Learning from the past: the relevance of international history

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In what follows I will begin in Houghton Street and from there will broaden outwards in successive circles, from London in the 1920s to Europe in 1914, to the Caribbean Sea in 1962, and to where we find ourselves today. The reasons for so doing will, I trust, become clear. But my focus will be on the origin and applications of the discipline of international history, through an investigation of the Stevenson Chair around which the LSE International History Department grew up; the LSE becoming in turn one of the nuclei from which the subject would spread further, both elsewhere in Britain and overseas.[1] I will underline the practical purposes of the discipline's creators, while highlighting a tension between two intellectual traditions that were present from the outset. I will emphasize the need to synthesize those traditions if the study of international history is to yield the maximum insight and value.

I

According to Ralf Dahrendorf's authoritative history of the LSE, in 1932 Charles Kingsley Webster became the first holder of the Stevenson Chair.[2] Webster's papers give some period flavour. Previously the holder of the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at Aberystwyth, Webster was effectively headhunted—he was invited to apply, and the Board of Advisers interviewed him in South Kensington on 22 January.[3] Ten days later Eileen Power, an LSE professor of medieval economic history, shared with Webster her despair about the lack of international reaction to Japanese aggression in Shanghai. She also disclosed that the selectors had ranked him 'unhesitatingly first'. Webster was offered £1,000 per year and wanted more—the LSE Governors agreed to up the figure after

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1 By 1968 the department had placed over 100 of its students in university posts around the world: Donald Cameron Watt, *What about the people? Abstraction and reality in history and the social sciences*, Stevenson Inaugural Lecture (London: LSE, 1983), p. 1.

2 Ralf Dahrendorf, *LSE: a history of the London School of Economics and Political Science 1895–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 242.

3 Worsley to Webster, 14 Jan. 1932, LSE Archives, Webster MSS, 6/1.

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five years by 25 per cent.[4] The LSE Director, Sir William Beveridge, mediated in the teaching demarcation between the Professor of International Politics, Charles Manning, who dealt with the subject 'analytically', and Webster, who was to do so 'historically'.[5] Beveridge need not have worried. Webster largely confined his teaching to lectures on 'European diplomacy from 1814 to 1878' and a special subject on 'The reconstruction of Europe and the European alliances, 1813–1822'.[6] Nonetheless, Webster believed historians should press the authorities to open up the archives, and he was a thorn in the side of the Foreign Office, where Sir Eyre Crowe had considered him 'a terror'.[7] A man of decided views and a proselytizing internationalist, Webster would vigorously condemn appeasement.[8] In the Second World War he returned to government service and in 1944–5 attended the Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco conferences, where he made a distinctive contribution to the drafting of the UN Charter.[9] In many ways he established international history at the LSE upon a trajectory that it would follow until the 1990s.

What I have just provided is a sort of departmental foundation myth. Yet the reality is more intriguing. The Stevenson Chair was actually founded not in 1932 but seven years earlier, and as a joint foundation between the LSE and what then was still the British (rather than Royal) Institute of International Affairs.[10] Its first holder was not Charles Webster but Arnold Joseph Toynbee, whose conception of the discipline differed sharply from that of his successor. Drawing on the extensive correspondence that survives at Chatham House, I will organize this story around three central figures—Lionel Curtis, Sir Daniel Stevenson and Toynbee himself.

Lionel George Curtis, civil servant, Oxford academic and leader of the 'Kindergarten' of imperialist intellectuals that had originated round Alfred Lord Milner, was a crusader for imperial federation and for Anglo-American friendship.[11] He attended the 1919 Paris peace conference as a member of the British delegation, and like many of his colleagues was appalled at how, in his view, an ignorant and chauvinistic public opinion contributed to a draconian peace settlement. What would become Chatham House emerged from a meeting of British and American delegates at the Hôtel Majestic in Paris in May 1919, which both Curtis and Webster

4 Power to Webster, 3 Feb. 1932, LSE Archives, Webster MSS, 6/1.
5 Beveridge to Webster, 16 March 1932, LSE Archives, Webster MSS, 6/1.
6 Note, LSE Archives, Webster MSS, 6/1.
7 Keith Hamilton, 'The pursuit of "enlightened patriotism": the British Foreign Office and historical researchers during the Great War and its aftermath', in Keith Wilson, ed., *Forging the collective memory: government and international historians through two world wars* (Providence, RI, and Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), p. 218. Crowe was permanent under-secretary between 1920 and 1925.
8 George Clark, rev. Muriel Chamberlain, 'Webster, Sir Charles Kingsley (1886–1961)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates/article.jsp?articleid=36807&back=, accessed 23 Nov. 2013; Philip Noel-Baker, 'Sir Charles Webster: a tribute', *International Relations* 2: 5, April 1962, pp. 273–5; cf. Ian Hall, 'Diplomatic investigations. The art and practice of a diplomatic historian: Sir Charles Webster, 1886–1961', *International Politics* 42: 4, Dec. 2005, pp. 470–90.
9 Philip Reynolds and E. J. Hughes, *The historian as diplomat: Charles Kingsley Webster and the United Nations, 1939–1946* (London: Martin Robertson, 1976).
10 The Institute was renamed in 1926.
11 Alex May, 'Lionel George Curtis', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32678?doc.Pos=1, accessed 23 Nov. 2013.

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Arnold J. Toynbee, Lionel Curtis and Roderick Jones at Chatham House (date unknown).
Source: Chatham House archives.

attended: this world was small and interknit.[12] Those present wished to maintain the interchange between specialists versed in 'the facts' that had emerged behind the scenes at Paris, and to cultivate a more enlightened public opinion:

> It was recognised by all thoughtful men that in future the foreign policy of each state ought not to be guided merely by a calculation of its own individual interest. National policy ought to be shaped by a conception of the interest of society at large; for it was in the advancement of that universal interest that the particular interest of the several nations would also be found.

It was agreed that what was needed was a centre modelled on the Royal Geographical Society but devoted to the 'scientific' study of international affairs (based on objective, factual enquiry and off-the-record discussion between academics and practitioners), whose findings the organization's journalists and intellectuals must disseminate.[13] Central to this project would be an annual survey of international affairs, and in 1924, with Arnold Toynbee, Curtis found a man who he believed could write it: a classicist who during the war had served in the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department and who had recently resigned from the Koraes Chair in Hellenic Studies at King's College London. Sir James Headlam-Morley, the chief historical adviser to the Foreign Office and another participant at the

[12] Although the original vision was of a single organization with British and American branches, the Council on Foreign Relations developed as a separate initiative: Peter Grose, *Continuing the inquiry: the Council on Foreign Relations from 1921 to 1996* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996, 2006), pp. 1–9.

