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ARTICLE

A "Great Power" Man or World Stater? The International Thought of Charles Kingsley Webster, 1886–1961

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This article examines the international thought of Charles Kingsley Webster, one of Britain's most important diplomatic historians of the twentieth century. Though best remembered as one of the first historians of the Congress of Vienna and a biographer of Lord Castlereagh and Lord Palmerston, Webster also served as one of the key planners for the United Nations Organization in the Foreign Office during the Second World War. His ideas concerning internationalism—particularly his belief in an eventual world state—as well as his views on British foreign policy and the nature of international politics, offer a unique insight into both the varieties of interwar internationalism and the intellectualism which contributed to British strategic planning in the early 1940s.

From its inception in June 1942, the Economic and Reconstruction Department within the British Foreign Office took on a significant role as a postwar planning department under the leadership of Gladwyn Jebb. Amidst numerous problems that were expected to arise at the conclusion of hostilities, the creation of a postwar international organization loomed large, as such an institution would be responsible for the maintenance of peace in subsequent years. Nearly six months into the department's existence, Jebb felt compelled to bring a historian into the department, particularly one with an expertise in previous international organizations dating back to the nineteenth century. The man he chose was Charles Kingsley Webster, a professor then on leave from the London School of Economics and serving in the Foreign Office Research Department. This "Roman-nosed, chinless extrovert," as Jebb later described him, had "an encyclopedic knowledge" of international organizations dating back to the Congress of Vienna. But while Jebb considered the majority of policy-minded professors to be no more than "long-haired theoreticians" spouting impractical schemes, he considered Webster, like himself, to be a "Great Power man."[1]

[1]Gladwyn Jebb, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (New York, 1972), 120.

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While this description is important in understanding Jebb's motivations for bringing Webster into the department, it is a simplification of one of the most knowledgeable minds within the Foreign Office's postwar planning operation. Though Webster was indeed an expert on past organizations and often stressed the position and responsibilities of the great powers, he was also a liberal internationalist with radical, long-term visions of an international order of which Jebb, as well as others in the Foreign Office, was unaware. By the time of Webster's full involvement in the department by the spring of 1943, the "Prof," as he was known to wartime colleagues, had been refining and articulating his nuanced views on international politics for almost forty years.

Webster's approach to the study of both diplomatic history and international politics has been addressed in previous scholarship, as has his worldview more broadly. On the latter subject, scholars have been split on how exactly Webster's views might be categorized, if at all. Ian Hall, in a study dedicated to Webster's historiographical and international thought, has sought to escape the narrow confines of labeling him an idealist or realist. His thought, Hall argues, "fits easily into neither category."[2] Philip Reynolds and E. J. Hughes, who have undertaken the longest examination of Webster's work during the Second World War, have called him "idealist in his realism."[3] Others, including the historian T. G. Otte, have described Webster as a "liberal internationalist" though "not an idealist," while David Stevenson, one of Webster's successors in the chair of international history at the London School of Economics, has claimed that Webster was "a man of decided views and a proselytizing internationalist."[4]

This article puts forward a view which is in line with the argument, expressed by the scholars mentioned above, that Webster's worldview cannot be classified or categorized with ease. Indeed, his views were contingent on circumstance as much as they were on his understanding of historical events and figures. He rarely strayed from a view that military and economic power was a key determinant in international politics, and at times—especially with regard to his work in government during the Second World War—his concern for the national interest sometimes outweighed larger internationalist considerations. Equally, however, Webster was a committed internationalist, believing that increased international cooperation along economic, political, and social lines was inevitable and in the interest of the United Kingdom.

[2]Ian Hall, "The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian: Sir Charles Webster, 1886–1961," *International Politics* 42 (2005), 470–90, at 486. This article follows the path first carved by Hall's excellent study—namely an investigation into Webster's historiographical and international thought—but it differs from it in important ways. For one thing, Hall combines Webster's writings, lectures, and correspondence across decades, in order to give a comprehensive view of Webster's approach to history and his worldview. This article, however, sees these views as changing over time, and it aims to grasp how and to what extent Webster's thinking altered with experience.

[3]P. A. Reynolds and E. J. Hughes, *The Historian as Diplomat: Charles Kingsley Webster and the United Nations, 1939–1946* (London, 1976), 91.

[4]T. G. Otte, "'The Confederation of Europe'? British Views of the Congress of Vienna in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Thomas Olechowski, Brigitte Mazohl, Karin Schneider, and Reinhard Stauber, eds., *Der Wiener Kongress 1814/1815* (Vienna, 2019), 311–20, at 317; David Stevenson, "Learning from the Past: The Relevance of International History," *International Affairs* 90/1 (2014), 5–22, at 6.

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Where the article departs furthest from previous scholarship, however, is in advancing a line that Webster's thinking was infused with a utopian vision of a future international order—one which, while not radical in its means, was certainly radical in its ends. The first instance of this utopianism came in 1909 when, as a postgraduate student at the University of Cambridge, he argued that the development of a world state was not only a possibility but an inevitability. Though the product of a youthful optimism buoyed by some of the intellectual currents of his period, these views did not dissolve over time. Three decades later, as he found himself enmeshed in the United Kingdom's planning efforts for a postwar international organization, Webster was still expressing such views, albeit sporadically. While he kept these ideas from his government colleagues for fear of being labeled too much of a visionary idealist, it was the concept of an eventual world state that, as this article argues for the first time, sat at the back of his mind, providing a broad shape to his recommendations for a postwar organization.

This article traces several currents in Webster's international thought, from the early years of his university education, to the period of the Second World War (which was the pinnacle of his policy influence), to the last years of his life. In particular, the work focuses on the way in which historical study and concurrent ideas and events shaped his thinking. As an intellectual, he was not necessarily profound. His approach to history was more practical than philosophical.[5] In addressing some of the key questions of international politics and British foreign policy in these years, he was, in varying degrees, both contradictory and prescient. Yet through a reading of his published works, his lectures, and his correspondence, a recognizable, if complex, approach to history and international politics emerges. It is the aim of this article to trace these patterns of Webster's international thought, how they developed, and how they altered over time, especially in response to events he lived through. In so doing, the work shines light on a significant figure of the twentieth century, and how his thinking aligned with, or diverged from, certain strains of liberal internationalist thinking in the period spanning 1900 to 1960.

In terms of historians becoming involved in major policy planning, the case of Webster is one of the most consequential of the twentieth century. Few professional historians within the United Kingdom have been in such a position, and still fewer have their fingerprints on the structures of a postwar international order that survives into the present day. On perhaps a deeper level, his experience is representative of how, in any given period, countless ideas related to the structure and conduct of international politics merge and collide within one's intellect, and how, in turn, the resulting conceptual constructs come to be shaped by certain necessities. In the case of Charles Webster, we see how an individual's historical study and personal experience moulded his international thought, including his more radical ideas, over time. At the same time, we can also observe how these ideas were, or were not, directly applied when he found himself in a position often cordoned off to scholars and historians—the world of high policy.

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[5] Hall writes that Webster's "historiographical principles were representative of his time, if not philosophically sophisticated." Hall, "The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian," 487.

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The foundation of Webster's international thought was his approach to historical study, a view nurtured and cultivated at the University of Cambridge in the first decade of the twentieth century. By the time he matriculated to King's College in 1904, the discipline of history itself was continuing an evolution that had begun nearly thirty years before. Under the direction of Oscar Browning and George Prothero, the Historical Tripos had been established in 1875, and, for the first time, history was treated as its own discipline outside the wider "moral sciences."[6] By 1903, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, John Bagnell Bury, remarked that historical studies remained in a transformative state, something he considered to be "a great event in the history of the world."[7] It was in this environment that Webster's impressionable mind shifted in important ways. Though he was not a disciple, per se, of any iconic Cambridge historian—for instance, a John Robert Seeley, Lord Acton, or Bury—he adopted certain elements which, largely popular during his time, would go on to define his approach to history and politics in the succeeding decades.

Arguably the two most important aspects of his historical study were the scientific approach to investigation and the use of history for practical purposes. Concerning the former, Webster was open about the influence of Lord Acton, and specifically what he described as the one-time Regius Professor's ability to bring the methods of the famed German historian Leopold von Ranke to English historiography.[8] Other scholars who embodied this style were Samuel Rawson Gardiner and Frederic William Maitland, the latter of whom Webster considered to be "the most imaginative, the most scientific, and the most successful of all recent historians."[9] The period itself was one during which, as Robin Collingwood and Herbert Butterfield each noted, began to move away from more partisan and dramatized accounts of history, especially national history.[10] In this sense, Webster was a product of the time. During a 1912 lecture on the principles and methods of historical study, Webster, then just twenty-six years old, described the "detective instinct of the historian" which relied on robust documentary evidence and the ability of historians to enter into the minds of their subjects. If scholars could adopt such a mind-set, Webster suggested, then they might be able to "lay the foundations of the new science."[11]

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[6]History Tripos minutes, 2, in UA/HIST/2/2, Cambridge University Library Archives.

