

H-Net Reviews

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Christopher Baxter, Michael L. Dockrill, Keith Hamilton, eds. *Britain in Global Politics Volume 1: From Gladstone to Churchill*. Security, Conflict, and Cooperation in the Contemporary World Series. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 312 pp. \$100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-36044-0.



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This collection brings together eleven essays under the titular heading of British international affairs from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The volume takes the form of a *Festschrift* commemorating Saki Ruth Dockrill, whose work—sadly truncated by her untimely death in 2009—encompasses British and American political history, with emphases on the relationship between coercive and diplomatic methods of deterrence, the Cold War, the connection between domestic and international policy, and the “special relationship” between Britain and the United States. The authors and editors of *Britain in Global Politics Volume 1: From Gladstone to Churchill* have realized a fitting tribute to these accomplishments.

A driving theme in these chapters is the changing role of coercion in relation to wider strategic objectives. Lord Curzon, formerly viceroy of India, embodied a more bellicose Victorian and Edwardian paradigm. Acceding to the position of foreign secretary after Versailles, as John Fisher discusses, Curzon’s “appetite for territorial gain” (p. 62) as a bulwark to Russian ambitions in Central Asia and the Middle East fit awkwardly in a new era of retrenchment and Wilsonian self-determination, and he wielded limited strategic influence as a result. Adopting a more theoretical perspective on Anglo-Russian tensions,

T. G. Otte argues for the analytical use of the term “Cold War” to describe the animus between the two countries well before 1945. These antagonisms, comprised, among other things, the use of buffer states in Turkey and Afghanistan to contain nineteenth-century Russian territorial ambitions, and—with the glaring exception of the Crimean War—generally succeeded in avoiding direct warfare. This rivalry would ultimately engulf East Asia as well. Christopher Baxter details the riveting 1931 arrest of a Comintern agent named Jakob Rudnik, then operating in Shanghai under the alias Hilaire Noulens. Rudnik’s capture illuminated more than the inner workings of the Comintern. It also revealed much about attitudes toward communism in Britain, from high-profile sympathizers like H. G. Wells to the Bolshephobic Secret Intelligence Service agents themselves, whose fixation on communism blinded them to Japanese ambitions in Manchuria. Attitudes toward Russia feature likewise in Keith Hamilton’s analysis of interwar Foreign Office censorship of political memoirs. Office personnel took exception, for instance, to David Lloyd George’s inclusion of materials implying that the Romanovs had been denied sanctuary in Britain owing to the tsarina’s pro-German sympathies, as well as to prevailing British anti-monarchical sentiment, which placed popular support

for the monarchy in an inadmissibly volatile light. References to Belgian Congo atrocities, to Britain's imperial ambitions during the war, or to Anglo-French differences over Egypt—anything, in short, which promised to inflame “the contemporary debate on the origins of the war and the legal and moral foundations of the peace” (p. 100)—were similarly anathema.

Several contributions center on British foreign policy during the fractious 1930s. Standard interpretations posit Neville Chamberlain as the political loser of this history for his failed efforts to address Hitler's demands through diplomacy, while Winston Churchill emerges as the victor for his heroic opposition to Chamberlain and his later military success vis-à-vis the Axis powers. Such a view, Philip Bell explains, forgets that Churchill's pre-war stance pivoted on the idea of a military alliance with France, a position which greatly underestimated British anti-French sentiment. It also overlooks the fact that Churchill's anti-appeasement failed to include countermeasures for Italian actions in Abyssinia, or for Nazi occupation of the Rhineland. Joe Maiolo challenges the Churchillian version of events in a similar vein by recuperating Chamberlain's conduct during the so-called Phoney War. Suspending all-out mobilization, Maiolo argues, makes sense on several grounds, namely that total war was ruinously expensive, it was widely known that Germany could not afford a long war, and there was no reason to expect that Hitler's gambits in Belgium and France would be successful. Brian McKercher likewise offers a more sympathetic appraisal of Chamberlainian appeasement by locating precedents in William Gladstone's dealings with Russia at the 1878 Congress of Berlin, Lloyd George's attitude toward Germany at Versailles, and other situations. On the related issue of British nonintervention during the Spanish Civil War, Glyn Stone interprets this policy as a product of a reluctance to meddle in a political situation that, until 1936, posed no threat to British investments in Spain, and that, after the onset of Nationalist-Republican hostilities, did so from both the right- and left-wing sides of the conflict. Nonintervention also helped to secure at least the nominal neutrality of Francoist Spain during World War II. Moreover, after the civil war abated, no one—not the British Labour party, and not even exiled Spanish Republicans themselves—seriously countenanced any action that risked reigniting the carnage.

The three remaining essays focus more expressly on the British Empire. Saul Kelley describes the controversy surrounding British efforts to acquire rem-

nants of Italy's East African territories during World War II. Whereas British authorities favored incorporating Ethiopia's Ogaden region into a Greater Somalia under British or British-friendly administration, Kelley explains, US “anti-colonial sentiment” (p. 275) and commercial interests preferred the existing territorial configuration. Discrepant attitudes toward colonialism emerge again in Andrew Stewart's intriguing and entertaining analysis of the Committee on American Opinion on the British Empire. Americans, informed by their own hard-won independence from Britain, viewed its empire as outdated, incompetent, and a scourge to indigenous societies globally. Committee members, on the other hand, perceived, as Stewart puts it, a “weakness in the American mind which prevented any inconsistency being registered between how other ‘Empires’ were viewed and American practice in relation to its negro and American Indian populations” (p. 247). Turning to the issue of military tactics, Martin Thomas examines interwar air policing in French North Africa and the British Middle East. Proponents touted aircraft as a less costly and superior means of surveying territory and inculcating deference to an “omniscient, omnipresent adversary” (p. 70). In reality, air personnel often missed critical intelligence, and bombardments failed to curb subject peoples' movements. The scale of aerial surveillance, meanwhile, helped to dehumanize Kurdish, Berber, Bedouin, and other Arab peoples, and thereby authorized an appalling level of violence against innocent noncombatants, including nomadic communities and their livestock. Europeans had denounced the use of airplanes during the lately concluded war for precisely this reason; a racialized double standard rendered such a criticism largely ineffectual in colonial contexts. This captivating chapter, uncannily relevant to debates surrounding the use of “smart” technologies of colonial warfare today, is marred only by the fact that it concerns France more so than Britain.

Altogether, this is an impressive collection. Maps would have been a welcome inclusion for some chapters. So too would a more theoretically oriented introduction, alongside the warm and informative tribute to Professor Dockrill authored by Brian Holden Reid. Nevertheless, this stimulating collection of essays should be required reading for students of international history, and also serves as a credible means for nonspecialists to enrich their survey courses of British, European, and imperial history—a recommendation all the more consonant now that this useful compilation is available in a cost-effective paperback format.

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