Post-war and Pre-war

SALLY MARKS

Sidney Aster, ed., *Appeasement and All Souls: A Portrait with Documents, 1937–1939*, Camden Fifth Series, Vol. 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2004), 252 pp., £50.00, ISBN 052184374X.

Patrick O. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 693 pp., £55.00, ISBN 9780521853538.

Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 379 pp., £50.00, ISBN 9780521857130.

Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 938 pp., £41.00, ISBN 0198221142.

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the United States, a few book editors seeking a silver lining, however slight, suggested that the global shock might generate a revival of international history. As time passed, works gendering (or engendering) the landscape or re-imagining the city remained dominant in the historical profession. Some international historians addressing very recent periods found a bandwagon and focused on cultural diplomacy, which was largely a post-1945 innovation, but the rest of the field continued to languish. Only time will tell if the optimism of the editors was justified, but whether or not '9/11' (as Americans term it) had any causal role, we now have four studies directed to the international history of Europe in the inter-war era.

One work whose genesis clearly predates 9/11 is Zara Steiner's monumental sequel to A. J. P. Taylor's *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*. Since Steiner's long-awaited work addresses a shorter period but more European countries as well as some non-European states and also intricate economic diplomacy, it is being published in two volumes and three sections. *The Lights that Failed*[1] contains the first two sections, dealing with the post-war era to 1929 and then more briefly with what Steiner dubs

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[1] Of which this reviewer read a radically different version in draft.

Contemporary European History, **17**, 2 (2008), pp. 263–273 © 2008 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0960777308004402 Printed in the United Kingdom

'the hinge years' (1929–33), leaving the Nazi pre-war era to a forthcoming second volume. The initial volume is almost as impressive as it is lengthy.

Steiner wisely refuses in a work of such breadth to be confined to a single overarching theme. In writing a classic narrative of international history, she focuses primarily on the interplay of the great powers, but she promises to give the east European states their due and does. In brief, she first addresses the efforts to reconstruct a European system on a new basis after the Great War had shattered the old concert beyond repair, and then deals with the disasters which undermined or swept away the considerable but fragile reconstructive accomplishments of the 1920s. Early and late, Steiner attributes many of the miseries of the inter-war era to economic, ethnic and political nationalism let loose from the 'Pandora's box' (p. 1) of self-determination.

Steiner starts by noting, 'The very concept of a "European system of international relations" was shattered by the Russian revolutions and American participation in the war' (p. 1). Once said, this is obvious, but it is rarely, if ever, said – and it needs to be. Steiner declares firmly that the 1920s were a post-war decade, not part of a second pre-war, arguing that the Versailles treaty caused neither the Second World War nor Hitler and that the Depression hastened the latter's accession to power but did not cause it. In the late 1920s, she observes, progress generally came at the expense of France, whose weakness and fears she fully comprehends, for each German gain meant a French loss in a continent lacking either a hegemon or a balance of power.

Steiner repeatedly argues that only hatred of the Versailles treaty, especially the reparations clauses, held Weimar together, although the treaty did not destroy the republic. Its territorial demands were 'neither unduly nor unprecedentedly harsh' (p. 54) and, as she points out, it was the least severe of all the peace treaties. If the victors were unified, the Versailles treaty could be enforced or revised, but, lacking such unity, only Britain and the United States together could break the impasse, as happened in 1924–5. Steiner sees Locarno as launching an era of pragmatism and concert diplomacy, as Britain's foreign secretary, Austen Chamberlain, intended, until Labour took power in 1929 with a greater fear (as in the early 1920s) of France than of Germany. She points out that by the close of the first Hague reparations conference in 1929, the German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann gained all he had sought at Locarno less than four years earlier, except the Saar, which was to be discussed.

Steiner begins her examination of eastern Europe with a splendid account of its multitudinous problems, noting that Czechoslovakia was the only state with the characteristics of a Western society and the only democracy. Although she handles Russia well on the whole, she becomes overly detailed about it and other east European states, paying excessive attention to British policy in the area. Perhaps she implies that eastern Europe was more stable in the 1920s than it really was, given the temporary abnormal conditions in which neither Germany nor Russia could dominate the region. However, she makes the important point that the role of nationalism in driving the policy of sovereign states was an innovation, and observes that Allied interventions in Russia in 1918 produced lasting Soviet fears of Western attempts to overthrow the regime.