[13] Minutes of Hôtel Majestic meeting, 30 May 1919, Chatham House Archives, 2/i/2; Sir Clement Jones, 'The origins of Chatham House' (n.d.), Chatham House Archives, 2/1/2a; Stephen King-Hall, *Chatham House: a brief account of the origins, purposes, and methods of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 1, 11–12. Cf. Curtis to Stevenson, 8 April 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.

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Hôtel Majestic meeting (as well as being the leading Board of Education adviser on the school history curriculum), brought in Toynbee to produce the survey; what was needed now was money to support it permanently.[14]

The money was forthcoming after Curtis met Sir Daniel Macaulay Stevenson at Buxton in April 1925. (The intermediary was Sir Henry Hadow, director of the Sheffield firm that produced the wartime British steel helmet.[15]) Stevenson deserves to be better known. He was a proud product of Victorian Glasgow, the second city of the empire and an economic and cultural powerhouse: one-third of British shipbuilding tonnage launched between 1870 and 1914 came from the banks of the Clyde.[16] He was also a man of the world. Apprenticed to a shipbroker at age 16, Stevenson established a successful coal-exporting company before moving into politics as a radical Liberal, committed to improving working-class living conditions, and becoming Glasgow's City Treasurer and Lord Provost. Having made his fortune by cresting the pre-1914 wave of globalization, he remained a lifelong free trader and an apostle of international cooperation. He modelled Glasgow's new electric trams on Hamburg's and was criticized for seeking good relations with the German cities that rivalled Clydeside in the Edwardian naval race.[17] Although he assisted with the 1914–18 war effort, heading a consortium that delivered coal to France and Italy, for a man of his perspective the Great War was a disaster. In its aftermath he backed the League of Nations Union and continued his quest for reconciliation. A proficient and self-taught linguist, he had high-level contacts across Europe. In June 1933 he would visit Berlin for private meetings with Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, President Paul von Hindenburg and the new Chancellor Adolf Hitler—and that he could achieve this as a private citizen gives a measure of his status. He reported in the Glasgow *Evening News* that Hitler was more of an 'idealist than one would gather from his speeches'. When Stevenson confided that he had pressed from the beginning for revision of the Versailles Treaty, the Chancellor responded that he wanted friendship with England and 'stories that he wanted war were absurd'. Stevenson concluded on the Germans that: 'Even if we are not altogether at one with them in their methods, they … deserve to have our best wishes in the stupendous task which lies before them.'[18] And yet, that lapse of judgement notwithstanding, he remained a progressive, who went on to found the Scottish Ambulance Unit that served with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War.[19]

Stevenson became a major philanthropist, primarily to the benefit of the university education that he himself had lacked, and in total donated almost £500,000.

[14] William McNeill, *Arnold Toynbee: a life* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 122; Headlam-Morley to Toynbee, 2 Nov. 1923 and 30 Jan. 1924, Bodleian Library, Toynbee MSS, 37; on Headlam-Morley, see David Cannadine, Jenny Keating and Nicolas Sheldon, *The right kind of history: teaching the past in twentieth-century England* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 25–8, 56–8.

[15] Hadow to Curtis, 5 April 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.

[16] Sidney Pollard and Paul Robertson, *The British shipbuilding industry, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 61.

[17] Obituaries in *The Times* and the *Glasgow Herald,* 12 July 1944, Chatham House Archives, 4/STEV.

[18] *Evening News* (Glasgow), 29 June 1933, Chatham House Archives, 4/STEV.

[19] 'The Scottish Ambulance Unit in Spain and the Spanish Civil War', http://universityofglasgowlibrary.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/the-scottish-ambulance-unit-in-spain-and-the-spanish-civil-war, accessed 23 Nov. 2013.

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He had become convinced that a major reason for the First World War was the nationalist bias of pre-1914 history teaching and school textbooks, and sought opportunities to correct it.[20] Sir Eric Drummond, the first Secretary-General of the League of Nations, suggested Stevenson should endow a chair at Geneva; the French ex-President Raymond Poincaré that he should endow one at the Hague.[21] But Curtis won over Stevenson to a joint appointment, divided equally between writing the annual survey as Director of Studies at Chatham House and serving as a London University professor, attached to the LSE. Stevenson was enthusiastic about the survey, but what he wanted above all was to get 'international history taught impartially, so far as that is possible', and to train a younger generation of university teachers who would think likewise.[22] His object was 'to find someone who would tell future generations in England how other nations interpreted history in its relation to Great Britain as opposed to the usual method by which history is taught only from the point of view of one country'.[23] Among other things, therefore, this was a project of detoxification, and *The Star* newspaper headlined the Stevenson endowment as '£20,000 to Promote Peace'.[24]

Arnold Toynbee took up the new dual role in 1926, and it has to be said that his tenure of it was a failure. Part of the reason was personal: Toynbee had little commitment to teaching, and he loathed administration.[25] He was expected to do too much, and his health broke, Beveridge reluctantly agreeing to reduce Toynbee's responsibilities to just three lectures a year. But something more fundamental was also at issue. Curtis had told Stevenson that before taking the job Toynbee 'feels it is very important that it should be clearly understood between yourself and him exactly what you mean by "International History". As you know, the word is capable of various interpretations.'[26] Stevenson hit it off with Toynbee and presumably therefore shared his conception of the discipline,[27] some sense of which is conveyed by the topics of Toynbee's LSE lectures: 'The Pacific as a focus of international relations', 'Emigration and immigration since the war of 1914–18', and 'The effect of colonial warfare on the industrialization of military techniques',

