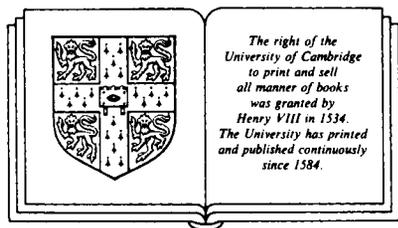


Cabinet decisions on foreign policy

The British experience
October 1938–June 1941

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1. CABINETS, FOREIGN POLICIES AND CASE-STUDIES

A great deal has been written about both the British Cabinet and British foreign policy, but hardly anyone has tried to put the two together systematically. Work on Cabinet government has alluded to foreign policy examples in passing, and Patrick Gordon Walker provided a short case-study of a foreign policy decision in his 'imaginary' accounts of discussions around the Cabinet table.¹ Historians have more often written about particular Prime Ministers and the foreign policies they pursued in conjunction with their Cabinet colleagues. The books produced in recent years on the Labour government of 1945–51 and on the second Churchill administration are cases in point.² But the neglect of foreign policy by British political science as much as the natural preoccupation of historians with chronology and doing justice to the wealth of archive material has meant that there is a striking gap in the literature, namely the absence of any full-length discussion of how the British Cabinet behaves in the realm of foreign policy. It is this gap which the present book, through the case-study method, seeks to fill.

The approach is cross-disciplinary, dealing with the three closely related academic areas of political science, International Relations (the capital letters are to distinguish this from real-world international relations) and international history. There is an inevitable risk of falling between stools when attempting to straddle three well-established specialisms, each with its voluminous literature, but it is a risk well worth taking. If a real contribution is to be made to our understanding of top-level foreign policy-making in Britain, there is no escaping the need to draw on the work already done on the Cabinet from the viewpoints of constitutional theory and domestic policy, on foreign policy decisions from the International Relations perspective of decision-making theory and the character of international system and on the peculiarities of context explained by

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experts in a particular period. It is worth saying a little more about the three levels of analysis.

In the area of political science (or what is often called in the United Kingdom 'the study of government'³), it has been assumed for many years that the Cabinet and its anthropology is a suitable, indeed crucial subject for research, given its standing at the apex of the political system. Although in recent decades a degree of scepticism has grown up among some scholars about the worth of investigating superstructural phenomena like institutions, leading to the belief that the Cabinet should be accorded rather less importance than the political and social systems which condition its membership and constrain its choices,⁴ there is undoubtedly a well-established tradition – reflected in higher education courses throughout the country – of writing about the powers and interactions of the ministers of the Crown inside that citadel known as the Cabinet.

This writing has covered the last 150 years of British history, and encompassed the whole range of government business. Part of the work has concentrated on the history of the constitutional and administrative problems of the Cabinet and its associated bodies.⁵ Much of the controversy in the field, however, has been engendered by a dispute over the degree to which the twentieth-century Cabinet has become one of Bagehot's 'dignified' institutions, its authority supplanted by 'Prime Ministerial' government.⁶ Protagonists have sought to identify the basic pattern of central policy-making.

Broadly speaking, although those involved have often been more subtle than they have been given credit for, the debate has mainly been conducted in terms of the techniques by which Prime Minister or Cabinet may respectively monopolise the finite powers at stake, and the sanctions which each may exert to protect their own position. Analysis has thus been based on the shared assumptions that it is possible to discover the general locus or tendency of 'power' and that, to some extent at least, all actors compete between themselves over participation in policy-making – most ministers through their collective role in Cabinet and the Prime Minister by either bypassing or dominating the Cabinet.⁷ Academic work in this field has tended to conceive of the powers of Prime Minister and Cabinet as subject to a zero-sum game between separate entities, and has concentrated on trying to mark out the boundaries between them.

There are, despite the thousands of pages generated on the Cabinet since Bagehot, certain *lacunae* in the literature. Of these one

is clearly foreign policy,⁸ but another important need is for detailed case-study treatment of *any* area of policy. The generalising instincts of political scientists, whether of traditional, behaviouralist or structuralist inclinations, has led them to range widely over the history of British government without stopping long enough to use the available public records on Cabinet discussions for a close-textured analysis. Where writers have focused on the Cabinet in particular periods, it has usually been through the device of the political biography, which has produced some interesting but also inherently incomplete versions of life in Cabinet.⁹ A detailed study of how the Cabinet made foreign policy decisions should, therefore, go some way towards adding two extra elements to the study of Cabinet government.