Despite its problems, the 1920s, with no European wars, constituted a decade of hope. The hinge years, falling between 'the decade of reconstruction and the decade of disintegration' (p. 635), ended hope and destroyed much international fabric, as Europe shifted from talk of liquidation of the war in 1929 to talk of a new war in 1933. Although stressing that nationalism intensified markedly, Steiner primarily addresses three problems, each a failure of international co-operation: the diplomacy of the Depression, the 1931 Manchurian crisis and the 1932 Disarmament Conference. As to the first, she reminds us that the system assumed continuing prosperity and says that after devaluation and imperial preference Britain became more isolationist and less influential on the Continent. In Manchuria, it engaged in 'crisis avoidance' (pp. 725–6) as did others, since action depended on the United States. The gap between British interests and power was revealed, as was the weakness of the international system. Steiner does well by the League's varied activities and her discussion of the Disarmament Conference is meaty, remarkably interesting and valuable.

Steiner's vast reading has led her to challenge a number of traditional views. On the 1922 Anglo-Turkish confrontation at Chanak, she incorporates new material revising old treatments. She doubts that 'the British really feared French hegemonic designs' (p. 208); similarly she argues that the Soviet 'war scare' in 1927 was partly a domestic power struggle, and that the Soviet foreign minister Georgy Chicherin did not fear British military action (which in fact could only be minuscule). Nonetheless, Britain posed the main threat to the Soviet Union, which, she claims, was less dependent on Germany after the 1926 treaty of Berlin, not more so. She further dissents from a traditional view in saying that Germany and the USSR tried to restrain Lithuania's acute hostility towards Poland. She calls Locarno a triumph of the 'old diplomacy', adding that 'the French had opted for the British scenario of peaceful change' (p. 409). Interestingly, she argues that Germany's entry into the League of Nations made Geneva (not the League) the focal point of European diplomacy, and concludes that the amount of reparations collected was not worth the social and political price.

Steiner has researched in the archives of Britain, France and Germany, and the published documents of six more states; she has read a vast number of diaries and memoirs and a tremendous amount of secondary literature. But nobody can read everything, and nobody can be perfect. To expect perfection in any book and especially in one covering so much is as foolish as expecting perfection of the Versailles treaty. The work is flawed by occasional – mostly minor – errors, too much attention at times to Britain and a tendency to become mired in excessive, often confusing and unfocused detail regarding eastern Europe, reparations and Italian agreements which never materialised. The space saved could have been devoted to brief discussion of the effect of empire on policy, especially for Britain, France and Italy. There are also questions of interpretation. For example, Steiner discerns genuine French hegemonic aims in the early 1920s, while others say that France's moves were defensive, spurred by weakness and fear of Germany. This question of degree, motive and interpretation is a valid topic for historical debate.

Steiner writes well and sometimes brilliantly, providing vivid quotations from primary sources and marvellous word sketches of individuals, along with indications of domestic pressures affecting policy and the mutual antipathies of leaders such as Stresemann and Benito Mussolini, Neville Chamberlain and Franklin Roosevelt. Yet the prose is uneven. It is a pity that she was not given a better copy editor who could address the occasional lack of clarity and excessive detail, grating word repetitions, over-packed sentences, and long parenthetic statements. A first-class copy editor would ask for more dates, identifications and reasons why, and surely would catch such slips as dating US presidential terms in election years and repeated misspellings of Thoiry. Such a paragon would notice that tables and text do not always agree, dangling participial clauses occur and certain modifiers ('highly,' 'all-important') are overworked. These weaknesses are minor, but noticeable because everything else is so good – from the sardonic November 1925 German cartoon adorning the dust jacket through the excellent maps to the lists of prime ministers and foreign ministers and detailed chronology, although the index is weak.