[20] Stevenson to Meston, 16 July 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.
[21] Hadow to Curtis, 5 April 1925, Stevenson to Curtis, 15 April 1925, both in Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.
[22] Stevenson to Curtis, 15 April 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d; Meston in Stevenson Board of Advisers, 2 Feb. 1927, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2b. According to the revised Stevenson indenture of 17 Feb. 1931, 'the Founder being desirous of furthering amity and good understanding among all nations and being persuaded that the study and teaching of History as hitherto practised in this and other countries have not been conducive to this end, that on the contrary in practically all Countries the teaching of History and the Class-books used therefore have had a strong Nationalist bias creating among the peoples from childhood onwards a spirit of antipathy, ill-will and even hatred of other peoples and being convinced that the teaching of history internationally and as far as practicable without bias would tend to substitute for this spirit a spirit of international co-operation, peace and good will came to the conclusion that such teaching could be undertaken satisfactorily and carried on efficiently by the University of London working in co-operation with the British Institute of International Affairs': Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d. According to the University of London Vice-Chancellor, chairing Toynbee's inaugural lecture on 9 March 1926, the Stevenson professorship 'has been expressly founded for the purpose of better understanding and sympathy between nations': Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2a.
[23] Meston in Stevenson Board of Advisers, 2 Feb. 1927, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2b.
[24] *Star*, 24 Jan. 1925, Bodleian Library, Toynbee MSS, 37.
[25] Toynbee note, 23 June 1953, Bodleian Library, Toynbee MSS, 40.
[26] Curtis to Stevenson, 23 June 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.
[27] Stevenson to Macadam, 24 Oct. 1932, Chatham House Archives, 4/STEV.

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as well as by his seminar series on 'Cultural relations between the West and other civilizations'.[28] Toynbee's real commitment, though, was not to lecturing but to the annual survey—and above all to writing what his wife and children called the 'nonsense book', which he would later publish as *A study of history*: a monumental survey of the rise and decline of 26 civilizations, only two of them European.[29]

Toynbee had, in other words, a very different understanding of the proper scope and subject-matter of international history from Webster's, or from that of Harold Temperley from Cambridge, who like Webster served on the Advisory Board for the Stevenson Chair and in 1928 submitted a sardonic memorandum, 'Suggestions for the work of the Stevenson Professor'. According to Temperley (who said Webster agreed), international history must be 'strictly defined', and based on unrestricted access to at least two sets of foreign ministry archives, which meant the most recent year that could be studied was 1878. Studies based on published sources, he considered, 'do not constitute international history'.[30] Essentially, in his view, international history was synonymous with diplomatic history—with the political relations between states and particularly between foreign ministries—and it could not come up to the present.

Although he expressed himself too categorically, Temperley was right to emphasize that in judging how far one government's policies have influenced another's it is hard to avoid the detailed reconstruction of day-to-day bilateral relations on which the 'London School' of diplomatic history traditionally concentrated. But for Toynbee, in contrast, the unit of analysis was the civilization rather than the state, archival sources were not central to the enterprise, and culture, empire, demography, economics, technology and contemporary affairs were all legitimate fields of enquiry. He wanted to define his field as 'international history, with special reference to the spread of Western influence on non-Western peoples … the rise and spread of the characteristic things in Western civilisation: Industrialism, Nationalism, Race Feeling, Parliamentary Government, the Press, military technique, mechanical means of communication, law, medicine, finance'.[31] Indeed, his work on the annual *Survey* convinced him that the traditional distinctions between international and domestic affairs and between politics and economics were no longer tenable.[32]

After 1945, especially, Toynbee would enjoy huge sales and an enormous vogue, featuring on the cover of *Time* magazine.[33] But he would also experience his own equivalent of a civilizational rise and fall, his reputation being punctured by hostile academic reviews in the 1950s from which it has never recovered.[34]

[28] Appendix A, Stevenson Board of Advisers, 2 Feb. 1927, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2b.
[29] McNeill, *Toynbee*, pp. 130–32, 149.
[30] Harold Temperley, 'Suggestion for the work of the Stevenson Professor', 28 Jan. 1928, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2b.
[31] Toynbee memorandum, 2 May 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2b.
[32] Toynbee memorandum, 23 June 1953, Bodleian Library, Toynbee MSS, 40.
[33] Fergus Millar, 'Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889–1975)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates/article.jsp?articleid=31769&back=, accessed 23 Nov. 2013.
[34] On Toynbee, see Richard Overy, *The morbid age: Britain and the crisis of civilization, 1919–1939* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 34–46.

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Even so, in the longer run he inspired the Chicago historian William McNeill, who would write Toynbee's biography as well as reviving the study of global history. But in 1932 the solution reached was to divide Toynbee's duties. Toynbee became the Stevenson Research Professor of International History at Chatham House and Webster became the Stevenson Professor of International History at the LSE, and taught the subject much as Temperley had envisaged. Until the 1950s the two institutions cooperated through a joint steering committee. Sir Daniel Stevenson had enabled this solution by modifying his bequest so as to lessen its tax liability and double the funding available, and that was not the only testimony to his shrewdness.[35] Two contrasting traditions of approaching international history were therefore present from the founding years, and even today their traces linger in the LSE department's syllabuses. Although since the 1990s a broader and more inclusive interpretation of the scope of the discipline has rightly predominated, the more focused approach is also needed, and the relationship between them should be complementary and symbiotic.[36]

Although I have highlighted the divisions among the pioneers, what mattered more was what linked these figures together. The LSE chair formed part of a larger development: the rise of a new discipline of international studies. As LSE Director, Beveridge deliberately built it up, assisted by Rockefeller funding.[37] Stevenson insisted that his new chair should be based at the School,[38] where during the 1920s the chair of international law held by Herbert Smith was joined by a chair of international politics held by Philip Noel-Baker and then by Charles Manning.[39] At Aberystwyth David Davies (whose family fortune also came from coal exporting) founded the Woodrow Wilson chair that Webster held before he moved to London.[40] In 1924 the first Labour government helped provide raw material by authorizing what became eleven volumes of *British documents on the origins of the War*, edited by Harold Temperley and George Gooch.[41] The correspondence of the period conveys a sense that something new and exciting was emerging, as part of a transnational movement that embraced scholars such as Pierre Renouvin in Paris, Bernadotte Schmitt in Chicago, and Otto Hoetzsch and Albrecht Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in Germany.[42] According to Webster's 1932 Stevenson inaugural, 'In the last thirteen years the history of the relations between

[35] Stevenson to Gathorne-Hardy, 15 Oct. 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2e.

[36] For a fuller discussion, see Patrick Finney, ed., *Palgrave advances in international history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[37] José Harris, *William Beveridge: a biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 265–6; Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 166; cf. Stevenson to Meston, 4 Aug. 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.