[7]John Bagnell Bury, "'The Science of History': Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Cambridge, 23 Jan. 1903," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge, 1930), 3–22, at 4.

[8]Webster, *The Study of Nineteenth Century Diplomacy: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Liverpool on Friday, 10 December 1914* (London, 1915), 6. For a discussion of Lord Acton's view of Ranke see Casper Sylvest, "British Liberal Historians and the Primacy of Internationalism," in Brendan Simms and William Mulligan, eds., *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660–2000* (Basingstoke, 2010), 214–31, at 220–21.

[9]Webster, *The Study of Nineteenth Century Diplomacy*, 38. For Maitland's influence see Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 2005), 33.

[10]R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York, 1946), 146–7; Herbert Butterfield, "History in the Twentieth Century," in Butterfield, ed., *The Historical Association, 1906–1956* (London, 1955); Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*, 14–15, 194–8.

[11]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Documentary Evidence of the Nineteenth Century," (1912), Papers of Charles Kingsley Webster (hereafter Webster), 21/1, London School of Economics and Political Science (hereafter LSE).

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The second major theme of Webster's approach to history was the discipline's practical use. Here he was the latest in a lineage of Cambridge historians who championed a similar view. John Robert Seeley had spoken of history as the "school of statesmanship" in 1870, while Lord Acton, no stranger to politics or elite political circles, carried on the tradition.[12] The latter's inaugural lecture in 1895, in particular, reads as one of the great testaments to the utility of history for political life.[13] This was an approach which enveloped Webster and his young contemporaries, and by the time he submitted his dissertation on the Congress of Vienna in 1909, he was explicit about the modern applicability of his research.[14] "The Congresses at The Hague in 1899 and 1907 are in a sense the successors of those [at] Vienna and Aix-la-Chapelle," he wrote. "An investigation of the policies of their predecessors should be of considerable assistance to the statesmen of the twentieth century."[15]

As he further honed his historical method, Webster's urge to influence the present at times crept into his treatment of the past. He saw it as necessary for historians, especially those living in a world becoming more unstable and hostile, to furnish large generalizations about international politics. The assumption here was that through historical study, one could gather the facts and arrange them in a way which might create practical knowledge about the way states can and should interact. With enough of this know-how, he believed, war might one day be "abolished." Much of his confidence was derived from his own faith in human reason—a rationality which might be discovered through a reading of history and harnessed for the most noble of ends. "The movement to a deeper understanding of the course of modern history," he wrote confidently, "is one that will fundamentally affect the whole destiny of the human race."[16]

While a decisive standpoint for a historian still in his twenties and yet to hold a permanent post, Webster's reflection here was not entirely unique for his time. In many ways, it built upon earlier ideas as expressed by Bury, who in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1903 had spoken of adopting certain—though not all—scientific approaches to historical study, especially as this related to the development of human societies and the interactions between them. "The clear realisation of the fact that our conception of the past is itself a distinct factor in guiding and moulding our evolution, and must become a factor of greater and increasing potency, marks a new stage in the growth of the human mind. And it supplies us with the true theory of the practical importance of history."[17] Though Webster would soon go well beyond Bury's sympathy for historical generalizations, the connection between scientific approaches to historical study and what this

[12]John Robert Seeley, "The Teaching of Politics: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Cambridge 1870," in Seeley, *Lectures and Essays* (London, 1870), 290–317, at 296.

[13]John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, "Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History" (1895), in Acton, *Lectures on Modern History*, ed. John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence (London, 1906), 1–28.

[14]S. T. Bindoff and G. N. Clark, "Charles Kingsley Webster, 1886–1961," in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 48 (London, 1961), 427–47, at 429. Printed copy in Webster 27/1, LSE.

[15]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Studies in Foreign Policy, 1814–1818," dissertation for the University of Cambridge (1909), 153–4, KCAC/4/11/1/Webster, King's College Archive Centre, University of Cambridge.

[16]Webster, "Documentary Evidence of the Nineteenth Century."

[17]Bury, "The Science of History," 12.

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might reveal about the wider evolution of international affairs occupied an increasingly important place in his own thinking.

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Webster's approach to history in these years led him to a radically progressive view of the international system. Specifically, he believed that not only was a singular world-state the preferable solution for an inherently unstable international system, but that such an arrangement was a historical inevitability. Only months after submitting his dissertation, Webster drafted an ambitious argument, one that, while never presented to the world outside King's College, marked one of the earliest examples of Webster's internationalist thinking and his application of modern history to contemporary issues. It was a vision on international organization he would adjust in the future, but one whose central thesis he would never completely abandon. If anything, it remained his ultimate goal.

The paper was entitled "Evolution of a World State," and across twelve handwritten pages he made a case for why the international system of nation-states should—and would—become a "world-state" in which all nations would submit to a single legal structure, the decisions of which would settle disputes and, most importantly, avoid open conflict. Given its sweeping range and the place it would occupy in his thought over the next decades, the paper is worth discussing in detail here.

For Webster, the period was one of great advancement in a number of fields, and relations between nation-states were no exception. Using phrasing which he would employ throughout his life, he wrote, "Today we are progressing with a rapidity such as has never before been experienced." The development of international law and the increasing tendency by some governments to submit to arbitration, in addition to steady industrial and scientific advancements, stood out in his mind.[18] "There can be no doubt that in a few years the international machinery will be greatly perfected, and, as precedent accumulates on precedent, obligatory arbitration will be practically achieved."[19]

The central argument he presented concerned a parallel between the internal political evolution of a national state and the ongoing political evolution of the international state. There were four related stages to each evolution and of these, Webster believed that the international state had completed all but the final step: the abolition of war in favor of peaceful settlement of disputes. Beginning with a Hobbesian state of nature and private war between individuals, the state had moved into a second stage of centralized control, in which "private vengeance was regulated." This control of violence was complemented by the third stage, which involved the creation of tribunals whereby individuals could seek justice "instead of settling their disputes themselves." The fourth and final stage saw the cessation of private war altogether. At this point "it became compulsory to refer all disputes to a central authority."[20]

[18]For an overview of the movement towards institutionalized forms of arbitration see Bob Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organisations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (Abingdon, 2009), 68–71.

[19]Webster, "The Evolution of a World State," 5, Webster 21/1.

[20]Ibid., 4.

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Turning to the evolution of the international state, Webster saw the Thirty Years War as the example of a brazen, lawless struggle between private individuals. But by the time it concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Europe had split into different "states of equal legal rights." This, Webster claimed, was evidence of the international state's entry into the second stage of evolution and "the date at which modern history practically begins." In addition to the settlement at Westphalia which, in effect, regulated "private vengeance," thinkers from Hugo Grotius in the seventeenth century to the statesmen responsible for the Geneva Convention of 1864, the Brussels Conference of 1874, and the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 had all sought to develop laws governing the use of force which could restrict a nation's ability to wage war. Webster argued that these agreements had prevented unnecessary wars between civilized states except in those cases in which war was used as "an instrument for the adjustment of international disputes."

In order to peacefully settle such international disputes, Webster noted that the international state, thus far, had in fact created the necessary machinery. Just as in the third stage of state evolution citizens had developed court systems to settle disputes based on the rule of law, so too had nation-states within the international system developed the International Court of Arbitration in 1899. "Arbitration has come to be regarded as a practical alternative to war just as a trial was … regarded as an alternative to the family feud," he wrote. The final stage in the evolution of the international state—the abolition of war in favor of compulsory arbitration—remained elusive, however. While advanced nation-states had secured this evolutionary step internally, the international state had yet to reach this milestone, although Webster argued that the first steps had been taken and that the world was within "measurable distance of obligatory arbitration." He alluded to the fact that in certain matters, for example those dealing with commercial treaties, referrals to arbitration had become the norm. Furthermore, Webster held up the first International Commission of Inquiry in 1905, which had prevented a war between England and Russia over the 1904 Dogger Bank incident, as a great example of the more general tendency to resolve disputes peacefully.[21]

Now, as more international laws became codified and recognized by nation-states throughout the world, and as more governments submitted to arbitration in order to settle disputes, Webster envisioned the eventual formation of "an international Parliament at The Hague with an international executive responsible to it." Importantly, the overall structure would take the form of a federation of states, one based on the American model. Like other British intellectuals in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, Webster looked upon the precedent of American federalism as a model of future interstate relations. "The experience of the United States," he wrote, "shows how easily men of entirely different races and language can be assimilated into one nationality."[22]

[21]Ibid., 5.