Steiner, whose earlier work concerned Britain in the pre-war period, has thought long and deeply and well about the inter-war era. As a result she has produced two spectacular concluding chapters in summation of her two sections. These should be required reading for all who teach surveys of European history. Experts in inter-war diplomacy will read the entire book, finding much that is valuable and thought-provoking. Those specialised in other aspects of inter-war history such as domestic, cultural or gender issues should read the two concluding chapters. For the rest, one can only eagerly await what Steiner has to say about the diplomacy of the Nazi era.

If 9/11 announced the age of terrorism, as some claim, the First World War ushered in the age of propaganda. This took and continues to take many forms, as Patrick Cohrs makes clear. His *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932* covers much the same ground as Steiner's book, but in different ways. Although billed as 'a highly original and revisionist analysis' (p. i), it is very old wine in new bottles which are heavily encrusted with international relations theory and jargon; these last impede readability and afford fully utilised opportunities for repetition of views which were first heard in the 1920s and dominated the historiography until the 1960s, when several archives opened and a series of studies adding the United States to the European mix began to appear.

Unlike Steiner, Cohrs does not aspire to 'a unified "grand narrative"' (p. 12), but claims an analytic approach, which perhaps explains the unevenness of the work. Some sections rely on printed materials, chiefly secondary, along with speeches and public utterances; some have little documentation; and others are archivally based, primarily in Anglo-American and – to a degree – German records and private papers, not all correctly listed. Except regarding 1924–5, French archives are rarely cited. The bibliography of printed works is imposing but omits some primary and secondary works, especially on reparations, with which the author disagrees.

Cohrs's account of negotiation of what he calls 'the ill-founded peace of Versailles' (p. 7), so-called because Germany did not participate both fully and as an equal, is sufficiently error-prone and erratic to raise questions about his control of the material. He portrays Georges Clemenceau as extreme in his aims, ignoring political pressures from genuine extremists; says that David Lloyd George was not a peacemaker (although he in fact set the British policy of gradual treaty revision for the inter-war era); does poorly by Poland, perhaps from lack of consultation of the standard work;[2] and both distorts and pre-dates to February the May 1919 German reparations offer. Cohrs accurately reflects German bitterness at the treaty but does not explain why defeat deserved the same treatment as victory, including the reward of Anschluss, affording domination of south-eastern Europe.

Cohrs whips through 1920–3 in fewer than eight pages, again with many errors, especially concerning France, which supposedly 'clamoured' (p. 69) often for new British guarantees. This issue, added last to the crowded agenda for the January 1922 Cannes Conference, appears to be the only issue there, where 'president' (of France? of the Council?) Raymond Poincaré (p. 72) is described as making extraordinary demands and the pact allegedly failed. Most historians think it died a lingering death after the post-Cannes meeting in Paris of Lloyd George with premier-designate Poincaré. Cohrs says that the April 1922 economic conference at Genoa failed because the United States did not participate, thus offering simplicity and novelty and forcing the facts to fit the theory. He does little with the Ruhr occupation, which ultimately forced the one major policy revision of the era, that of France. Cohrs devotes much space to shifts by other powers, but in fact is describing changes of tone and tactics and perhaps emphasis, not basic alterations of policy.

The heart of Cohrs's work deals with the 1924 and 1925 London and Locarno settlements, for him the first steps toward real peace and a Euro-Atlantic system. That is not only because Germany participated, gaining major concessions in London in the first major treaty revision and at Locarno regaining diplomatic respectability, but also because Cohrs rejects the concept of the balance of power and criticises those who write about it, often distorting their views. For obvious reasons he prefers 'legitimate equilibrium' with 'reciprocity, a balance of rights, . . . reciprocal satisfactions' (p. 14). There were no satisfactions for France in London, where the Premier, Edouard Herriot, suffered defeat after defeat, and at Locarno France gained only an inoperable British guarantee.

One can make a case that the victors should either have enforced key provisions of the Versailles treaty, as France wished, or have radically revised it to placate Germany, as Cohrs believes. Largely owing to Britain's policy and to a degree that of the United States, they did neither, as Lloyd George opted before the treaty was signed for gradual piecemeal revision, which only heightened both German impatience and French fears without really creating the Euro-Atlantic system which Cohrs stresses. As he acknowledges, the United States was aloof for much of the time after 1924, as before. Further, because his mastery of 1918–23 is precarious, Cohrs thinks that many moves from 1924 on were innovations when they were really only variations on prior themes.