[38] Stevenson to Meston, 4 Aug. 1925, Chatham House Archives, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/2d.

[39] Fred Northedge, 'The Department of International Relations at LSE: a brief history, 1924–71', in Harry Bauer and Elisabetta Brighi, eds, *International Relations at LSE: a history of 75 years* (London: Millennium, 2003), pp. 7–16.

[40] Brian Porter, 'David Davies and the enforcement of peace', in David Long and Peter Wilson, eds, *Thinkers of the twenty years' crisis: inter-war idealism reassessed* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 58–9.

[41] Hamilton, 'The pursuit of "enlightened patriotism"', pp. 214ff.

[42] Schmitt's correspondents included Temperley, Sir James Edmonds (the author of the British official military history) and Hans Delbrück in Germany: University of Chicago Special Collections, Schmitt MSS, series i, box 1.Toynbee knew Hoetszsch in Berlin: Toynbee memorandum, 5 Jan. 1928, Chatham House Archives, 2/II./2b.

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organised groups has been transformed.'[43] Crucial to the period, however, was the understanding that what was being developed had more than scholarly value. Donald Cameron Watt's 1968 Stevenson inaugural likened the early years of international history to 'disaster studies',[44] and it is no accident that the discipline emerged in the aftermath of the Great War, during which many of its founders had served in government or the military. They spanned the divide between academic life and public affairs, and that experience had intensified their sense that history was *important*. According to the in-house history of the RIIA, its aim was to apply to international affairs the method of objective and disinterested research that had succeeded in the natural sciences.[45] According to Curtis, 'I feel that the study of international affairs is of such vital importance to the whole world that I hope to devote to its organisation every hour of every minute that I can spare'; and Stevenson hoped that 'what we are doing is to serve for generations, if not for centuries'.[46] Looking back in 1947, Webster reflected on his belief that if scholars could better understand the international system, catastrophes like 1914 might be avoided: 'But I underestimated both the pace at which history would be made and the pace at which it could be written.'[47]

II

This faith in history's practical value had a lengthy pedigree. If Webster declared in 1933 that 'the great men of action have always used it to test and train themselves',[48] the nineteenth-century imperial historian John Robert Seeley had viewed it as 'the school of statesmanship'.[49] King George I had founded the Regius chairs of modern history at Oxford and Cambridge in order to impart 'knowledge which is highly necessary towards completely qualifying the youth committed to their care for several stations both in Church and State'.[50] Such convictions dated back at least to Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War—and we should remember that Toynbee was a Hellenist who, in explaining the origins of *A study of history*, wrote that he 'could not live through the outbreak of war in AD 1914 without realizing that the outbreak of war in 431 BC had brought the same experience to Thucydides … [he was born into] a Time of Troubles that was, by definition, a historian's paradise'.[51] For my purposes here, two things Thucydides wrote are particularly pertinent. First, he aimed to 'provide a clear account of what happened—and, such is the human condition, will happen again at some time

[43] Charles Webster, 'The study of international history', *History* 18: 70, July 1933, p. 99.
[44] Cameron Watt (*What about the people?*, p. 4) points out that the Franco-Prussian War had inspired similar scholarship.
[45] King-Hall, *Chatham House*, p. 2. According to its Charter, the Institute was to 'advance the sciences of international politics, economics, and jurisprudence' as well as to 'provide and maintain means of information on international questions': King-Hall, *Chatham House*, p. 129.
[46] Stevenson to Curtis, 18 Nov. 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/e.
[47] Clark, rev. Chamberlain, 'Webster, Sir Charles Kingsley (1886–1961)'.
[48] Webster, 'Study of international history', p. 113.
[49] John Tosh, *Why history matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 103.
[50] Michael Howard, *The lessons of history* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 6–7.
[51] Arnold J. Toynbee, *A study of history*, abr. David Somervell, vols vii–x (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 352–3.

in the same or a similar pattern'. And second, the cataclysmic struggle between Athens and Sparta escalated from a local conflict between Corinth and Corcyra whose details mattered less than did the 'real reason, true but unacknowledged, which was the growth of Athenian power and Spartan fear of it'.[52]

I want to stay with history as a school of statesmanship but to transfer to another time of troubles, and specifically to a conversation in the White House on the evening of Tuesday, 23 October 1962, the day after President John F. Kennedy announced a 'quarantine' to halt Soviet missile shipments to Cuba and the day before the Americans realized that Soviet vessels were stopping short of the quarantine line:

> 'The great danger in all of this [said Kennedy] is a miscalculation—a mistake in judgement.' A short time before he had read Barbara Tuchman's book, *The Guns of August*, and he talked about the miscalculations of the Germans, the Russians, the Austrians, the French, and the British. They seemed somehow to stumble into war, he said, through stupidity, individual idiosyncrasies, misunderstandings, and personal complexes of inferiority and grandeur. We talked about the miscalculation of the Germans in 1939 and the still unfulfilled commitments and guarantees that the British had given to Poland … He did not want anyone to be able to write a book on 'The Missiles of October' and say that the United States had not done all it could to preserve the peace. We were not going to misjudge, or miscalculate, or challenge the other side needlessly, or precipitously push our adversaries into a course of action that was not intended or anticipated.[53]

That conversation took place half a century ago, and one realizes with something of a shock that as much time now separates us from Kennedy as then separated him from the Great War. Both the 1914 and the 1962 crises were emblematic episodes, and of course the five-decade time segment that divides them is an arbitrary and artificial construction, but in an essay with this one's title and timing you would expect me to refer to them, and the very fact that you would do so underlines how our grid-referencing of the territory of the past shapes how we think and feel about it. What I want to do next, therefore, is to explore these episodes' interconnection.

The passage cited above from Robert Kennedy's *Thirteen days* is often alluded to but rarely cited in full. President Kennedy's emphasis was on miscalculation, although with reference to 1939 as well as 1914. And immediately afterwards, as Robert Kennedy tells us, the President sent his brother to open a secret negotiating channel with the Soviet Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin: in other words, invoking the historical analogy led on to action. Certainly Robert Kennedy's memoir is unreliable, but we have corroborative evidence that the President often cited Barbara Tuchman's volume, insisted that his aides read it and wanted 'every officer in the army' to do so, and that the Secretary of the Army sent copies to every US military base in the world.[54] *The Guns of August* won the Pulitzer Prize, remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 42 consecutive weeks,

[52] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, intr. Peter Rhodes, trans. Martin Hammond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 12–13.
[53] Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen days: the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: Pan, 1969), pp. 65–6.
[54] Michael Dobbs, *One minute to midnight* (London: Arrow, 2009), p. 226.

