mounting British anxieties about the fragility of their country's Far Eastern imperial position shaped calculations about the desirability of American support in the Pacific theatre. As in so much of high-quality diplomatic history, the devil is in the detail, however. Nazi Germany exploited the instability resulting from the Spanish crisis to marginalize the Soviet Union, to cut useful armaments deals and, most important, to undermine the strength of Italian resolve in central Europe. Fascist Italy, always the most enthusiastic interventionist in Spain, capitalized on the war to end its brief post-Ethiopian-crisis spell as international pariah. But Mussolini lost out in the wider game of geo-politics, Italy's tighter focus on Mediterranean, African and Middle Eastern affairs

coming at the price of declining influence along the Danube corridor. Meanwhile, France's inability to affect the outcome of civil war in Spain made its occasional, largely fruitless attempts to do so increasingly galling to a British government already engaged in damage limitation on the Iberian Peninsula. So far, so familiar. Yet the more that Steiner unpicks its diplomatic threads, the more revealing the tapestry of a collapsing Europe becomes. For instance, the strength of residual British governmental confidence that a Nationalist Spain under Franco would remain a containable problem rested on an ugly amalgam of contempt for left-tinged France, a crass dismissiveness about the excesses of Francoist repression, and the pragmatic arrangements made to safeguard British business interests.

As for British exposure in the Far East, the resentment in Whitehall circles at being caught between the consequences of civil war in China and American reluctance to pull Europe's colonial coals out of a Japanese-stoked fire emerges particularly strongly over the critical winter of 1937-38. Here, again, Steiner's purpose is less to rewrite the Far Eastern diplomatic script than to connect its critical episodes to the intensification of Europe's international crisis. If she seems more at home with the minutiae of an unravelling French alliance system in Eastern Europe than with the mounting late 1930s disorder in South and East Asia, it bears reiteration that her book is primarily a European history. It is this that justifies her essential preoccupation with Nazi Germany's step-by-step advance towards eastern living space and Western European war. The confrontations over Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Danzig, and Poland are all examined expertly and exhaustively. Indeed, in her treatment of these immediate pre-war crises – the logical starting-points of Nazi empire-building and the ethical low-points of Western Power appeasement - Steiner the counter-revisionist comes to the fore. One senses that this is where the book was always going, the warm-up acts in Ethiopia, Spain and East Asia preparing us for the appearance of the main draw.

In describing the mutual incomprehension of opposing negotiators, particularly Hitler and Neville Chamberlain, each strong-willed and diplomatically simple-minded, she indicts the appeasement enthusiasts in particular for their deafness to contrary advice. And in her meticulous attention to the 'grab what you can' intricacies of Balkan states' diplomacy and the self-seeking aspirations of neutrals and non-belligerents, she demonstrates that the ruthless bargaining of Europe's strongest was matched turn-for-turn by the actions of the Continent's weaker international players. In doing so she makes plain how different were the causes of war in 1939 from those of 1914. Neither the prospect of revisionist gains in South-Eastern Europe nor the consolidation of strategic raw material supplies was, in the end, decisive in the German decision to move in September 1939. Instead, the outbreak of war is restored as merely the first step in an altogether longer, more distant march to *Lebensraum* and total domination of Europe's East. At the interpretational level, appeasement, which was for some time explained, even excused, as economically rational and strategically imperative, is reworked here as neither. And the unidirectional course of Nazi foreign policy, itself an element of wider preparations for a war of conquest and settlement, makes the sorry tale of the elusive quest for a 'general settlement' of Europe's post-1919 inter-state disorder seem darker still. Europe's path to war, in other words, was cleared not just by those who actively sought this outcome, but by the misguided obstinacy and chronic miscalculation of those who did not.

While the contingency surrounding the descent into war and the constructed (and thus alterable) nature of the international environment that produced it figure strongly in *The Triumph of the Dark*, rather less is said about what the clash between the Axis revisionists on the one hand and the non-revisionist victor powers on the other hand actually represented. In this context the book's continental parameters become rather more problematic. At the risk of sounding oxymoronic, I'm not sure that the climax to Europe's inter-war crisis can be explained wholly or even primarily in European terms. The diplomatic rivalries and regional disputes, even the ultimate conflagration, between European haves and self-declared have-nots was not just the sum of its parts. Each was moulded by conflicting ideological cultures, rival conceptions of global economic organization, and incompatible views of tolerable and intolerable empire. At this level, the Second World War was not just a struggle for dominance in Europe but a war of imperialisms. What was at stake was not simply – or even primarily – the possession of overseas territory, but the global networks of trade, migration, communication, financial transaction, and capital flows made possible by imperial control.

Put differently, in its origins as much as in its outcomes, the Second World War was predicated on the extent to which global affairs should be conducted according to the preferences of the conflict's victorious hegemonic block. Britain, its Dominion partners, the United States and even France, supposedly the most 'Continental' of all the major allied nations (but the one most dangerously over-reliant on colonial trade), framed European affairs, intra-European commerce and the financial system underpinning it in a more global context. Assuredly, they fought to defend domestic frontiers, waters and skies. But choosing war was never reducible to these essentially laudable motives of defending hearth and home. Something even bigger was at stake. For the leading non-revisionist powers, strategic policy-making sought far more than European peace as its own reward. The core aim was to safeguard their territorial possessions, their investments, their preferential market privileges and, first and foremost, the liberal trading order on which the entire edifice of industrial capitalist prosperity rested. To illustrate the point more plainly, while the British approach to the Czech crisis may have been dominated by assessments of war-readiness and the possibility of conclusive agreement with Berlin in the short term, it was perhaps more profoundly conditioned by the need to ensure the survival of a British imperial trade system in the long term. Or, to pursue a similar point from a different geographical standpoint, while it is clearly essential to explain the component problems of British imperial 'over-stretch', the deeper issue of why Britain as an imperial power and epicentre of a 'British world' network felt compelled to fight Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously perhaps bears closer analysis. Just as the British Empire did not go to war for Belgium in 1914, it was not fighting for Poland, France, or even the green fields of the Home Counties in 1939. All of which is simply to say that the disaggregation of the European crisis from the global system that produced and sustained it may be difficult to sustain.

The point, though, should not be overdrawn. At no stage does *The Triumph of the Dark* confine its gaze to European corridors of power. Indeed, it is a measure of Zara Steiner's immense scholarship that the book wears the breadth of its coverage and the depth of its

analysis so lightly. Elegantly written and supremely well-informed, it is unlikely to be surpassed.