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[2] Kay Lundgreen-Nielsen, *The Polish Problem at the Paris Peace Conference*, trans. Alison Borch-Johanssen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979).

Cohrs particularly admires Charles Evans Hughes, terming him 'the pre-eminent US secretary of state of the interwar period' (p. 610). Curiously, his bibliography does not list the standard work by a less enthusiastic biographer.[3] He approves of the British prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, who engineered and chaired the 1924 London conference, attributing to him a sweeping Euro-Atlantic vision, although Sir Eyre Crowe, permanent under-secretary at the foreign office, usually decided policy. Austen Chamberlain, the honest broker of Locarno and later negotiations, is a secondary hero. Cohrs minimises Anglo-American disputes in the late 1920s, which distracted Chamberlain from Europe. And while the United States was crucial to financial diplomacy, Cohrs exaggerates its role in security matters and in claiming an important US dimension to Locarno, though its efforts began well after France set its policy. Despite his claims of a key US role, Cohrs admits that it was 'semi-detached' (p. 299).

Stresemann is presented as a good European, not as the brilliant German nationalist he was. According to Cohrs, he had a transatlantic policy of peaceful change, eschewed force, did not seek arms equality or revision of the Polish Corridor and wanted good relations with Warsaw. The 1925–6 commercial war with Poland 'had broken out' (p. 410), although later Cohrs admits that the goal was territorial concessions. He argues that Locarno was to Poland's advantage, although most scholars would agree with Stresemann that it was not. Anschluss is not mentioned, although Stresemann was not so reticent.

France is the villain of the piece. Herriot, who yielded so much at London, and who is variously described as a socialist or a Socialist although he was neither, gets kinder treatment than his predecessor and successor. Poincaré is deemed, largely owing to the views of British officials who detested him, to have sought continental hegemony. Aristide Briand is distrusted and his domestic difficulties are rarely mentioned, unlike those of Stresemann. Above all, although France allegedly cared more about financial certainty than security, it is condemned for militarism. Using statements of that minority of leading US Republicans who distrusted France and adding his own, Cohrs talks of 'costly military preponderance' (p. 322), '"horrendous" armament expenses' (p. 475), and 'insistence on maintaining a massive armed preponderance' (p. 599) as 'Europe's still most highly armed power' (p. 601). In fact, France's metropolitan army shrank as the term of service was progressively cut from three years to one and by 1931 was smaller by 100,000 men than that of Italy (Steiner, p. 755), not to mention the Soviet Union. As over half the military budget was devoted to a long-deferred naval build-up against Italy and from 1929 to the Maginot Line, army equipment was vintage 1918. Throughout the era French military expenditures were always below those of the United States and, until 1931, below those of Britain (Steiner, p. 826).

In addition, Cohrs maintains his thesis by omitting or barely mentioning that which contradicts it. For instance, he stresses that the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo contained no military clause, but does not say why or mention the August 1922 military convention, and Russo-German military collaboration receives only a glancing allusion later on. In tracing the 1925 Locarno negotiations, Cohrs is at best unclear over why Stresemann made the offer, omits the eruption over Article 231 of the Versailles treaty (the so-called war-guilt clause), and dismisses Stresemann's ultra-nationalist effusion to the crown prince (without indicating its contents) as a sop to right-wing nationalists, which seems unlikely for a private letter. He ignores both the effort a few days after Locarno to regain Eupen-Malmédy from Belgium and the November 1925 speech behind closed doors to a German audience, in which Stresemann argued that altering borders by force was excluded only until Germany had the force.[4] Cohrs also claims that, despite large concessions to Germany, the 1929 Hague reparations conference was 'a regression from the politics of London' (pp. 479–80), apparently because new British and US governments did not play the roles which Cohrs has assigned to them.