In the area of International Relations, the pertinent sub-field is foreign policy analysis, which deals with the actions and motivations of the actors in the international system, principally states. Over the last thirty years this subject has developed to the position where it is now an orthodox, indeed major, component in most university degrees in International Relations, and it has spawned much comparative and theoretical research. By definition a large proportion of this work has been on the conduct of foreign policy by such elite institutions as the American National Security Council and the Soviet Politburo. There have been various excellent case-studies produced, in the accessible form denoted 'structured empiricism' by Michael Brecher,¹⁰ such as those by Graham Allison on the Cuban Missile-Crisis and by Karen Dawisha on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹¹ The subject is like its sibling 'policy analysis' in political science in that it tends to question the truth of accounts of policy-making which focus only on institutions and the relative powers of formal office-holders. Its working assumption is that decisions are subject to far more complex processes than constitutional theory and institutional description generally allow.

Although a 'British school' of foreign policy analysis has developed strongly in recent years, and more attention has been focused on specifically British foreign policy after a hiatus since 1974,¹² there have been no structured case-studies and surprisingly little work on the foreign policy-making process in Britain. In the 1960s the growth of American foreign policy analysis led to the first introductory surveys of British foreign policy-making, culminating in what is still the standard book on the subject, by William Wallace.¹³ As for the

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Cabinet and foreign policy, treatment has been extremely patchy. Donald Bishop has written briefly about the pressures of maintaining Cabinet cohesion in the face of modern foreign policy developments, and a group of scholars at Reading University have produced a useful survey of relations between post-war Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries, but other references have only been made in passing.¹⁴ Moreover the terms of reference of the discussion of Cabinet government in the context of foreign policy have been largely carried over from the mainstream debate; that is to say, they are still preoccupied with the administrative functions of the Cabinet and the institutional location of power within it. What has not been done is to apply some of the interesting work done in the areas of political psychology and group dynamics to the analysis of top-level policy formulation in Britain, as writers such as May and Janis have done for the United States.¹⁵

An equally striking omission (with one notable exception¹⁶) is the fertile area of crisis studies. This is the section of foreign policy analysis which has produced the biggest and probably the best co-ordinated research effort, under the leadership of Michael Brecher.¹⁷ Apart, however, from observations in the comparative surveys of such writers as Bell, Williams and Lebow,¹⁸ this literature has hardly been picked up by those writing about British foreign policy, let alone about the institution of the Cabinet. Although it is not a primary aim of the current study to test the hypotheses of the crisis and political psychology areas of foreign policy analysis, an awareness of their preoccupations has informed the research on which it is based and has, as will become clear, shaped some of its conclusions. The basic intention is to create a dialogue between the discussion of policy-making from a traditional institutional perspective and that from the post-behaviouralist angle of foreign policy analysis.¹⁹ Some of the central questions at stake will be set out towards the end of this chapter.

The third level of analysis is the historical or, to be more exact, the international-historical, since there is now a flourishing sub-discipline in existence known as international history, which has superseded the old specialism of diplomatic history by paying far more attention to the non-governmental forces which cross boundaries and in many respects shape the crucial domestic environment of foreign policy.²⁰ But historians of all kinds are defined by their interests in periods, and that chosen here is one of the most magnetic

of all, the years from the Munich Conference in September 1938 to the German invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941. These thirty-three months have been chosen out of personal interest as well as for their intrinsic importance, but they also provide excellent material for a case-study of the foreign policy operations of the Cabinet.

The need for a case-study approach as such seemed evident from the deficiencies of the existing literature. Whether traditionalist or behaviouralist, comparative works on foreign policy devoted too little space to the Cabinet, while studies of the Cabinet barely touched upon foreign policy. Moreover, in Jim Bulpitt's words, 'British political science . . . has always professed an interest in the general subject of government, but it has been markedly reluctant to develop any enthusiasm for the study of particular governments. That task has usually been hived off to historians or memoir-mongers'.²¹ Equally, when detailed studies of particular governments or individuals have emerged, they have tended to concentrate on domestic policy, and/or to neglect the interplay of Cabinet ministers in the particular dynamic context of a Cabinet meeting regularly over a period of months and years. Only by examining in sequence the events of a limited period can we get to grips with theories about the existence or otherwise of settled patterns of influence within a group like the Cabinet, which is at once both an intimate, continuous, club and an ever-changing forum for the meeting of diverse interests and ideas. This is particularly true for Britain, where a close observation of internal governmental behaviour is possible through access to the immense public archive of the Public Record Office. Cabinet minutes and memoranda, which have been put to extensive use already by modern historians, are crying out for exploitation by political scientists interested in the interaction between process and policy, and in the testing of their theories about the sources of power, influence and change.

