

Carole Fink

Writing 20th Century International History

Explorations and Examples



Jena Center

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20th Century History

Wallstein

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Preface

The five essays in this collection reflect several of my current interests as an international historian, including the historiography of my field, the international problem of refugees and the protection of minorities, the fraught relations between West Germany and Israel, and the history of the Cold War. This book expresses my conviction that the craft of international history requires many skills, among them using innovative as well as the standard ways of our discipline, engaging in research across many national borders, creating a coherent narrative that allows space for questions and problems, and applying a critical stance toward conventional interpretations. It also indicates the *incomplete* nature of our work: there will always be new documents and new interpretations to absorb; and there will always be new research questions.

The first essay, *Rethinking International History: New Tools for an Old Discipline*, traces the field's accomplishments and challenges over the past half century. Like all scholarly disciplines, the practice of international history is inseparable from its political and institutional basis as well as its intellectual and cultural background; and the turbulence in all these areas has created a lively debate between traditional practitioners and experimentalists.

The second essay, *The Crisis Years: Britain, Australia, and Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany, 1938-39*, a case study of failed internationalism, examines the responses of the world's largest empire and its distant dominion to efforts by the League of Nations and the United States to internationalize the Jewish refugee problem. Probing beneath the myths and controversies, it reexamines the attitudes and policies in London and Canberra that limited Jewish migration before the outbreak of World War II.

The third essay, *International Minority Rights: The »Versailles System« in Historical Perspective*, revisits the minorities

regime established by the League of Nations that was partially revived after the Cold War. Combining unprecedented external controls over fifteen Central and East European governments with conciliatory enforcement procedures, the world's first efforts to protect minority rights were almost universally judged a failure. However, a closer look at the creation and working of the Versailles system casts light on the formative ideas and personalities, the decision-making process, and the external constraints that crippled the system and have continued to make international minority protection an elusive goal.

The fourth essay, *Normalizing the Past? West Germany, Israel, and Günter Grass's First Visit to Israel in March 1967*, is part of a work in progress on FRG-Israel relations in the 1960s and 1970s. With its detailed examination of the diplomatic and biographical background and of the writer-activist's eventful two weeks in Israel, this chapter aims at expanding our understanding of a key transitional moment in a complex relationship.

The final essay, *Facing Brezhnev and Each Other: Nixon, Brandt, and Meir after 1969*, is a reexamination of the controversial five-year era of détente and *Ostpolitik* that focuses on the interactions of these four leaders. It weighs their decision-making during several Middle East crises and the impact of their politics and personalities on one of the world's most volatile regions.

It is a pleasure to express my gratitude to several people who contributed to my memorable residency at the *Jena Center 20th Century History* in the Summer Semester 2016: to Norbert Frei for his gracious invitation; to Kristina Meyer for her numerous forms of assistance; to Jacob S. Eder, Tobias Freimüller, Joachim von Puttkamer, and Daniel Stahl, for their warm welcome and collegiality; to Benedikt Rothhagen, for his expert support in the doctoral seminar; and to all the seminar students, whose ambitious research projects and probing questions made my stay at the University of

Jena both instructive and a delight. My thanks also extend to Anne Heideking, Marion Schubert, and Nora and Beno Blachut for making my newest visit to Central Europe a deeply rich and pleasurable experience. And I am grateful to Kristina Meyer and the editorial staff of Wallstein Verlag for their meticulous work in preparing this volume for publication.

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Carole Fink

Rethinking International History

New Tools for an Old Discipline

The field of International History has undergone substantial changes in the past half century. Back in the 1960s, what was then called diplomatic history occupied a place of respect and privilege in universities and in the public forum. It drew upon a long European intellectual tradition dating as far back as the Renaissance, and which in the 19th century had been codified into a series of professional rules and practices. Scholars were trained in graduate colloquia and seminars to work in libraries and archives, to examine written documents on the external relations between and among distinct political entities large and small, and to produce lectures, papers, articles, and monographs analyzing significant historical events over short- and long-term periods. The official sources matched the subject matter – the state and the nation; and these were solid and palpable bodies competing in a centuries-long struggle on land and sea and in the minds and imaginations of their peoples, their allies, their enemies. At the center of their scrutiny were the elite decision makers who represented a central authority within the classical European state system¹.

The Golden Age

Diplomatic history, with its emphasis on explaining the big issues – war and peace – through meticulous, objective, and exhaustive research and analysis, appealed to a generation that had been deeply marked by the two World Wars and by the Cold War. In the United States those drawn to the study of German foreign relations had – thanks to the Allies' capture and filming after World War II of a very large quantity of the Reich's governmental records – an unprecedented ac-

cess to more than 70 years of official documentation. Those who focused on US, British, French, Italian, or Soviet history were far less fortunate. In America and in most of Europe diplomatic and government records were only slowly being released, and in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe the documentary sources were even more limited.

The period of the high Cold War from the early 1960s until the mid-1970s was nonetheless a golden age for diplomatic historians in the United States and also in Western Europe. Due to the postwar baby boom universities and their student populations had exploded, and job opportunities and research fellowships were expanded as were scholarly organizations and the production of journal articles and monographs². For US scholars the strong dollar and inexpensive jet travel made overseas research and international contacts (even behind the Iron Curtain) attainable; and, where permitted, photocopying and microfilming archival materials expedited their work on both sides of the Atlantic.