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[3] Betty Glad, *Charles Evans Hughes and the Illusions of Innocence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

It appears that Cohrs is the prisoner of a preconception and made the mistake of setting out to prove a thesis. That is a pity. He is intelligent and occasionally makes interesting observations. For instance, 'Like Anglo-American policy makers, financiers were refusing to engage in a zero-sum game where every gain for Germany equalled a loss for France . . .' (p. 142) warrants exploration, as does his view that US diplomats and financiers never discouraged or encouraged German revisionism and his argument that the Depression started in 1931 in Europe and spread to the United States. Further, despite remarkable circumlocutions much of the time, Cohrs *can* write clear, straightforward English, and does so in an excellent summary of struggles at the Preparatory Commission on Disarmament.

Cohrs aims to impress, but his work is more pretentious than profound, presenting at best one side of the coin. He is so repetitive, selective and allusive that the reader gains less than half a picture as the convolutions of a reiterative theoretical superstructure consume much space at the expense of substance. One must dynamise, concretise and equilibrate through an 'architecture' of inter-elite accommodation, transatlantic concertation, constitutive correlation and the like in order to learn little that is new. Such small reward does not warrant a major effort.

Unlike the sweepingly ambitious studies of the post-war by Cohrs and Steiner, the two works under review concerning the new pre-war era have much narrower foci. Despite its title, Keith Neilson's *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* concentrates on the musings of foreign office staff (and periodically others such as treasury, war office, and admiralty leaders), chiefly about the USSR, from 1933 to 1939, with a single chapter covering 1919 to 1933, mostly 1932. Neilson, whose prior works dealt with earlier eras, explains that the book drills an Anglo-Soviet borehole (or case study) into British strategic foreign policy (undefined) to gain a core sample revealing much about inter-war British foreign policy generally.

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[4] For the text see Henry Ashby Turner Jr, 'Eine Rede Stresemanns über seine Locarnopolitik', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 15, 4 (1967), 416–36.

Neilson has exhausted British archival records and private papers about Soviet Russia. He has read many English-language monographs and lists twenty pages of articles. There is no bibliography in other languages. Neilson's use of his material is entirely honest and heavily documented, although not always clear. His prose is serviceable, although he is allergic to 'he', resorting to elegant variation and excessive use of PUS (permanent under-secretary), which, despite a list of abbreviations, becomes irritating.

Although Neilson's bibliography contains works on other countries, he seems unclear about inter-war international politics in general and British policy in particular, thinking that it wanted to uphold the 1919 status quo and that until 1933 it rested on arms control and the League of Nations, genuinely favoured only by two short Labour ministries and the former Labour foreign secretary Arthur Henderson at the 1932 Disarmament Conference. Most leaders held the League in contempt (while often trying to *appear* supportive), and arms control was chiefly aimed at cost reduction, and not a policy goal of itself except in terms of weakening France to German benefit. Neilson barely mentions Russia's diplomatic debut at Genoa, and, like Cohrs, could benefit from the standard work.[5] He is similarly allusive about the 1926–7 war scare and says that 'Locarno was intended to ensure European stability until such things as arms control and the League proved their worth' (p. 51). Austen Chamberlain, who referred at Geneva to 'your Council' and 'your Assembly'[6] would be astounded at this interpretation of his new Concert of Europe. As 'the period of persuasion' was overtaken in 1933 by the 'period of deterrence' (pp. 80, 88), the background weakness continues. Neilson's description in full of a 1935 Anglo-French-Italian conference aimed primarily at restraining Adolf Hitler – 'British policy at Stresa was confined to maintaining a semblance of solidarity with France and Italy, while not antagonising Germany' (p. 138) – indicates neither what the conference concerned nor the Soviet reaction. Regarding the 1938 Munich crisis over Czechoslovakia, Neilson is entirely accurate about the USSR but less so on the broader circumstances.

The book, which indubitably will save historians the tedium of copying many foreign office minutes, was apparently written for those with the details of Soviet foreign policy firmly in hand. Chicherin is never mentioned. The Russian spy in the foreign office is noted, but one wonders in vain what he told his paymasters. And in the last substantive chapter, Neilson writes at some length about British objections to the Soviet definition of 'indirect aggression' without ever explaining what that definition was. Many questions are posed but not answered.