There are, of course, contrary arguments about the value of case-studies, from those who believe on the one side that the case-approach does little more than dress up history, without transcending the limits of all phenotypical work, in producing non-commensurable results, and on the other that cases inevitably miss the deeper, more impersonal forces of long duration which shape choice without always being revealed at the point of surface decision.²² In some ways this debate is akin to that between the elitists and the pluralists which enlivened much of the world of political

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science in the 1960s and 1970s.²³ For reasons already stated, however, there is little choice but to follow the case-study path if one wishes to advance the study of the British Cabinet beyond the illumination of a limited historical period (important as that is), but lacks faith in the ability of broad surveys to generate further insights than the field of Cabinet studies have already produced. The present enterprise is, therefore, a case-study in the sense that it focuses closely on a period of just under three years, but its mode of discussion is constantly geared to the preoccupations of those who think analytically and theoretically about the nature of the foreign policy process *per se*. It should at least be possible to conduct the investigation in such a way as to make comparisons possible, even if an end-result of substantial generalisation cannot be guaranteed.

If a case-study is desirable, however, the reasons for the suitability of this particular period still need detailing. At one level it is enough to argue that the origins of the Second World War, and Britain's part in it, remain one of the great issues of our times and of the academic subject of International Relations (one of whose classical texts, incidentally, was sparked by its onset²⁴). Yet a huge literature now exists on this subject, and a historical debate has grown to maturity.²⁵ What is the justification for extending it?

One reason is the very richness of the historical literature, which enables a political scientist to be more confident in basing analysis on secondary sources than would have been possible twenty years ago, when the public records had only just become available and political controversy over appeasement was still the order of the day. While there is still no substitute for direct work in the primary sources, it is possible to plot something approaching a professional consensus on many issues among those who have devoted their careers to studying the late 1930s or early 1940s, and this makes the task of the would-be discipline-crossover somewhat more manageable.

A second reason for choosing the years from Munich to Barbarossa is that these dates encompass a period of some considerable unity. It is now a truism that the Second World War only became truly global in 1941, when the USSR, the United States and Japan entered the conflict. This is not to downplay the sombre significance of the Franco-British declarations of war on 3 September 1939, or to overlook the shattering impact of the fall of France in 1940. But the first twenty-one months of the conflict, and particularly those of the 'Phoney War', have at least as much in common with the European

crisis of 1938–9, as with what followed.²⁶ The pattern of tension punctuated by German *putsche* characterises nearly every year from 1935 onwards, if with increasing severity. On the other hand Munich was clearly the apogee of the attempt to accommodate rather than resist Hitler's demands, and the prospects for a lasting peace receded soon afterwards. There are therefore quite natural breaks at both ends of our period. In any case, the controversies over Munich and the Second Front, which lie respectively just beyond each terminal date, are large subjects in their own right and would require more than passing attention if included here.

Thirdly, the coming together of war and peace in such a close conjunction – an intermittent war of peace, to paraphrase Alistair Horne's subsequent description of the Algerian conflict²⁷ – provides us with interesting opportunities for comparisons. Does decision-making alter significantly under conditions of war, or is crisis the most significant variable, in both war and peace? What difference did the institution of the War Cabinet make to relations between the Prime Minister and his colleagues, both inside and outside that small body? Does foreign policy itself become attenuated in conditions of war? Or does Churchill's view apply, following Clausewitz, that 'It is not possible in a major war to divide military from political affairs. At the summit they are one . . . the word "politics" has been confused, and even tarnished, by its association with party politics'?²⁸ What pattern of leadership in the Cabinet on external policy matters can be found before and after war is declared? Is it justifiable to talk of a 'foreign policy executive' within the Cabinet, as the team of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary might be termed? Does the pre-eminence of military events in wartime diminish the role of the Foreign Secretary, or is personality a crucial factor?