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and indeed highlighted inadvertence: 'War pressed and twisted against every frontier. Suddenly dismayed, governments struggled and twisted to fend it off … Appalled upon the brink, the chiefs of state … attempted to back away but the pull of military schedules dragged them forward.'[55] This interpretation—of a conflict involuntarily forced upon reluctant governments by their own military preparations—has been enormously influential, Henry Kissinger in his *Diplomacy* presenting a similar view.[56] And although some historians have disparaged Tuchman, whom the press depicted as an unpretentious New York housewife, she had distinguished antecedents. Her uncle, Henry Morgenthau Jr, was Franklin Roosevelt's Treasury Secretary and the author of the 1944 'Morgenthau Plan' for German pastoralization; her grandfather, Henry Morgenthau Sr, was the American representative in Constantinople in 1914, and she remembered the arrival there of the German cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau* that would precipitate Turkey's entry into the war. Her book cited most of the published primary sources in English, French and German, and although she did not cite her secondary sources, her interpretation was not far distant from that of leading professionals at the time. In 1950 (the year of the Schuman Plan for a European Coal and Steel Community), a conference of French and German historians led by Pierre Renouvin and Gerhard Ritter had pronounced that 'the documents do not permit attributing a premeditated desire for war on the part of any European people or government in 1914' and that textbooks in both countries should be revised accordingly.[57] Charles Webster's successor, Norton Medlicott, lamented in his 1955 Stevenson inaugural that 'at least 90 per cent of the people in this country still accept, in spite of the universal rejection of this belief by historians, the original 1914–18 war guilt thesis as applied to Germany'.[58] If it was not a product of design, the war must have been somehow unintended, a notion popularized not only by Tuchman but also in A. J. P. Taylor's mordant *The First World War: an illustrated history*, which by 1989 had already sold a quarter of a million copies.[59]

American policy in the Cuban Missile Crisis is often—and in many ways correctly—highlighted as an exemplar of successful learning from historical experience. But with reference to the 1914 analogy, I will make two points. First, the inadvertence thesis is no longer sustainable. Second, and probably fortunately, that thesis did *not* in fact provide the basis for Kennedy's conduct in the Cuban confrontation. Let me take these in turn. While Tuchman and Taylor were disseminating the inadvertence thesis, Professor Fritz Fischer's work in Germany was frontally assaulting it, first by suggesting in his *Grasp for world power* (*Griff nach der Weltmacht*) in 1961 that Germany's leaders had deliberately risked a European

[55] Barbara Tuchman, *The guns of August*, foreword by Robert Massie (New York: Ballantine, 1994), p. 86.
[56] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), chs 11, 12.
[57] Dwight Lee, ed., *The outbreak of the First World War: who was responsible?* (Boston: Heath, 1966), p. 64.
[58] W. Norton Medlicott, 'The scope and study of international history' (1955 inaugural), *International Affairs* 31: 4, Oct. 1955, p. 421.
[59] 'Nowhere was there conscious determination to provoke a war. Statesmen miscalculated': Alan John Percival Taylor, *The First World War: an illustrated history* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 16; cf. Alex Danchev, '"Bunking" and debunking: the controversies of the 1960s', in Brian Bond, ed., *The First World War and British military history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 263.

war, and then in his *War of illusions* (*Krieg der Illusionen)* in 1969 that they had been planning for one since 1912.[60] He challenged a comfortable historical consensus in a manner that Sir Daniel Stevenson might heartily have approved. But what I want to underline is not so much Fischer's findings as his method. Prior to Fischer the leading authorities on war origins, such as Bernadotte Schmitt and Luigi Albertini, had written about European diplomacy as a whole, and how the Great Powers' policies interacted .[61] They followed Temperley's prescriptions even if they wrote on recent events and lacked unrestricted access to archives. Fischer, in contrast, used archives copiously, but concentrated on the foreign policy of just one country, relating diplomacy to broader forces in Germany's economy and society, and blazing the trail for similar analyses of the other powers. For all the contrasts between him and Toynbee, the two shared a concern to expand the scope of the discipline. Only since the 1990s have historians returned to the international system, but now setting foreign policy in both its external and its domestic context. It may be unfashionable to say so, but scholarly investigation has made progress, and the cutting-edge literature on war origins now rests on a far deeper understanding than we possessed in the 1920s or even in the 1960s, as international historians have also progressed in understanding such other canonical fields of enquiry as European imperialism, the origins of the Second World War, European integration and the Cold War. Yet underlying much of that progress is precisely historians' use of a combination of approaches to their discipline, in the manner envisaged by James Joll in his celebrated Stevenson inaugural 44 years ago.[62] International history cannot be understood without reference to national history—although the converse also applies.

Out of the debate on war origins as it approaches its centenary a striking new consensus is emerging. Although the debate on Germany is not exhausted, I think that more historians would go broadly with the first version of Fischer's thesis than with the second. My own view is that a preventive war was increasingly attractive to the German leaders from approximately 1911 but not decided on until July 1914. But new pre-centenary studies by Stefan Schmidt, Sean McMeekin, Nicholas Lambert and Christopher Clark have underlined how far Germany's opponents were willing to risk war (as, even more, was Germany's principal ally, Austria–Hungary).[63] The issue was not that *nobody* wanted war, but that *everybody*

[60] Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961); *Krieg der Illusionen: die Deutsche Politik von 1911–1914* (Düsseldorf; Droste, 1969). Pub. in Eng. as *Germany's aims in the First World War* and *War of illusions* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967, 1975). For the latest reappraisal, see Annika Mombauer, 'The Fischer controversy 50 years on', *Journal of Contemporary History* 48: 2, April 2013, pp. 231–40, and other articles in the same issue.

[61] Bernadotte Schmitt, *The coming of the war, 1914* (New York: Scribner, 1930); Luigi Albertini, *The origins of the war of 1914*, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1952–7).