Neilson focuses more on foreign office minutes than on key events, which are mentioned primarily as a basis for comments by officials. Thus we hear more about possibilities, rumours and potential actions of powers than about their actual actions, and the reader must extract important matters from the swirl of foreign office speculation about what might happen. Neilson seems to think that all views, including those of juniors, are of equal value or at least equal interest. As a result, we have many trees and some slender saplings, but little forest. These thickets of minutes continue in the Neville Chamberlain era, when foreign office staff were ignored.

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[5] Carole Fink, *The Genoa Conference* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

[6] Francis P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 346.

Neilson is scrupulously fair to Neville Chamberlain, whom he does not admire, perhaps too fair, for he says that Chamberlain shifted after the 1939 Nazi occupation of Prague but omits his initial reaction and the uproar forcing the shift. He does not ask whether Chamberlain intended the August 1939 Anglo-French-Russian negotiations to result in a treaty or was simply pursuing deterrence against Germany, perhaps obliquely implying the latter. But he fails to explain the bases of Chamberlain's policy. When Britain's acute military weakness became clear, knowing that Britain had no fleet east of Malta and that the public was oversold on disarmament, Chamberlain proposed in 1934 ending work on the Singapore base and writing off the Far East to concentrate on European defence. When he failed to carry the cabinet, a closer relationship with Japan became his alternative proposal. In Europe, he viscerally opposed both war and communism and knew that war would mean Soviet domination of at least half of Europe, so he tried to appease Hitler at the expense of eastern Europe. These policies were rational if, alas, never really abandoned.

Some of Chamberlain's concerns, especially about Soviet Russia, appear in foreign office and cabinet minutes. Lack of information and difficulty in assessing Soviet policy are clear, as is the flabbiness of British policy in general. There is an excellent portrayal of British weakness (which historians are likely to echo fifty years from now about the United States of today) and a clear picture of a staff struggling with Britain's too few resources and too many interests and commitments in an overstretched empire. Permanent under-secretary Sir Robert Vansittart complained, 'this perpetual making of bricks without straw is a heartbreaking task for any FO in the long run' (p. 173). Those who think that Vansittart and Sir Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary, were appeasers will find some ammunition here. Interestingly, some opposed a grouping of Britain, France and Russia because it would echo 1914. And of course the minutes reveal much about clashes within the foreign office, although Laurence Collier, head of its northern department, comes off well. He probably deserves a biography and certainly should be included (along with US General Eric Shinseki) in any study of those whose careers were curtailed because they were right.

Neilson avoids much analysis of Soviet policy until his concluding chapter, but along the way consistently presents it as pragmatic, which it generally was. Foreign office minutes are another matter. He says that Soviet Russia wanted to return to the old diplomacy, which he thinks Britain opposed, considering the use of power sinful. In his conclusion, he emphasises Soviet ideology. Perhaps he exaggerates, but an ideological overcast did appear at times, especially in Russian fear of a four-power capitalist alliance against the USSR.

Neilson blames the failure of the August 1939 negotiations on both sides. Despite his focus on the British end, he is usually even-handed. However, despite much conscientious labour, he has not accomplished his stated goal, whose feasibility is uncertain even with greater mastery of the era and a more substantive focus, for, as he acknowledges, the Anglo-Soviet relationship was peripheral much of the time.

Unfortunately, Neilson has provided a maximum of minutiae and a minimum of solid framework.

An entirely different kind of look at pre-war British foreign policy is presented in Sidney Aster's *Appeasement and All Souls: A Portrait with Documents, 1937–1939.* From an array of sources, Aster has gathered together and edited the records and correspondence of the Foreign Affairs Group (FAG) which met intermittently, mostly at All Souls, Oxford, from December 1937 to May 1938. These twenty-one individuals attempted to devise an agreed policy statement, but, as Aster points out, their debates were overtaken by crises.

The group, over which Lord Allen of Hurtwood presided not because of his intense pacifism but because of his talents as a chairman, ran the policy gamut and much of the political spectrum, although principally from the centre leftwards. Harold Macmillan (later prime minister), who seems to have said little, was the only Tory politician, albeit a leftish and anti-appeasement one. They were well educated, well established, well connected (showing drafts to Eden), well informed, well intentioned – and so often wrong. Sensibly starting with an assessment of power, they overrated France's strength, as did others. They thought Anschluss would not occur, that Germany did not want to annex Czechoslovakia and that, while Germany was the main danger, Italy or Japan was more likely to start a war.