Certainly what happens at the highest level of the government of Britain, in terms of the making of foreign policy, matters to the ordinary citizens of the country, whose lives are ultimately at stake. At no time was this more evident than in 1938–41, when the agonies of the Great War were fresh in the mind, and a new age of democratic activism on foreign policy issues had produced constraints of which politicians were only too aware.²⁹ This is why the decisions about whether or not to fight, and afterwards to what ends and for how long, were so agonising for Chamberlain and his colleagues. They were sobered by an awareness of the consequences of what they were doing in domestic as well as foreign terms, in contrast to many of

their predecessors, and the moral claims of each realm could not, in the end, have been more sharply posed.³⁰ Moreover this was just as true for the first year of the war, when the impact of Chamberlain and Halifax was still to be felt, as it was for 1938 and 1939.

This brings us to the fourth reason for choosing 1938–41, namely that these years are not in fact as unrepresentative of modern British history as they might seem. To the criticism that the years 1938–41 are not ‘typical’, and that we should be better served by studying more routine decisions, the rejoinder is clear: these were *crucial* times, but in important respects not unique. Crises happen frequently enough (and often when least expected) to warn us that we need to understand them and be prepared for the time when – if in different forms – their stresses recur. The handling of foreign policy at Cabinet level needs more exposure and dissection for the benefit of both practitioners and society at large.

What period, indeed, is to be regarded as ‘typical’ of British foreign policy in the twentieth century? Britain’s recent history has been that of a major power directly involved in the ordering and re-ordering of international relations. The onset of the Second World War, although clearly unique in what it unleashed, did not make wholly unfamiliar demands of British politicians, who even today are used to international affairs coming to dominate their agenda. It is true that Hitler was an unmanageable phenomenon for almost all his contemporaries, but Chamberlain and his colleagues were not otherwise ill at ease at having to spend so much time on foreign policy and the settlement of Europe’s problems. After the withdrawal of the United States from 1919 onward Britain had remained the main supervisor of world affairs, if with steadily waning power. If the Polish crisis of 1939 had not resulted in war it would soon have joined the canon of those events in British history which are seen as important but not climacteric, such as Schleswig-Holstein, Fashoda, Chanak, Manchuria and (after 1945) Suez, Rhodesia and the Falklands. The few years after Munich are untypical of British foreign policy in that not all crises lead to world wars,³¹ but they posed similar dilemmas about the boundaries of Britain’s vital interests and the interpretation of leaders’ motives to those present in many of the other difficult periods studding Britain’s twentieth-century experience.

The last reason why it is worth focusing on Britain’s entry into the Second World War is because there has not yet been much system-

atic analysis of the decision-making process in that period. Although we have long since left the 'guilty men' era of highly coloured judgemental history, and professional use of the public archives has revised many aspects of our thinking about appeasement, the dominant approach to causation and explanation has remained that of chronology.³² This has meant that we now have a very good idea of how thinking changed over time on the content of policy, and why and how the war came when it did. We also have the benefit of a considerable range of historical studies of particular elements in the evolving story of appeasement. Moving beyond the tradition of writing about bilateral relations,³³ studies have appeared of the impact of the Dominions and the United States on British policy and, institutionally, on that of the Treasury, the military, the Intelligence services and the press.³⁴ These are indispensable, and of course often highly analytical. Yet they almost all operate from within the distinctive historical paradigm of being fundamentally concerned with the linear movement of events over time. Only Peden and Wark show much interest in the political scientists' preoccupations with the functioning of institutions and systems on the one hand and the relevance of theory on the other. The sheer weight of work to be done on the archives of the period has imposed strict priorities, quite apart from methodological preferences and convictions. Reflections on the *nature* of civil-military relations or the good use of intelligence, for example, have only occurred in passing. Even Donald Cameron Watt, who was one of the first historians to see the potential common ground with decision-making theory which has subsequently attracted figures such as Samuel Williamson and Ernest May in the United States, has not been tempted down the paths of abstraction or generalisation.³⁵ In general the fertile continental tradition of placing history and theory in close proximity has not infected the sceptical brand of empiricism dominant in Britain.³⁶

What is perhaps more surprising than the fact that the historians have stuck to their last is how little interest political scientists have shown in mining the vast source-material now available for the years before 1960 and exploiting the more settled perspective offered by hindsight. The siren song of contemporary politics almost always proves irresistible. This is particularly true with respect to the higher estates. Although the political parties have been well-served, Parliament, the Cabinet and most great offices of state have not received the in-depth case-studies they deserve – the Foreign Office, for

example, still awaits the kind of specialised monographs that have appeared in the context of nineteenth-century history. J. M. Lee's account of 'the Churchill coalition' is in this respect something of a pioneer, but it has to cover a lot of ground in a short span.³⁷