This was also an era of lively historiographic debates. While Soviet scholars and their politically conservative Western critics hewed to the Marxist version of an ideologically driven Soviet foreign policy, some Western historians, inspired by George Kennan's perceptive 1961 study, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, moved to demystify Moscow's behavior by drawing on Russia's history and geography. Historians of German diplomacy, stirred by two other books published in 1961 – Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914-1918* and A.J.P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* – plunged into the debates over the continuity of the Reich's expansionist policies between 1890 and 1945 and over Nazi Germany's sole responsibility for the outbreak of World War II. And US historians, scarred by the hot wars in Korea and in Vietnam and inspired by William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), Gar Aperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy: Hi-*

rosshima and Potsdam. The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power (1965), and Gabriel Kolko's *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (1968), challenged the orthodox-patriotic interpretations of America's imperialism after 1898, of its use of the atomic bomb in 1945, and of its role in the origins of the Cold War.

These debates led to a revival of the earlier challenges to the *Primat der Außenpolitik* by Karl Lamprecht, Eckhard Kehr, and Charles Beard, and stirred new investigations of the domestic sources of diplomacy. Soviet historians uncovered the sometimes clashing military, economic, ideological, and personal elements behind Lenin's and Stalin's relations with Europe and the rest of the world; and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (1969) and *Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus* (1974), detailed the endogeneous socioeconomic forces behind German and US global expansion.

Around 1970 some practitioners of diplomatic history gave it a new name – *international* history – which one historian dubbed a »new field with an old pedigree« – to denote a broader intellectual pursuit³. Although mainstream scholars continued to apply traditional methods, others began adopting tools from the social sciences. There were also new subjects, among them the study of peace, as in Roger Chickering's *Imperial Germany and a World Without War: The Peace Movement and German Society, 1892-1914* (1975), and of women, as in Leila J. Rupp's *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (1978).

The renamed field also became more international in the 1970s after several West European countries, led by Britain's Labour government, lifted their 50-year archival restrictions and when East-West detente led to the easing of controls in Soviet and East Europe repositories. There were new studies of the interwar period that transcended purely national

perspectives, such as Jon Jacobson's *Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West, 1925-1929* (1972) and Stephen A. Schuker's *The End of French Predominance in Europe: The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan* (1976), which added a sophisticated economic perspective. This enhanced accessibility to official documents created new demands: international historians were now obliged to acquire additional languages, spend longer times abroad, acquire new technical skills to absorb the new data, and adjust to a multi-state perspective; but the field remained centered on the United States and Europe.

New Challenges

The golden age of international history came to an abrupt end after 1975. Three decades after the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Cold War the world had drastically changed: West Germany had become a solid democracy and leader of the nine-state European Community, and the Helsinki Accords had not only ratified Europe's postwar division but also established human rights in the continent's diplomatic vocabulary. The US-Soviet rivalry had been tempered by détente and by America's humiliating defeat in Vietnam; but the decolonization of Europe's former empires had created new sites of Superpower confrontation in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

There were also new global economic and social challenges. The 1970s witnessed major rises in commodity prices and two global economic shocks as well as the rise of spread of national and international terrorism and the rise of political Islam in Afghanistan and Iran. Moreover, the emerging global issues – among them the struggle for human rights and the problem of mass migrations, the advent of new technology and threats to the world's environment – required not only new mindsets but also new sources and new historical approaches.

Inside the academy international historians suddenly faced harsh criticism from fellow scholars. International-relations specialists, who liberally mined their data to construct their models and theories, chided historians for their over-reliance on discrete events; sociologists faulted them for ignoring structural analysis; and economic historians criticized them for failing to integrate long-term waves of growth and retraction.

There were also detractors within their own departments. Some colleagues criticized international historians for their over-reliance on a constructed and artificial master narrative; others faulted their ignorance of psychoanalytic theory; and still others noted the absence of quantitative analysis. Younger historians, inspired by the *Annales* school then reigning in Paris, were gravitating toward the field of social history – of »history from the bottom up« – and challenging the notion that the main currents of human history operated primarily through the channels of international politics. Indeed, the school's leader Fernand Braudel, in *On History* (1980), dismissed »event-based history« (e.g., focusing on Yalta or Potsdam, Dien Bien Phu or the launching of sputnik) as containing only »brief flashes« of reality.

By the late 1970s there was also a general sense that international history was dominated by conservative and nationalist perspectives. Non-Western historians faulted the ambitious works of William Roger Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939* (1971), and Michael H. Hunt, *Frontier Defense and the Open Door: Manchuria in Chinese-American Relations 1895-1911* (1973), for their sole reliance on Western documentation. The demotion of international history reflected more than old scholarly rivalries but also represented an institutional threat. Its practitioners now faced marginalization within their departments and campuses as well as reduced opportunities to obtain grants and employment and to publish their work.

At the opening of the 1980s the Harvard historian Charles S. Maier famously acknowledged the depths of the crisis, an-