[22]Ibid., 5. In 1906, Frederick Scott Oliver published a popular biography of Alexander Hamilton, one which, as the historian John Kendle has pointed out, was picked up by members of the Round Table, including Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr. See Frederick Scott Oliver, *Alexander Hamilton: An Essay on American Union* (1906) (New York, 1920); John Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History* (London, 1997),

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The paper was delivered to a seminar chaired by Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, and while no record of the subsequent discussion exists, it likely provoked a range of responses given its ambitious claims. What seems to be clear, however, is that Webster was caught up in the uncertainty, excitement, and general fervor surrounding the modernity of the period. Not only were technological advancements changing the way in which individuals perceived time and space, but political thought—particularly liberalism—was experiencing a transformation. Issues concerning democracy, nationality, federalism, and the future of the British Empire were just a few of the major topics undergoing a rigorous evaluation. Duncan Bell has described the period as one when there was an "intense and rapid transition in which many of the exiting categories and concerns of politics were being transformed, even revolutionized."[23] Elsewhere, Bell and Casper Sylvest have written of a peculiar strain of liberal internationalist thinking which, like Webster's own view, put forward the idea of a "domestic analogy" to describe one way the international system might come to be ordered.[24]

But where exactly did Webster sit in the context of other writers in the period? His views were optimistic but not entirely anomalous in the first decade of the twentieth century. Among some prominent English historians in particular, there was, as Collingwood observed of the turn of the century, a belief that the world was moving in a certain direction. "The idea of progress," he wrote, became almost an article of faith."[25] Within this broader intellectual climate, there was a sense that, with the right analytical approach, scholars could discover the direction of domestic and international politics (as well as economics) and then guide societies to peace and prosperity. The historian of international thought Glenda Sluga has described an "international turn" taking place in these years, as writers and organizers sought to develop new social and political forms against the backdrop of material progress.[26] If the nineteenth century was defined by nationalism, wrote one of the most famous journalists of the period, W. T. Stead, then the following would be the "Century of Internationalism."[27] Moreover, Webster's writing was evidence of a wider fondness for, and faith in, international law. The Hague Conferences which Webster alluded to were, as historian Madeleine Herren has described, events which "led to the first official inventory of multilateral co-operation, and international unions and multilateral treaties served as models for a new world order based on arbitration."[28]

81–2; Lionel Curtis, *The Project of a Commonwealth, Part I* (London, 1915); and Curtis, "World Order," *International Affairs* 18/3 (1939), 301–20.

[23]Duncan Bell, "Democracy and Empire: J. A. Hobson, Leonard Hobhouse, and the Crisis of Liberalism," in Ian Hall and Lisa Hill, eds., *British International Thinkers from Hobbes to Namier* (New York, 2009), 181–205, at 183.

[24]Duncan Bell and Casper Sylvest, "International Society in Victorian Political Thought: T. H. Green, Herbert Spencer, and Henry Sidgwick," in Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016), 237–64, at 239–40.

[25]Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 144.

[26]Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013), 11–12.

[27]Quoted in Madeleine Herren, "Governmental Internationalism and the Beginning of a New World Order in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann, eds., *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (New York, 2001), 121–44, at 121.

[28]Ibid., 143.

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As for the great focus of the paper, the idea of a unitary or federal world-state, it was a concept not widely popular but one floated by a number of writers, including W. T. Stead, H. G. Wells and J. A. Hobson, as well as those closer to Webster, such as Lowes Dickinson.[29] Within Webster's paper, however, there were no references to contemporary writers or publications. Instead, he couched his argument in a range of more established political theories, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's writings on a universal jurisprudence, Jeremy Bentham's early calls for an international court of arbitration, and Immanuel Kant's theory of "perpetual peace."[30] Webster, however, viewed these arguments as abstract theories. While they were invaluable to the evolution of the world-state, there were recent historical forces at play which proved that the international system of nation-states was moving towards a more unified structure that he described. Rather intriguingly, one of the only references Webster made regarding economic systems involved socialism, which he thought would be a "further unifying force" towards a world-state. Though he dealt with this aspect briefly, this issue was one which revealed, perhaps more than any other topic in the paper, the influence of the intellectual and social environment of his time. This period, as Patrizia Dogliani has described it, was part of a wider "golden age" of socialist international thought, and this is certainly evident in Webster's writing.[31] "The ideas of socialists," he noted, "are largely cosmopolitan and their influence which must necessarily increase will be bound to be on the side of a world state."[32] Though throughout his subsequent professional life he would largely avoid opinions related to the financial and economic aspects of international order (in favor of topics dealing with political and security matters), the reference to socialism here reveals important characteristics of how Webster recognized and made sense of contemporary forces within society.[33]

Webster's sweeping predictions here could be written off as a consuming idealism so common to individuals in their twenties. Yet these were ideas which proved lasting. Indeed, his writings from 1909 would turn out to be ones that he would hold throughout the prime of his working life.

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[29]W. T. Stead, *The United States of Europe on the Eve of the Parliament of Peace* (Toronto, 1899), Part I; H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (New York, 1902), 267; and Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London, 1905), 12; J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, 2nd edn (London, 1905), 332. In an article written in 1907, Lowes Dickinson suggested a "federal unity" throughout the world. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, "Peace or War?", *Living Age*, 14 Dec. 1907. See also Casper Sylvest, "Continuity and Change in British Liberal Internationalism, *c.* 1900–1930," *Review of International Studies* 31/2 (2005), 263–83, at 266 n. 13.

[30]Webster, "The Evolution of a World State," 1.

[31]She has written that this period extended from 1889 to 1939. Patrizia Dogliani, "The Fate of Socialist Internationalism," in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017), 38–60.

[32]Webster, "The Evolution of a World State," 10.

[33]This is in contrast to some prominent British internationalists during the interwar period, such as Barbara Wootton, Lionel Robbins, and William Beveridge, who viewed economic considerations as key to discussions around world order. Or Rosenboim, "A Plan for Plenty: The International Thought of Barbara Wootton," in Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, eds., *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge, 2021), 286–305; Lionel Robbins, *Economic Planning and International Order* (London, 1937).

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Like so many others of his generation, Webster would come to be influenced in profound ways by the experience of the First World War. Having only recently taken up his first academic post—as chair of modern history at the University of Liverpool—when the conflict began, Webster soon joined the Army Service Corps as a junior officer, though poor eyesight kept him from the front lines.[34] Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality was certainly a catalyst for the twenty-eight-year-old Webster, but as he recalled in later years, he was motivated, in part, by the idea of being involved with the peace settlement which might conclude the war.[35] In the third year of the conflict, Webster was brought into the Military Intelligence Division at the War Office, and later the Historical Section at the Foreign Office. Thanks in large part to the classicists Arnold Toynbee and Alfred Zimmern, men who would go on to become Webster's close colleagues in the forthcoming decades, a number of Britain's best young historians were brought closer to the conduct of policy.[36]

By December 1918, as the British government was preparing for forthcoming negotiations in Paris, Webster was asked to contribute a memorandum on the lessons of the Congress of Vienna. As one of the first British historians to examine this period, Webster had immersed himself in the national archives of capitals across Western and Central Europe. Throughout this time, he was motivated not only by the historical importance of the settlements which concluded the Napoleonic Wars but also by what he considered to be their contemporary relevance. Just a month before the Paris Peace Conference, he wrote that the Congress of Vienna was the "only assembly which can furnish even a shadowy precedent for the great task that lies before the statesmen and peoples of the world."[37] For some, Webster's paper was enlightening. The young diplomat Harold Nicolson offered his praise, as did the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Lord Hardinge, who asked that the paper be printed and circulated widely.[38] But for others, including the American president Woodrow Wilson, the historical precedent represented exactly the kind of closed diplomacy and balance-of-power arrangements that they were hoping to transcend.[39] Webster, however, saw in the congress (and especially the Concert of Europe that followed) the first formal and sustained diplomatic interaction between modern European powers—an experience which had laid the foundation of modern internationalism.

[34]Bindoff and Clark, "Charles Kingsley Webster," 427.

[35]Charles Kingsley Webster, unpublished autobiography, 1, Webster 23/6.

[36]Erik Goldstein, "Historians Outside the Academy: G. W. Prothero and the Experience of the Foreign Office Historical Section, 1917–20," *IHR Historical Research* 63/151 (1990), 195–211; T. G. Otte, "'The Light of History': Scholarship and Officialdom in the Era of the First World War," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 30/2 (2019), 253–87.

[37]Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815* (London, 1918), iii.

[38]Goldstein, "Historians Outside the Academy," 203; and Erik Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference 1916-1920* [1991] (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), 40.