[62] 'The crisis of 1914 … is an example of the extent to which what we call International History must in fact embrace all kinds of history, and it suggests that any attempt to insist on a too rigid departmental division of historical studies into economic history, diplomatic history, military history, art history, and so on, must lead to an impoverishment of our historical understanding': James Joll, '1914: the unspoken assumptions' (Stevenson inaugural, 1968), in Hans Koch, ed., *The origins of the First World War: great power rivalry and German war aims* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972), p. 327.

[63] Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Außenpolitik in der Julikrise 1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009); Sean McMeekin, *The Russian origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap, 2011); Nicholas A. Lambert,

was willing to risk it—and if necessary to fight rather than give way. Yet this willingness did not reflect war fever on the streets. On the contrary, the trends of public opinion in France, Germany and Britain have all now been thoroughly investigated, and the finding in each case is that the jingoistic demonstrations in the capital cities were largely an epiphenomenon.[64] What mattered—and here Sir Daniel Stevenson's insights remain pertinent—was more the underlying assumptions of the governing elites, and that the pre-1914 moulding of national consciousness had predisposed the broader public to accept the necessity of the conflict once it began. The fact that that generation too had just been commemorating centenaries—the Russians that of Borodino and the Germans that of Leipzig, to say nothing of the American half-centenary of Gettysburg—also contributed. The German Emperor Wilhelm II chose the unveiling of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* (Battle of Leipzig memorial) on 18 October 1913 to urge the chief of the Austro-Hungarian general staff to attack Serbia, remarking: 'I have done much reading about war and know what war means, but finally the situation occurs in which a great power can no longer look on, but must reach for the sword.'[65]

If we ask why governments played with fire, two further factors should be highlighted. One is armaments—and one is reminded of the reflection by Stevenson's friend, the former Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey:[66]

> The enormous growth of armaments, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them—it was these that made war inevitable. This, it seems to me, is the truest reading of history, and the lesson that the present should be learning from the past in the interests of future peace, the warning to be handed on to those who come after us. This is the real and final account of the origins of the Great War.[67]

Most relevant here is not the Anglo-German naval race, which lost impetus after 1912, but the competition between the European armies, in which Germany allowed its traditional predominance to slip in France's and Russia's favour before snapping back with unprecedented increases in 1912–13 (see figure 1).

The military appraisals forwarded by the European general staffs to their political chiefs underlined that 1914 marked a crossover point, a moment not of stable but of unstable equilibrium.[68] While Austria–Hungary and Germany were on the downslide their opponents were moving up, but for both sides war now seemed prospectively a rational option. This did not make hostilities inevitable, but we

Planning Armageddon: British economic warfare and the First World War (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2012); Christopher Clark, *The sleepwalkers: how Europe went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012). On Austria–Hungary, see Francis Roy Bridge, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Sam Williamson, *Austria–Hungary and the origins of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991). Further major centenary reinterpretations are in press.

64 Jean-Jacques Becker, *1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977); Jeffrey Verhey, *The spirit of 1914: militarism, myth, and mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Catriona Pennell, *A kingdom united: popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

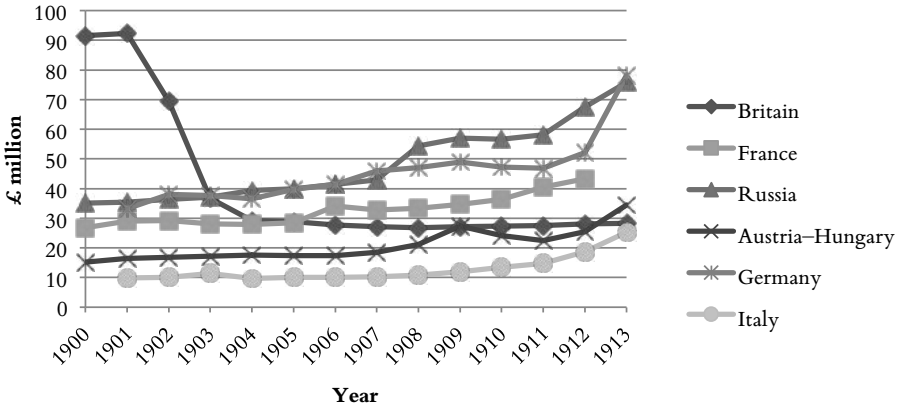
65 Albertini, *Origins*, vol. 1, p. 484. The monument has recently been restored. Elite attitudes are explored in Avner Offer, 'Going to war in 1914: a matter of honor?', *Politics and Society* 23: 2, June 1995, pp. 213–41.

66 Curtis to Stevenson, 26 Nov. 1925, Chatham House Archives, 2/II/e.

67 Edward Grey, *Twenty-five years, 1892–1916*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1925), vol. 1, p. 90.

68 David Stevenson, *Armaments in the coming of war: Europe, 1904–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 220, 291–2, 307.

Figure 1: Army expenditure of the European powers, 1900–1913 (constant prices)



Source: Adapted from David Stevenson, *Armaments and the coming of war: Europe, 1904–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 5, 8.

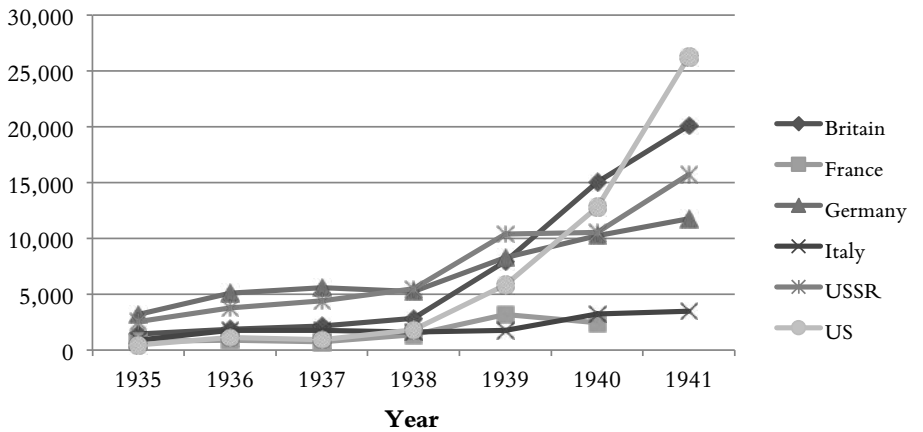
need also to factor in the ways in which governments managed—or mismanaged—the July 1914 crisis. If Kennedy in 1962 looked back to 1939 and 1914, what were the 1914 statesmen's precedents? The question needs closer investigation and at the time was rarely articulated, but a decade of tension had preceded the war and two episodes in particular carried weight. The first was the Russians' humiliation in the Bosnian annexation crisis of 1908–1909. The second was what historians now refer to as the 'winter crisis' during the First Balkan War of 1912–13. This episode had demonstrated to the Russian Foreign Minister that he could back up diplomacy by heightening military preparedness, but to the Austrians that even armed diplomacy against Serbia did not work, and to both the Austrians and the Germans that the conventional diplomatic device of mediation via a Great Power conference did not operate in their interests. In 1914 they rejected it.[69]