The FAG assumed that there would be no substantive help from the United States. Thus Britain could not defend the Far East. Thus, also, the power equation never came out right without the Soviet Union, about whom they were more uncertain than hostile, thinking that Britain could not count on the USSR. As to Germany, most favoured firmness followed by conciliation, but where to be firm? Spain was the only place against which Britain could exert power (against General Francisco Franco) without undue risk. In some respects many members agreed with Chamberlain: they were willing to let Germany dominate eastern Europe provided it did so peacefully, and most believed that neutrality should be imposed on Czechoslovakia along, perhaps, with a cantonal system. But none thought that negotiations with Germany would lead to any solution.

Most deemed the Versailles treaty 'ill-founded', in Cohrs's words, and displayed that sense of guilt inculcated by Anglo-German propaganda in the 1920s. A draft by Lord Allen saw 'the errors of the peace treaties and the tragic errors of French and British policies in the post-war years' as 'moral liabilities' (p. 126). Reparations, disarmament, demilitarisation of the Rhineland and the ban on Anschluss were all unfair, and Article 231 should be eliminated. Yet they were much attached to the collapsing League of Nations – provided it was detached from the Versailles treaty and Article 16 was eliminated. Some sort of collective security should be reconstructed, but how? There was also a commitment to 'defence of democracy in the British Empire' (p. 83), which would have raised eyebrows in some parts of it.

In several senses, the FAG was a larger, more informal, self-appointed precursor of the US Iraq Study Group.[7] Feminists will note that the FAG contained no women while the smaller Iraq Study Group included one. Both groups faced intractable problems where resources were inadequate and no satisfactory solution was visible. Unlike the Americans, the FAG never achieved an agreed statement. However, the Iraq Study Group never faced anything as stark as author and former diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson's assessment on 9 March 1938, 'We are suddenly faced by the complete collapse of our authority, our Empire, and our independence' (p. 81). Most of the group wanted a middle policy between resistance and retreat but were not sure that it existed.

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[7] The co-chairmen of the congressionally endorsed Iraq Study Group were chosen by the US Institute for Peace and three similar organizations in conjunction with interested members of Congress, and

Aster has carefully annotated the minutes, other records and correspondence among members of the group, including a few pointless pieces, such as a member saying he has cancelled a lunch to attend, but most are relevant. All British individuals are fully identified, but not other items and persons. Those not expert in the period may be confused by mention of the 1937 Paul van Zeeland report (on trade revival), the 1938 Anglo-Italian agreement, the May 1938 Czech crisis obliquely in letters, and the anti-Nazi (Count Albrecht von) Bernstorff. Fortunately, footnotes are at the bottom of the page, for tiny faint numbers in the text are nearly invisible.

Aster's introductory chapter serves primarily as a summary of events, and part of his conclusion details further activities of group members until the war. However, he has succeeded in revising A. L. Rowse's *All Souls and Appeasement*,[8] establishing that the majority of the fellows, especially younger ones, opposed appeasement, and that neither All Souls in general nor the FAG had much influence or played a central role. He further demonstrates a degree of Labour and Liberal support for some aspects of Chamberlain's policies and delineates both the varieties of appeasement and the strands of public opinion. He concludes that the group served, as intended, as a 'Brains Trust' which clarified the thinking of its members.

Similarly, it is to be hoped that this rather assorted collection of studies of aspects of inter-war diplomacy will help to clarify the thinking of international historians about a controversial period and delineate different strands of historical analysis. More years must pass before we can know whether their appearance heralds a much needed revival of diplomatic history. One hopes so, for this is certainly to be desired on its merits and surely can be accomplished without any additional impetus of renewed terrorism on either side of the Atlantic.

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the co-chairmen in turn chose the other eight (originally nine) members. The group had a staff and advisory panels. For details see *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage, 2006).

[8] A. L. Rowse, *Appeasement and All Souls* (London: Macmillan, 1961).