[39]According to Webster, Wilson, upon reading his paper, had said that there would be "no odour of Vienna … brought into the proceedings." Webster described this exchange in the preface of the 1934 edition of his book *The Congress of Vienna*. For a copy see Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815* (New York, 1963), 15.

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Though his paper was of marginal influence for the more senior British statesmen who traveled to Paris, the work is indicative of certain central themes in his worldview. First and foremost, the paper made clear that his own internationalism was one which rested on the collective responsibility of the great powers. Their leadership was indispensable in that what they agreed to effectively be dictated to by smaller, less powerful states. But despite his opinion that the great powers should be responsible for all major decisions, Webster was sensitive to the concerns of small states, a sympathy which dated back to his study of the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818. He acknowledged that the small powers were repeatedly ignored, which "caused great discontent," and while it was a challenge to conceive of a manner in which the smaller states could be decisive, "the utter disregard of their rights was one of the main reasons for the comparative failure of the Congress." Webster was careful to avoid overstating the role of smaller states, however. He wrote that while these governments must be involved in the wider settlement, they should be brought into the fold through the work of the allies. What must be avoided was the type of strategy employed by Talleyrand, in which the French ambassador courted smaller states with the aim of sowing discord among the assembly of nations. "It is essential, above all, that no opportunity be given to Germany to imitate the role of Talleyrand, and, by championing the rights of the small nations, to create discontent and even protest, which she can exploit for her own purposes."[40] One way to bring smaller countries in, he suggested, was to create smaller subcommittees on which they would sit. This hub-and-spoke arrangement would allow their concerns to be expressed and views incorporated but through the appropriate channels. In practice, Webster's plan to include smaller powers into allied subcommittees was more about creating a feeling of legitimacy within the allied camp. He harbored no illusions about the secondary role of small powers. "The initiative on these matters must come from the Great Powers … If the Great Powers can formulate schemes, these can subsequently be discussed with their smaller allies, and the whole then presented to the enemy Powers as the considered programme of the Alliance."[41]

After the Paris Peace Conference, Webster returned to academia, a relative decline compared to the landmark proceedings in which he had just taken part. Still, he approached his postwar work, as did many of his wartime colleagues, with renewed energy and sense of mission.[42] Returning to Liverpool in July 1919, he helped to found the Institute for International Affairs and the Liverpool branch of League of Nations Union, an organization to which he would contribute throughout the interwar years.[43] Crucially, when it came to teaching and research, Webster continued to be guided by a feeling that historians of international politics

[40]Charles Kingsley Webster, "General Observations on the Congress of Vienna and the Applicability of Its History to the Present Time," 30 Oct. 1918, 5–6, Webster 22/2.

[41]Webster, "General Observations on the Congress of Vienna," 6.

[42]The historian T. G. Otte has described how the experience of these historians during the First World War, and especially at the Paris Peace Conference, influenced their later scholarship and teaching. See Otte, "The Light of History."

[43]Bindoff and Clark, "Charles Kingsley Webster," 433.

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had a profound responsibility to furnish knowledge which might guide citizens, and then statesmen, towards a more peaceful coexistence.[44]

It was a theme which Webster had himself advocated as far back as December 1914, when, just months into the conflict, he delivered his first inaugural lecture. Though the scientific approach to history remained fundamental in his eyes, what such a method could achieve had expanded. By collecting, organizing, and interpreting disparate facts, he pointed out just months into the war, "It is possible to make large generalizations of the utmost possible value to the human race." Nowhere was Webster more positivist in his thinking than in these years during and immediately after the war, when he urged that historians and scholars of international affairs employ the methods and testing of the natural sciences to develop a new "science of modern diplomatic." It was this approach, Webster posited, which should be seen as "contributing to a work that is essential to the progress of modern society."[45]

Closely related to this plea was Webster's suggestion that English and European historians needed to become less insular in their outlook. What one needed to avoid, for the benefit of both international history *and* contemporary politics, was a continuation of historical writing with a strong nationalist bent. It was this kind of history which had radicalized societies and indirectly led to the nationalism which drove countries into the conflict. That Englishmen knew little of nineteenth-century history and less of the United Kingdom's relationship with the Continent during this period was part of the reason the powers had descended into war, he argued.[46] As often was the case when it came to his reflections on the method and practice of historical study, Webster was pointed though not profound. A number of liberal historians who were either influences or contemporaries of Webster—men such as Acton and George Peabody Gooch—railed against historical writing which championed nationalism. As Casper Sylvest has written, much of this opposition stemmed from concerns over German historians and their writing in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth. It was the base interpretations of realpolitik and worship of the state that liberal internationalists such as Webster hoped to transcend.[47]

* * *

In the years after the war, his earlier suggestions became more urgent. The conflict had not only shaken the foundations of political, social, and military affairs, but for scholars like Webster it was nothing less than an intellectual revolution. The Great War, he remarked in 1923, had "sapped the foundations of international order; and changed so remorselessly our conceptions of International Relations."[48] Just as the

[44]Webster wrote of the need to make complex history digestible to the public. See Charles Kingsley Webster, "19th Century Britain," *Daily Post*, 24 July 1922, copy in Webster 22/1.

[45]Webster, *The Study of Nineteenth Century Diplomacy*, 19. Ian Hall has written, "In historiographical terms, Charles Webster was an impeccable modernist. He held the belief that 'historical science' could establish historical truth." Hall, "The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian," 477.

[46]Webster, *The Study of Nineteenth Century Diplomacy*, 9.

[47]Casper Sylvest, "British Liberal Historians and the Primacy of Internationalism," in Simms and Mulligan, *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History*, 214–31.

[48]Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Study of International Politics: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University College of Wales Aberystwyth on Friday, 23 February 1923* (Cardiff, 1923), 4.

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leading Western statesmen in 1919 had sought to refashion the *conduct* of international affairs, the professors intimately involved in the peace process, whether as pamphleteers or assistants in the delegation, tended to return to their research and teaching positions with a similar mission—that of reinventing the *study* of international affairs, a development which they believed would, in turn, alter the conduct of diplomacy.[49]

During his second inaugural lecture—this time for the Woodrow Wilson Chair at the University of Aberystwyth in 1923—Webster's view of modern internationalism came into clearer focus. The war, he said, had unleashed an international spirit among populations, and it was the role of historians like himself to channel this growing passion, by means of education and information, towards practical ideas for peace:

> Humanity is moved by its emotions, and the springs of action lie deep in the hearts of men. If civilization is to be saved, we shall need something else than the study, however wise and zealous. But it is a function of knowledge or reason to dig as it were a channel for the immense and potent forces that lie within humanity. The upheaval that the War has produced in every country has liberated new and formidable masses of energy. Unless an outlet is found for them, they will overwhelm the world.[50]

The idea of a newfound international spirit, one which might weaken more traditional nationalist emotions, coursed through Webster's writing and advocacy in these years.[51] Like other well-known writers and politicians in the period, including H. G. Wells, Lowes Dickinson, Alfred Zimmern, David Davies, and even Lord Cecil, Webster placed great faith in public opinion, provided citizens could be educated with modern histories of international politics.[52] Popular participation in debates over foreign affairs thus became a central theme of his work. Shortly after the war, he began to pressure the British Foreign Office to open its archives to historians, something he considered a "vital consideration in all attempts to make foreign policy depend upon the popular will."[53] Elsewhere he warned, "No country can afford to neglect the study of its own foreign policy, without taking the risk that its ideals will be misunderstood and misconstrued." It was in this vein that Webster championed what he referred to as "enlightened patriotism."[54] But his

[49]See, for example, Alfred Zimmern, "The Scholar in Public Affairs," copy in Zimmern, *America and Europe and Other Essays* (New York, 1929), 81–93, at 84. See also Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), 87–8.

[50]Webster, *The Study of International Politics*, 29.

[51]Charles Kingsley Webster to David Davies, 24 March 1923, Webster 1/6. Examples of this type of thinking were rife in this decade. Florence Melian Stawell, *The Growth of International Thought* (London, 1929).

[52]The idea of an "international mind" became popular in the years after the Paris Peace Conference. It was a phrase first popularized by Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University. See his essay *The International Mind: An Argument for the Judicial Settlement of International Disputes* (New York, 1912).

[53]Quoted in Keith Hamilton, "The Pursuit of 'Enlightened Patriotism': the British Foreign Office and Historical Researchers during the Great War and Its Aftermath," *Historical Research* 61/146 (1988), 316–44, at 336.

[54]Webster, *The Study of Nineteenth Century Diplomacy*, 12.