III

We may now return to 1962, although via 1939, where we witness an armaments conjuncture resembling that of a quarter-century earlier. Figure 2 shows that in 1933–8 Germany's air expansion surged ahead of Britain's and France's, but by 1939 the latter were catching up. It helps explain both why Hitler felt that time was running out and why his adversaries were gaining confidence.[70] Moreover, what we know of the two sides' military appraisals again bears out the statistical impression of an unstable equilibrium in which both were now more willing than previously to fight.

[69] Richard Crampton, 'The decline of the Concert of Europe in the Balkans, 1913–194', *Slavonic and East European Review* 52: 128, July 1974, pp. 393–419; Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 558.
[70] Cf. Richard Overy and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The road to war*, revised edn (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 369.

Figure 2: Military aircraft production of the major powers, 1935–1941



Source: Adapted from Richard Overy and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The road to war*, revised edn (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 369.

If we move on further to the early 1960s, the armaments picture once more exhibits certain similarities: in fact, some authorities point to another almost uncannily neat crossover point in overall military spending, but in nuclear delivery systems to an American advantage that was widening.[71]

Whereas on the one hand Marc Trachtenberg has shown that Kennedy judged a showdown inevitable and that it was better to face it before the United States lost its remaining strategic invulnerability, on the other hand Khrushchev placed his missiles in Cuba as a quick fix to prevent the nuclear balance shifting drastically against him.[72] If we pursue Thucydides' observation that international history follows recurrent patterns, the situation in 1962 bore striking similarities with those in 1939 and 1914, and it is no accident that *The guns of August* was a bestseller even before the missile crisis.[73]

Nonetheless, this time the pattern was broken. In part the world was simply lucky, and the Cuban lesson for the future is to try to avoid such confrontations. But in part also the peaceful outcome was due to Kennedy's handling of the crisis, and this in turn owed something to the President's and his advisers' use of multiple historical analogies. I stress *multiple*. Arguably the most important precedent was not 1914 at all but the botched invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, which underlined to Kennedy the importance of deliberation. And between 16 and 22 October he and his colleagues on the Executive Committee of the National Security Council

[71] Cf. Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in time: the uses of history for decision makers* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 124–5. Figures 7-1 and 7-2 suggest that Soviet real spending on strategic forces overtook that of the US in 1962–3, despite a continuing US advantage in numbers of bombers and missile warheads.

[72] Marc Trachtenberg, *A constructed peace: the making of the European settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 350–1; Vladislav Zubok, *A failed empire: the Soviet Union in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 144.

[73] The idea that a point of 'power transition' signals danger is not new. Theoretical insights date back to Abramo Organski, *World politics*, 2nd edn (New York: Knopf, 1968).

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enjoyed a breathing space in which to abandon their initial preference for an air strike and to adopt the less provocative alternative of a blockade. During this period two other precedents were cited to support restraint: that on the model of Suez and Hungary in 1956, American action against Cuba would encourage Soviet retaliation against Berlin; and that an air strike against the Soviet missiles would be a Pearl Harbor in reverse.[74] But Kennedy also noted historical analogies that operated the other way. His father had become notorious as a supporter of appeasement, and Kennedy's Harvard senior thesis, 'Why England slept', was written during and after the conclusion of the Munich agreement.[75] According to his 22 October television broadcast, 'the 1930s taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war'.[76] Certainly the President kept communications to the Kremlin open, but he also made very visible preparations against Cuba and placed US forces at high readiness: probably more so than was comfortable to Harold Macmillan, who had also read Tuchman, refused permission for Britain's Bomber Command to be alerted, and warned General Norstad that 'mobilisation had sometimes caused war'.[77] Indeed, immediately before Kennedy cited Barbara Tuchman on 23 October he had authorized the tracking in the Caribbean of Soviet submarines, which we now know carried nuclear torpedoes.[78] As the crisis reached its climax, however, the President and the Executive Committee unsurprisingly stopped citing historical analogies and concentrated on day-to-day developments.[79] The point remains that the American leadership drew arguments in favour of coercion as well as conciliation, and in the end the combination of the two—and coercion more than conciliation—persuaded Khrushchev to back down.[80] If Kennedy had taken only the Barbara Tuchman lesson in his conduct of the missile crisis, it most likely would have ended with the Soviet missiles still in place and led on to a still more dangerous confrontation over Berlin. The President's employment of analogies

[74] Ernest May and Philip Zelikov, eds, *The Kennedy tapes: inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 4, 17, 28; Neustadt and May, *Thinking in time*, pp. 5–8; Dominic Tierney, '"Pearl Harbor in reverse": moral analogies in the Cuban Missile Crisis', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9: 3, Summer 2007, pp. 49–77.

[75] Kennedy's thesis had an explicit concern with learning from historical experience, arguing that tardy rearmament had compelled Chamberlain to sign at Munich: John Kennedy, *Why England slept* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1940; repr. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1961).

[76] Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen days*, p. 133. By contrast, in March 1938 Neville Chamberlain had acknowledged receipt of H. A. L. Fisher's *A history of Europe* with the comment that 'at the present moment I am too busy trying to make the history of Europe to read about it'. Nonetheless, that summer he would be impressed by Harold Temperley's *The foreign policy of Canning, 1822–1827: England, the neo-Holy Alliance and the New World* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1925), which 'fortified' his aversion to making threats unless he was able to follow them through. See David Reynolds, *Summits: six meetings that shaped the twentieth century* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 48, 44. Conversely, before the western powers guaranteed Poland in 1939, British press commentaries contended that in 1914 there had been miscommunication and this time London must draw a clear line. (I owe this point to Paul Horsler.)