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persistence did not win him many friends on the official side. In 1924, the then permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Eyre Crowe, labeled Webster a "terror."[55]

Wrapped up in his confidence in public opinion was his insistence on what was then known as open diplomacy. He accepted that secret treaties in wartime were "devices … as inevitable as poison gas or high explosives," but he cautioned that diplomatic activity in general "must be discussed in open debate with the same frankness as domestic." While always publicly advocating for open diplomacy and the outsized role that supportive public opinion could provide, Webster also understood the potential for popular opinion to constrain professional statesmen. Before a diplomat can execute a policy, he wrote, "A long preparation of public opinion appears to be necessary." Given the possibility of diplomatic constraint by a naive public, Webster's recourse was to call for citizens to be properly educated on international affairs within national universities. "It is not much use teaching History to the Statesmen if the peoples which they represent are to be left in ignorance."[56]

* * *

In addition to his historical research and teaching, Webster focused a great deal of his attention on contemporary affairs, especially those which involved the League of Nations. He became a prominent commentator on the nascent organization, even traveling periodically to Geneva to report on its activities. Taken together, his writing in these years reveals an idealist frustrated by a lack of progress. Much of his consternation was directed at British officials. The government's approach, he wrote, reflected "an attitude of negation" which left the delegation bereft of good ideas or proposals. It had resulted in a "humiliating position for a great power," he said, particularly as France had assumed the "moral leadership of the Assembly."[57] Much of Webster's criticism by the mid-1920s stemmed from the Conservative government's refusal to support the Geneva Protocol, which had been introduced in part by Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government. The main point of contention involved a stipulation concerning compulsory arbitration—a development which Webster had long championed and which ran through his suggestions as far back as his paper on the evolution of a world-state from 1909. Once states substituted the rule of law for rule of force, he believed, there could be true movement in the direction of world peace.[58]

Webster also came to be a staunch supporter of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, seeing in this proposal a guarantee which might pave the way for future disarmament. This view brought him into opposition with other notable internationalists in

[55]Quoted in Hamilton, "The Pursuit of 'Enlightened Patriotism'," 340.

[56]Webster, *The Study of International Politics*, 22–5; this is also quoted in Hall, "The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian," 482.

[57]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Geneva and Locarno," *Welsh Outlook*, Dec. 1925, 321–2, copy in Webster 22/1. On France see Webster, "The Fifth Assembly: Rising Hopes," *The Nation and The Athenæum*, 20 Sept. 1924, copy in Webster 5/5.

[58]Charles Kingsley Webster, "The Fifth Assembly: Security, Disarmament, Arbitration," 13 Sept. 1924, copy in Webster 5/5.

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the period, including Helena Swanwick of the Independent Labour Party, as well as his former Lowes Dickinson. The latter warned that the treaty might be seen in other capitals as a hostile alliance, while Swanwick, though she considered the Geneva Protocol to be "a landmark of great significance in the evolution of international relations," thought that the treaty was an example of all that was wrong in international politics—namely the idea that "security can be got by force."[59] In contrast, Webster held that disarmament could only be achieved if there were adequate guarantees in place. For those countries retaining high levels of armaments, he believed that "their motive is fear." He added, "This fear will increase rather than diminish unless some more definite safeguards are added to the formulae of the Covenant."[60]

His writings and correspondence from this period were notable for their sober and historical analysis, but equally they also revealed subtle reflections related to the interplay of ideas, individuals, and institutions across history. Great thinkers and statesmen, he suggested, were more the products than the prophets of their time. "Political philosophy is … the expression of its environment and not the cause of it," he wrote to David Davies. "It was not Clausewitz that created European diplomacy, but European diplomacy that created Clausewitz."[61] In this sense, the most forceful ideas grew up from experience of new phenomena, and over time they percolated through the masses. The League of Nations was one such example. As he wrote to his friend Lord Cecil in 1922, "It is already apparent that the Statesmen, who controlled the recent settlement, dwelt, no less than their predecessors, on the past rather than the future." But there was a reason for this, Webster surmised, one which was revealed throughout history. "Men of action are inevitably behind the current of opinion of their time. Before new ideas, suggested by the ever changing facts of life, can be discerned with precision they must have already become something like commonplace."[62]

For Webster, great statesmen were those who could grasp, at least on some basic level, the animating ideas of their time and build lasting institutions which might embody and deliver on these principles. It was a position he reserved for Woodrow Wilson, one of his political and intellectual heroes. Perceiving a zeitgeist in the latter years of the First World War, the American president had channeled the forces of popular opinion into the creation of the League of Nations. That institution, Webster argued, "was more produced by the people than by the statesmen. It was imposed on governments by public opinion. In a great many countries, certainly in Great Britain, it was the existence of a new kind of public opinion which made it possible to bring it into existence."[63] Crucially for Webster, the

[59]Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, "The Treaty of Mutual Assistance," *The Nation and The Athenæum*, 5 Jan. 1924; H. M. Swanwick, *The Geneva Protocol* (London, 1925) and *Collective Insecurity* (London, 1937), 31.

[60]Charles Kingsley Webster, "The Treaty of Mutual Assistance," 7 Jan. 1924, printed in *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 12 Jan. 1924.

[61]Webster to Davies, 24 March 1923.

[62]Charles Kingsley Webster, "The European Settlement," draft manuscript sent to Lord Cecil, Dec. 1922, Webster 1/5.

[63]Charles Kingsley Webster, lecture on "The Alliance and the League of Nations," Nov. 1927, in Webster, *The European Alliance, 1815–1825* (Calcutta, 1929), 85.

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sustainability of institutions, not to mention their efficacy, depended to a great degree on adaptability. The importance of flexibility and gradual evolution came to be fixtures in Webster's opinion of international institutions. The Locarno Treaties of 1925, in particular, he held up as a prime example of how a larger organization such as the League could be buoyed by piecemeal agreements which sought to reinforce it.[64]

Despite periodic criticisms of the League, Webster held that the organization, on the whole, represented a fundamental advance in international affairs. It was a judgment perhaps most evident in his pronounced affection for Wilson, which is scattered throughout his writings and lectures in the interwar period. Despite Wilson's earlier snub of Webster's paper at the Paris Peace Conference, the latter considered the American president to be "one of the main intellectual and moral influences" of his life.[65] His guiding inspiration had helped create the first true international organization, a development that Webster believed to be an "invention just as marvelous and as little expected as the invention of the airplane and the radio."[66] These profound efforts, in Webster's eyes, had constituted "the greatest experiment in political machinery that the world has known."[67]

Enmeshed in his view of the League were the benefits that he thought the organization could bring to the British Empire and Commonwealth, and vice versa. Connections between the League and empire were common in the period, though opinion splintered along more national and international lines.[68] Mark Mazower has tried to draw the connection between empire and international organization in the thinking of Jan Smuts, something he refers to as "imperial internationalism."[69] Other scholars have written of influential personalities like Lord Lothian and Lionel Curtis, men with whom Webster interacted, whether over meals or debates at Chatham House. Michael Pugh has written of Lothian and Curtis that they saw in the League a way to buoy the empire and Commonwealth, with the latter possibly taking over for the League.[70] Webster, however, differed from these individuals in that he placed great importance on Britain's connection to Europe as well as his ultimate preference that an international organization become preeminent. It was a view he developed in part through his multivolume study of Lord Castlereagh, which Webster began publishing in 1925. Among the Foreign Secretary's great achievements, Webster lauded his tendency to be "more interested in constructing the new Europe than in completing the ascendency of the British

[64]He wrote that it was during this period that the League "made its greatest advance in the political sphere." Charles Kingsley Webster, *League of Nations in Theory and Practice* (Boston, MA, 1933), 303.

[65]Charles Kingsley Webster, "What the World Owes to President Wilson," 10 Jan. 1930, 1, CHAT/D/83, Webster 22/47.

[66]Ibid., 12.

[67]Webster, *League of Nations in Theory and Practice*, 55.

[68]One of the more radical ideas in these years came from the British philosopher Ferdinand Schiller, who warned that the British Empire was suffering from an inevitable and steady decline, and that the best solution was to push for a world-state. See Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller, *Cassandra: Or the Future of the British Empire* (London, 1926), 67–78.

[69]Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 28–65.

[70]Michael Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism: The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2012), 20–21.

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Empire in the rest of the world."[71] Elsewhere, Webster wrote that the former Foreign Secretary was "a diplomatist *par excellence*" who had "as deep an interest in the reconstruction of Europe as he had in purely British interests."[72] His great achievement—and the one which set him apart and above his counterparts in Russia, Austria, Prussia, and France—was the system of informal congresses and conferences set up in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. It was a project that embodied, in Webster's view, one of the great qualities of Castlereagh, namely his willingness to consider sacrificing small British interests if it meant that some wider, more important agreement could be reached among the actors involved.[73] It is striking to consider the parallel between the Foreign Secretary and the man who helped unearth his legacy. Just as Castlereagh saw British interests as being bound up with those of the European continent, Webster, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, held his own opinion that British interests were staked in those of the League of Nations, and vice versa. To a full lecture hall at the University of Wales he warned that the very existence of the British Empire resided in the continued development of the League.[74] Later, as the weaknesses of the League began to be increasingly exposed throughout the 1930s, Webster stated plainly, in an article for the *News Chronicle*, that British interests were indistinguishable from those of the League. Britain's salvation, he declared, "lies in making effective the 'League system.'"[75]

By the mid-1930s, as it became increasingly clear that British statesmen did not attach the same importance to working through the League, Webster grew more frustrated. In June 1936, eight months after Italian troops had invaded Abyssinia and three months after German forces had moved into the Rhineland, Webster wrote that "the world is in full crisis." British statesmen had made an "egregious error" in coming to terms with Benito Mussolini in 1935, while Adolf Hitler had eviscerated the Locarno Treaties, an agreement which Webster had considered to be the "main bulwark of the peace of Europe."[76] The year 1936 was one of great reflection for internationalists in general and advocates of the League in particular. The League of Nations Union published a report criticizing a lack of resolve amongst leading nations to confront aggression, and they even submitted a list of possible reforms to the covenant.[77] In the House of Commons, the leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee, accused his opposite number, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, of "shaking like a jelly at every dictator who shakes his fist at you."[78] Webster was of

[71]Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812–1815: Britain and the Reconstruction of Europe* (London, 1931), 491.

[72]Charles Kingsley Webster, *British Diplomacy, 1813–1815: Select Documents Dealing with the Reconstruction of Europe* (London, 1921), xli. For a discussion of Webster's view towards Europe see Hall, "The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian," 483.

[73]Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1815–1822: Britain and the European Alliance* (London, 1925), 502.

[74]Charles Kingsley Webster, lecture on "The British Empire and the League of Nations," delivered at the University of Wales on 18 Jan. 1927, Webster 21/5.

[75]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Why the Crisis? Is There a Way Out?", *News Chronicle*, n.d.

[76]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Can World Security Be Found? League of Nations Must Survive in Some Form," *Times of India*, 11 June 1936.

[77]*The Reform and Development of the League of Nations* (London, 1936).

[78]Hansard, House of Commons Debate, vol. 313, cols. 1197–1247, 18 June 1936.

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a similar mind, telling a group of his peers at Chatham House, "There is complete lack of confidence in any declaration that is likely to be made by us within a short period of time. No one will believe there is much chance of our implementing it, unless it suits our particular convenience at the time."[79]

In this and other analyses, the balance that Webster sought to strike between national power and international ethics comes into view. He held that it was through more traditional power structures, especially military and economic might, that the great liberal powers of the world were to usher in the international machinery that would eventually replace war. If the First World War had taught people anything, Webster argued, it was that theories aimed at ending war through increasing economic ties or altruistic calls for "brotherhood" were—to borrow a line from Lowes Dickinson—"just about as powerful as cobwebs across the mouth of a cannon."[80] Ethical aims could thus never become divorced from material considerations. Years later, he would write rather cynically that the concerns of Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo needed to be taken seriously because of their military strength, whereas the voices of smaller Central and Eastern European states could be "ignored because they are too weak to make much trouble."[81]

But equally, a military power devoid of moral considerations was doomed to fail. "Without moral foundations no sure shelter can be built in this storm-tossed world. But high purpose is not enough by itself. How often have we seen it fail! It needs concerted effort directed by informed intelligence to bring high purpose to fruition."[82] Thus he believed a successful British foreign policy was one which could identify certain moral forces in the international society and work towards defending these. "Moral power is as important as armed power," he wrote, and there was a distinct need for "moral rearmament" within the United Kingdom.[83] Such considerations are partly representative of how, even in the dire straits of the 1930s, Webster continued to see the League as a relevant institution, despite its shortcomings. His reasoning lay in the fact that the institution had planted an immovable spring in the moral urges of statesmen and their publics. And while there was some way to go before societies and governments more naturally resorted to peaceful deliberation, there had been, in his mind, some irreversible progress towards this end. "The great forces of the age are clearly in favour of a new and against a return to the old system. The world has clearly outgrown the old system of unco-ordinated national units. They are too small and at the same time too powerful."[84]

[79]Webster's comments can be found in Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Future of the League of Nations: The Record of a Series of Discussions Held at Chatham House* (New York, 1936), 151–2.

[80]Webster, "What the World Owes to President Wilson," 15; Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (London, 1916), 150.

[81]Charles Kingsley Webster, "What Is the Problem of Peaceful Change?", in C. A. W. Manning (ed.), *Peaceful Change: An International Problem* (London, 1937) , 3–26, at 9.

[82]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Some Problems of International Organisation," Second Montague Burton Lecture on International Relations, 15 Oct. 1943, delivered at the University of Leeds, 18, copy in Webster E (1)/946.

[83]Webster, "What Is the Problem of Peaceful Change?", 24.

[84]Webster, "Can World Security Be Found?".

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And this progressive frame of mind did not stop at the League. All throughout this period, Webster's view of a future world-state remained in the background, a utopian vision which might gradually be brought into existence. The idea itself did not have the broadest appeal. In the decade after the First World War, writers like H. G. Wells continued to express his desire for such a development, as did more politically influential figures like Harold Laski and Hugh Dalton, yet the real advocacy for a world-state remained on the more radical fringe of internationalist thought.[85] In Webster's case, references to a such a development were scattered throughout his writing in the 1930s and even the early 1940s.[86] But the most public of his views on the subject came in the pages of *The Times* in 1938, after the Bishop of York had published a manifesto which expressed the need for a world-state.[87] The piece sparked a somewhat heated debate among some of the more well-known commentators in the period, including Lord Lothian, Lionel Curtis, John Fischer Williams, and Webster.[88] Responding initially to the Bishop of York, Lord Lothian had written in *The Times*, "The real root of all our troubles is the anarchy of sovereignties and that there is no possibility of organizing peace or the reign of law or morality except by creating a federal authority, representing all the people."[89] For his part, Webster joined the debate with an article agreeing with the ends but differing in the means. As he wrote, "Lord Lothian is, of course, right in thinking that the ultimate objective of those who wish to bring peace to the world should be a world state … What Lord Lothian does not seem to realize is that the world State is not likely to be made by a single act but will come gradually into existence." Especially, the League of Nations Covenant, Webster noted, was to be a "step to some more comprehensive and definite organization."[90] Months later, in a response to a lecture by Lionel Curtis at Chatham House, Webster returned to the subject, stating that a world-state was not only desirable but "an obvious lesson of history."[91]

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When war was declared on the Continent in late summer 1939, Webster was quick to return to government service. He took up a leading role with the newly formed Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS), an outfit led by Arnold Toynbee which conducted similar research work to that undertaken during the previous

[85]H. G. Wells, "An Apology for a World Utopia," in F. S. Marvin, *The Evolution of World Peace* (1921) (London, 1933), 159–78; Wells, *The World of William Clissold*, vol. 3 (London, 1926); Wells, *The Way to World Peace* (London, 1930). For Laski see Harold J. Laski, *A Grammar of Politics* (New Haven, CT, 1925), 665; and for Dalton see Hugh Dalton, *Towards the Peace of Nations: A Study in International Relations* (London, 1928), 281.

[86]See, for example, Webster, "What Is the Problem of Peaceful Change?", 21.

[87]"Use of Armed Force: Bishops' Views on Justification: Danger of 'Sheer Expediency'," *The Times*, 7 July 1938.

[88]Lionel Curtis, "The World State: Initiation by the Democracies," *The Times*, 21 July 1938; John Fischer Williams, "To the Editor of The Times," *The Times*, 25 July 1938; A. F. Pollard, "The World 'State'," *The Times*, 26 July 1938.

[89]Lord Lothian, "Reign of Law," *The Times*, 13 July 1938.

[90]Charles Kingsley Webster, "The World State: A Matter of Gradual Evolution," *The Times*, 16 July 1938.

[91]See summary of discussion in Curtis, "World Order," 311–12.