[77] Len Scott, *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the threat of nuclear war: lessons from history* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 131.

[78] Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen days*, pp. 64–5.

[79] May and Zelikov, eds, *The Kennedy tapes*, p. 700.

[80] Kremlin conversation, 30 Oct. 1962, in 'The global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: new evidence from behind the Iron, Bamboo, and Sugarcane Curtains and beyond', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, nos 17–18, Fall 2012, pp. 400–2. (To justify yielding, the Soviet leader employed another First World War analogy: Lenin's conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. See Scott, *Cuban Missile Crisis*, p. 57.)

proved complex and subtle, as one might have hoped for from the man who in a 1960 election debate said his primary qualification for the White House was his sense of history.[81]

IV

Let me juxtapose that against Tony Blair's statement to the US Congress in July 2003: 'There has never been a time when, except in the most general sense, a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day.'[82] One understands why he said it. In the aftermath of the Cold War and of 9/11 it seemed the world had entered an unprecedented new era, in which interstate conflict had receded in significance. But a decade later, the picture looks different. According to some estimates, China's defence spending may overtake that of the United States by 2035,[83] to which one might add the intended doubling of Russian military expenditure over the forthcoming decade.[84] The current situation is beginning to display disquieting similarities with previous transition points in the military balance. Of course, the curves may not continue in this fashion—in fact, they are unlikely to—and historically arms races have neither invariably nor inevitably ended in hostilities. But military buildups can serve as a fever chart that tells us more than do public declarations and routine diplomacy about the underlying state of relations, and changes in capability may eventually change intentions. This applies the more forcefully as in East Asia there are signs not only of another pattern of recurrent crises but also of nationalist popular mobilization. The 2012 anti-Japanese demonstrations in China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute began on the anniversary of the 1931 Mukden incident and of the onset of the Japanese aggression about which Eileen Power was writing to Charles Webster;[85] and I note here Professor Arne Westad's comment that 'History … influences Chinese ways of seeing the world in a more direct sense than in any other culture I know.'[86] Although historical experience suggests that an isolated incident is unlikely to spark major hostilities, a pattern of repeated, endemic diplomatic crises such as preceded 1914, 1939 and 1962 would be more menacing. While the lecture on which this article is based was in preparation, Graham Allison in the *Financial Times* was pointing to a 'Thucydidean trap' in Sino-US relations, and *The Economist* likened them to the Edwardian Anglo-German antagonism.[87] Once one has been sensitized to such invocations, references to the 'lessons of history' seem to be discernible everywhere, and commentaries by journalists and by public intellectuals to be saturated with them.

[81] Tosh, *Why history matters*, p. 42.
[82] Tosh, *Why history matters*, p. 5.
[83] 'The dragon's new teeth', *The Economist*, 7 April 2012.
[84] Cf. 'Russia: a return to arms', *Financial Times*, 1 Oct. 2013.
[85] Rana Mitter, *The Manchuria myth: nationalism, resistance, and collaboration in modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 228.
[86] Odd Arne Westad, *Restless empire: China and the world since 1750* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), p. 2.
[87] Graham Allison, 'Thucydides's trap has been sprung in the Pacific', *Financial Times*, 22 Aug. 2012; editorial, *The Economist*, 22–28 Sept. 2012.

In a prospectively ominous future, can the study of international history still provide guidance? My starting-point was that its founders had eminently practical purposes. Curtis hoped to set international studies on a scientific footing; Stevenson to cleanse history of national bias and produce a discipline more independent and objective, critical if necessary of the historian's own country as well as of others. Although I am well aware that philosophically such ideals are problematic, they complement the traditional justification for acquiring historical knowledge as a repository of vicarious experience.[88] If time permits, the best way of working through a political problem is often precisely to construct a timeline, to investigate the viewpoints of the other parties, to weigh the evidence, and to identify the analogous situations that may or may not be relevant to possible action: all standard features of historical methodology.[89] It has further been suggested here that employing a variety of approaches is the best means of enhancing historical insight. And although Stevenson overestimated nationalism's contribution to the First World War, he and Curtis put their fingers on something important when they highlighted historians' capacity to influence opinion. Even if political leaders do not read history, the journalists they read may well do so, as also may the politicians' staffers—and who is to say that the staffers advising leaders in future crises may not be reading these very pages? But if politicians and commentators may be counted on to invoke historical analogies whatever we do, those analogies should at least rest on as accurate a representation of the past as possible. None of this means that historical study enables us to predict, or that it can substitute in decision-making for direct experience and detailed observation of day-to-day events. We should be measured about its role. Yet even if historians have no privileged claim on wisdom, their contribution can still be distinctive and bring insights that are applicable beyond the classroom. Probably we all sense this intuitively and can recognize it from experience in our own lives, even if in public discourse the theme of learning from the past, while omnipresent, remains sadly underexamined.

By way of epilogue I turn to a passage cited by the Cambridge international historian Harry Hinsley that has stayed with me over the years. We return to Scotland, and to the arrival in August 1773 of James Boswell and Samuel Johnson at Monboddo House after toiling over desolate moorland in driving rain. Johnson was peevish, and predicted that Macbeth's three witches would start out of the murk. The house was tumbledown—in Boswell's words, a 'wild and naked place'. But still, Lord Monboddo was not only a pillar of the Scottish Enlightenment but proved also a convivial host, and as the evening conversation mellowed it turned—of course—to history:

Monboddo. The history of manners is the most valuable. I never set a high value on any other history.

Johnson. Nor I, and therefore I esteem biography, as giving us what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use.

[88] Peter Lee, 'Why learn history?', in A. K. Dickinson, P. J. Lee and P. J. Rogers, *Learning history* (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 11–14.

[89] Neustadt and May, *Thinking in time*, ch. 13; Tosh, *Why history matters*, ch. 4.

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Boswell. But in the course of general history we find manners. In wars we see the disposition of people, their degrees of humanity and other particulars.
Johnson. Yes, but then you must take all the facts to get this, and it is but a little you get.
Monboddo. And it is that little which makes history valuable.[90]

[90] James Boswell, 'The journal of a tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson LLD', 21 Aug. 1773, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6018/pg6018.html, accessed 23 Nov. 2013; cf. Francis Harry Hinsley, *Power and the pursuit of peace: theory and practice in the history of relations between states* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. iv.

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