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war. Here Webster oversaw the groupings dedicated to Anglo-American relations and international organization. It turned out to be a convenient fusion, given that Webster, like others within the FRPS, advocated for an Anglo-American core at the center of a wider global institution. This came during a period in which diplomats, politicians, and intellectuals, especially those considered liberal internationalists, were beginning to sketch broad new outlines for a postwar international order. Webster remained a champion of the League, but in its most dormant years he began to rethink the building blocks of a stable internationalist system. As he wrote to the British official Frank Walters in September 1941, "an Anglo-American security scheme should be temporary and later fused into a general association."[92]

Given his extensive contacts in the United States—he served as visiting professor at Harvard between 1928 and 1932—Webster was sent to New York to lead the British Library of Information. By the time Webster returned to the United Kingdom in late 1942, the Foreign Office had already taken some concrete steps towards outlining a postwar grand strategy. As the planning became more detailed, however, officials began to consult with Webster, then seen as the most knowledgeable mind on matters relating to international organization. Had officials in the Foreign Office, most notably Gladwyn Jebb, who was in charge of postwar planning, been aware of Webster's more radical views concerning a world-state, the professor would likely have never come as close as he did to the planning machine. Jebb, in particular, was harsh in his treatment of Webster's colleagues, including Toynbee and Zimmern, referring to the professors as too idealist and out of touch with political realities.[93] But in characteristic fashion, Webster's desire to influence policy meant that his ultimate aspirations were tempered by his more practical knowledge. The results were recommendations which, while more internationalist than Jebb's, were nonetheless rooted in more stark considerations of national power.

Of the conceptions which Webster brought to the planning process, several are worthy of consideration here. As a start, Webster held that political structures must come before those dealing with economic matters. This topic marked a common fault line among interwar internationalists, with some insisting that a working basis for peaceful relations must first arrive through economic bonds. Individuals as diverse as H. G. Wells and Ernest Bevin held this view, while others, including Norman Angell, emphasized the need for political agreements to underpin economic relations.[94] Webster's view tended to fall in line with the latter grouping. "Economic interdependence presupposes some kind of political interdependence. It cannot be obtained in a world in which national sovereignty is an end in itself," he wrote.[95]

Related to this emphasis on the political bases of international order, Webster held that the great powers, in particular, would need to take responsibility for the maintenance of peace. In the early 1930s, he had written, "The destiny of the League lies mainly in the hands of the Great Powers of Europe"—a point which

[92]Letter from Charles Kingsley Webster to Frank Walters, 21 Sept. 1941, Webster 1/22.

[93]Sean Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Leiden, 2008), 163.

[94]For the difference between Wells and Angell see Webster, *The Future of the League of Nations*, 15–28, 41–3. For an example of Bevin's views see Curtis, "World Order," 318–19.

[95]Webster, "What Is the Problem of Peaceful Change?", 19.

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carried over into his wartime recommendations.[96] He reiterated in a number of lectures and memoranda from the period that "power and responsibility must be commensurate with each other."[97] This was a popular view, one held by influential politicians like Hugh Dalton and internationalist leaders like Lord Cecil, both of whom had, over the course of the previous decade, come to advocate for increased responsibility for powers harnessing a preponderance of force.[98] But this precept of power politics did not override the belief that for a world order to be broadly accepted, the interests of middle and smaller powers must be taken into account. While figures like Dalton and Cecil were of a similar mind-set, few, if any, couched it in historical terms as did Webster. He noted in one of his first recommendations for the Foreign Office that concern for the interests of smaller powers was a principle which dated back to the Congress of Aix la Chapelle in 1818.[99] Importantly, Webster held that if the new organization could establish functional bodies relating to economic and social issues, smaller powers might be made to think they had a larger stake in the wider organization. It was this view which placed Webster as one of the foremost defenders of smaller powers within Britain's postwar planning machine. Indeed, the respect for the views of medium and smaller powers that went into British planning papers, as well as the way in which British delegations defended the interests of these countries in conversations with the Americans and the Soviets, stems from the early recommendations of Webster.

Another theme which flowed throughout his wartime recommendations had been present in his writings as far back as the 1920s. It concerned the need for international institutions to be flexible and capable of adaptation. The rigidity of the covenant, he argued on multiple occasions, had discouraged members and stifled collective action. It was a view which was popular among some British internationalists of the period. John Fischer Williams, to take one example, had praised the work of British officials responsible for designing the League of Nations, men whom he believed embodied the traditions of a less rigid English constitutionalism.[100] Similarly, Webster argued against too strict a codification and instead put his faith in the articulation of principles which, if agreed upon by signatories, might guide the behavior of great and small powers alike.[101] The result came in the form of "principles and objectives" of the organization which Webster helped Jan Smuts to draft during a meeting of the dominion prime ministers in May 1944.[102]

[96]Webster, *League of Nations in Theory and Practice*, 304.

[97]Webster minute, 9 Sept. 1943, FO 371/35397/U3814, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA). See also Webster, "Some Problems of International Organisation."

[98]See Dalton's *Towards the Peace of Nations*. For an example of Cecil's view see Lord Cecil, "Note on World Settlement after the War," 22 Sept. 1939, FO 800/325/50–51, TNA.

[99]Webster's understanding of the Congress of Aix la Chapelle went back to his doctoral thesis at Cambridge. See Webster, "Studies in Foreign Policy, 1814–1818," introduction.

[100]John Fischer Williams, *Some Aspects of the Covenant of the League of Nations* (London, 1934), 3–4.

[101]Memorandum by Charles Kingsley Webster, "The United States Plan for the Pacific Settlement of Disputes and the Maintenance of Peace and Security," 9 Aug. 1944; and Jebb minute on this paper, 14 Aug. 1944, FO 371/40723/U6958, TNA.

[102]See Webster 12/2; this is also reprinted in Reynolds and Hughes, *The Historian as Diplomat*, 114 n. 19. For Webster's account of this drafting see Charles Kingsley Webster, "The Art and Practice of Diplomacy," lecture delivered at the London School of Economics and Political Science, 7 Dec. 1951, reprinted in Webster, *The Art and Practice of Diplomacy* (New York, 1962), 1–12, at 9–12.

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This document would eventually become the Preamble of the United Nations Charter.[103]

Lastly, Webster's work on postwar regional and international order reflected the way in which he connected more traditional ordering mechanisms with an international organization. Here a crucial aspect of Webster's international thought comes into clearer focus—namely how concerns for the national interest shaped his unique brand of internationalism. Between the Moscow Conference of October 1943 and the Dumbarton Oaks Conference which began in August 1944, the Economic and Reconstruction Department engaged in what was a complex arrangement to secure British interests in what they thought would be a fluid postwar world. British planners, and chiefly Jebb and Webster, articulated a strategy which was based on the seemingly paradoxical conceptions of the balance of power and a worldwide organization. Specifically, they advocated the creation of an alliance of Western democracies which, in the future, might protect against an aggressive Germany and insure against a hostile Russia.[104] In this way, Webster carried out what was a long-held belief in the need for Britain to commit to the security of the European continent, and, borrowing from the precedent of the Locarno Treaties, to develop a system whereby a Western security arrangement might buttress—as opposed to contradict—a larger international order. Among Foreign Office officials, the conceptual linkage of regional and international structures was articulated most clearly in Webster's writing in 1944.[105] Though writers and statesmen had described, and even advocated for, the possible benefits of regional approaches to international order, none succeeded in uniting these strands within postwar policy.[106] The eventual Charter of the United Nations, specifically Article 51, bares the mark of this conception, which at its root was derived from the need to balance larger internationalist ambitions with more regionally specific national interests.

By the time the charter was signed in San Francisco in late June 1945, Webster had clearly become indispensable to the Foreign Office's planning operation. His influence was such that when it came time to select the British delegation to the committee that would design the mechanics of the new organization during the autumn of 1945, Jebb wrote to the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Alexander Cadogan, that there was no one in Whitehall who knew more than he, Cadogan, and the "Prof."[107]

* * *

[103]Peter Marshall, "Smuts and the Preamble to the UN Charter," *Round Table* 90/358 (2001), 55–65.

[104]Draft memorandum by Charles Kingsley Webster, "Britain and Western Europe," 11 April 1944, FO 371/40692/U4102, TNA.

[105]See memorandum by Charles Kingsley Webster, "Reasons for Establishing the General International Organisation for the Maintenance of Peace and Security in Accordance with Article 4 of the Moscow Declaration," 29 April 1944, FO 371/40691/U4036, TNA.

[106]See for example, Jan Smuts, "The Present International Outlook," *International Affairs* 14/1 (1935), 3–19, at 9; G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, "Should the Membership and Obligations of the League Be Extended or Restricted?", in Webster, *The Future of the League of Nations*, 95–102; and Stafford Cripps's memorandum of 13 Nov. 1942, WP (42) 516, FO 371/31525/U1505, TNA.

[107]Letter from Gladwyn Jebb to Alexander Cadogan, undated, Papers of Gladwyn Jebb, Churchill College Archives Centre, University of Cambridge, GLAD 2/1/1.

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In the months after the San Francisco Conference, Webster remained optimistic about the future of the organization, even in the face of a breakdown in relations between Moscow and the Western powers. Concerning the Soviet Union, he wrote, "Her long-term interests are as much bound up with the success of the Charter as are those of any other State." But it was also crucial for the United Kingdom to take a "resolute stand," just as the government had done vis-à-vis Tsar Alexander's Russia in the immediate post-1815 period.[108] He noted that at three different points in the last two centuries—the Great Power Alliance of 1815, the Concert of Europe which followed it, and the more recent League of Nations—British statesmen had drawn back from a full commitment to a system of international organization. Webster warned that the government and public should not make the same mistake during this "fourth experiment."[109]

By the end of the decade his view had changed further, now moving more in favor of a robust Western security and economic architecture to defend against what he considered to be a communist menace in the Soviet Union. Regional organizations, particularly the Brussels and Atlantic pacts, he saw as key to the defense of the United Kingdom and Western Europe. In his public commentary, he continued to emphasize Britain's capabilities, as well as its diplomatic tradition of not allowing a single power to dominate the European continent. "It has for a long period been our special role in the world to act as the main link between the continents. We have three times before saved the liberties of Europe by serving as the medium through which the resources of the non-European world redressed the balance in Europe itself. We have a similar part to play today."[110] But in the background of Webster's confidence in and encouragement of British power was a realization that American economic and military strength was the guarantor of the peace and security of Western Europe.[111]

Interestingly, his earlier support for a world-state faded as the years wore on. Immediately after the war, he speculated that such a development could still take place. "If it be ever attained it will probably be through the development of the United Nations itself, and, perhaps, in some form not at present foreseen."[112] It was an optimism rooted in his proximity—really his stake—in the creation of the organization, though it contrasted sharply with the views of other British intellectuals. Among them was George Orwell, who wrote in March 1946 that the United Nations' "usefulness as an instrument of world peace is nil."[113] As for a more federated or unitary world system, there was a new generation of internationalists such as Robert Hutchins and Giuseppe Antonio Borgese seeking to advance the idea of a

[108]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Our Security: Can UNO Give It?", *The Observer*, 2 June 1946.

[109]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Fundamentals of British Foreign Policy," *International Journal* 3/4 (1948), 320–26, at 325–6.

[110]Charles Kingsley Webster, "Europe in One World," *The Listener*, 7 July 1949. Several years later, Webster continued to emphasize the place of the United Kingdom, calling it the "very centre of the free world." Webster, "Is Our Finest Hour Yet to Come?," *The Listener*, 15 Feb. 1951.

[111]Webster, "Europe in One World." See also Charles Kingsley Webster, "Nato's Tenth Birthday," *The Listener*, 9 April 1959.

[112]Webster, "Our Security: Can UNO Give It?".

[113]George Orwell, "In Front of Your Nose," *Tribune*, 22 March 1946.

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"world constitution" and "world government."[114] Strangely enough, however, it was in this period that Webster's belief in the organization—especially his faith in an progressive movement towards world unity on a political and social basis—had begun to fade against the stubborn resurgence of great-power politics. Reflecting on the United Nations in 1955, Webster wrote that the organization had become a "front in the cold war" rather than a place where the great powers, and principally the Soviet Union and the United States, could work out their differences. Overall, he thought the organization, while still serving a valuable purpose, had failed to become more "universal."[115] By the time of his death, in August 1961, Webster had effectively abandoned his earlier prediction about a world-state being an inevitable development of human society.

* * *

Individuals tend to study Charles Webster for his work as an esteemed scholar and his brief but influential time as an adviser during the Second World War. As a historian, he was both groundbreaking and successful for his time. His scholarship on the Congress of Vienna and later his biographies of Castlereagh and Palmerston placed him securely in the ranks of Britain's best diplomatic historians of the twentieth century. As a policy adviser, Webster also saw success, at least as compared to other academics of his generation such as his colleagues Toynbee and Zimmern. Rather paradoxically, Webster quietly held far more radical views than these academic contemporaries, yet he was seen by his Foreign Office colleagues, and principally Gladwyn Jebb, to be a man of practicality and concrete knowledge. This was a result of his ability to hold such ambitious ideas as a world-state quietly in the recesses of his mind. It was, for Webster, a larger vision that gave some purpose and shape to his more immediate recommendations for an inclusive world organization led by the great powers. And it was this work during the Second World War that helped to deliver the British plans for what would become the United Nations Organization. "It must be an abiding satisfaction to you to see so many of your own ideas taking form and substance," Gladwyn Jebb wrote to Webster a month after the signing of the United Nations Charter.[116] Other colleagues in the Foreign Office heaped even larger praise, going as far as to call Webster the "principal father" of the new organization.[117]

This is all to say that Webster's worldview, beginning with his approach to historical study, is worthy of detailed examination. As an analyst, few were as detailed in their reporting on League of Nations affairs and even fewer were as willing, or as able, to place events in their proper historical context. And his sober, penetrating analysis of British foreign policy during his lifetime was a reminder that even the most ardent of internationalists tend to retain a national instinct, however faint and fluctuating. But even for his empiricism and practicality on a range of subjects,

[114]For an excellent description and analysis see Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950* (Princeton, 2017), 168–208.

[115]Charles Kingsley Webster, "The United Nations' Ten Years: San Francisco Hopes Recalled," *The Times*, 18 June 1955.

[116]Gladwyn Jebb to Charles Kingsley Webster, 31 July 1945, Webster 1/24.

[117]Jack Ward to Charles Kingsley Webster, 25 April 1946, Webster 1/26.

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Webster's great ambitions for the international system remain an intriguing detail of his thinking. His idea concerning the inevitability of a world-state and how this would gradually come into existence was not entirely uncommon among the intellectuals of his milieu, but it was also not exactly popular. And it was certainly anathema to the majority of British statesmen and officials with whom he came into close professional contact. It is hardly a stretch to posit that if certain officials had known of Webster's ambitions, he likely would have remained on the margins of the policy debates which he ended up greatly influencing.

Apart from his more radically internationalist ideas, Webster's intellectual tendencies also reveal important insights into the way in which historical thought influences one's worldview. Far from being a quirky interest, historical study constituted the blocks and bindings of his international thought. He was instilled from an impressionable age with a view that history retained relevance, but where some might have used this anecdotally, Webster discerned in facts across time a pattern of international relations. And, importantly, he perceived it as moving in a progressive direction, one that he, by chance and design, felt he might be able to nudge along. Thus his historical acumen not only helped him advance professionally but also, more importantly, served as the essence of his worldview and the source of his visions of the future.

Though he never stated it explicitly, it is apparent that a faith in human reason coursed through much of his thinking. Among other things, it led him to appreciate the power of common citizens, and in turn the emphasis that Webster placed on public opinion and popular ideas—specifically the influence that they could exert on decisive political moments—came to be a convenient justification for his own writing and teaching. The work of scholars of international politics, and especially their ability to inform and educate the masses, had become for him one of the most significant shapers of modern international relations. For all of his championing of ethics and morals in international affairs, Webster never completely lost, at least during the years of his greatest involvement in policy, his respect for realities of material power. The trying years of the First World War had shown the unrelenting damage of unrestrained violence, while the frustrations of the interwar years had evidenced the futility of good intentions absent adequate force. It drove Webster towards a view that some measure of morality and ethics in international affairs was essential, but that it depended on the behavior of the great powers in the international system, as well as on their ability to construct lasting institutions. Only with such intentions and influence could a stable, functioning, and just world order be brought into existence.

Though his contribution to the history of international thought in the first half of the twentieth century is nowhere near as notable as that of British writers like his former teacher Lowes Dickinson or his friend and colleague Toynbee—the former, with his framing of international anarchy, and the latter, with his theory of civilizational movements, were ones addressed by succeeding generations of writers—Webster's lack of intellectual profundity should not preclude students of the period from examining his thought and work. He was, far more than Dickinson or Toynbee, and perhaps more so than any of his contemporaries, with the exception of John Maynard Keynes, Lionel Robbins, or William Beveridge in the economic realm, a scholar who found himself at the center of a momentous period of

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British policymaking. To trace his work over the forty-plus years from the turn of the twentieth century is to identify and understand some of the key variances and divergences within British internationalism. But more importantly, it helps us to see how these ideas, nuanced as they were, made it to and through one of the most crucial points of delivery, namely the British Foreign Office's plans for a postwar international organization.

The case of Webster is evidence of how one's international thought develops over time, and perhaps more intriguingly, how it exists both outside and inside official policy making. On the fringes of power, he was one who supported more radical ideas about the progress of the international system towards a more unified structure, yet once he was in government and faced with the need to offer timely and achievable recommendations, he put forward more practical suggestions on how a new international order might be fashioned from the rubble of the latest great war. It was not that he abandoned his older ideas but rather that he recognized that the time in which he was working called for different, more incremental, steps. His experience is not only reflective of the tension and ultimate balance between visions and plans, ideals and reality, thought and action, but also a window into both the diplomatic and the intellectual history of this most consequential of periods.

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