Beyond the discussion of institutions, moreover, there is a need for a more direct discussion of causation than has yet occurred. Always implicit, but no more than that, in the historical accounts is the dichotomy between the two fundamentally opposed theories of political choice: voluntarism and determinism. Few people subscribe fully – or even consciously – to either of these positions, but they act as useful yardsticks of belief. The voluntarist position sees decisions as the product of free minds applying themselves rationally to the problems confronting them, and therefore tends to concentrate on rehearsing the arguments used by those involved in making the policies in question. Different conclusions may be reached, but the main focus is still on the intellectual dimension, rather than on the organisational, psychological or historical contexts in which decisions were made. Politicians are to be regarded as fundamentally in control of their own actions. In the case of 1938–9 this leads to an analysis of the reasons which the Chamberlain government had for acting as they did, and whether they were justified.

The alternative, determinist, view holds that foreign (or any other) policies are essentially the outcrops of deeply rooted interests, circumstances or patterns. The important factors to analyse from the viewpoint of explaining international relations are those of basic structure – whether this be human nature, civilisation type, the domestic regime, balances of power or the character of economic relationships. Calvinists, Marxists, anti-Communists and neo-Malthusians may all take this line.³⁸ In the case of our period British policy may be ascribed, along such lines, to the compelling constraints of insufficient resources or of domestic pacificism.³⁹

Both voluntarists and determinists regard the ways in which decisions are made as having only a marginal impact on the ebb and flow of history. More profound reasons are sought to explain great events, although voluntarists often find room for 'chance'. Any position between these two extremes, however, must accept to some degree that how men and women deliberate about their actions, whom they consult and whom they do not, what prejudices they display and how thoroughly they examine their information will affect what they do. Decisions are not merely the superstructural product

of ratiocination or impersonal forces; they are part of a complex process of causation in which change results from interaction between many different actors, inside organisational and intellectual settings that are continually reinterpreted with the passage of time.⁴⁰ At the level of states operating within international relations, action is the result of individuals, organisations and groups competing for influence within a distinctive political culture, whose institutions and procedures may be decisive for the future course of events.

A decision-making approach, therefore, whether on a comparative basis or to a particular historical set of events, should enable us to weigh the roles of different factors against each other, and to use counterfactual analysis to consider more directly the contribution of particular variables – that is to say, would events have differed greatly if Sir Robert Vansittart had continued as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office instead of Sir Alexander Cadogan or, more pertinently for us, if Halifax had accepted the offer of the premiership on 10 May 1940? Such speculative questions may seem lacking in rigour, but in fact it is a delusion to believe that the ‘why’ questions are ever answered without reference to ‘what if’ suppositions, and it is essential to address them explicitly.⁴¹ It is certainly not fanciful to suggest that the balance between the decisions actually taken and other possibilities was a fine one, in (say) late March 1939 or June 1940. Some might also suggest that a more positive British attitude towards the negotiations with Moscow in the spring and summer of 1939 might have averted the Nazi-Soviet Pact, or that France would not have taken much encouraging from Britain to have reneged on Poland in September.⁴² Even where historians eschew an explicitly counter-factual methodology, they do not necessarily shrink from value-judgements on particular questions of this kind, and these contain within them implicit speculations about alternative possibilities.

Ultimately, direct attention to the decision-making level of analysis also makes progress possible on one of the key questions of the study of politics, that of responsibility. Because of the moral undertones of all history, and our urge to empathise with figures from the past, we are naturally concerned with who precisely was responsible for what, and whether there were alternative actions available which might have had ‘better’ consequences. This is so even if we restrict ourselves to the premises of those acting at the time, and exclude our own preferences. It applies equally to the

condition of slaves in the young United States, the revolution which overthrew the Tsar in 1917 and responses to the rise to power of Hitler.

In the case of the British Cabinet we come directly to the issue, for the Cabinet operates on the basis of the doctrine of collective responsibility. In the sphere of foreign policy, this means that the members of the Cabinet were all answerable for foreign policies conducted overtly by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. This tells us about subsequent pressures for solidarity, but does not say very much about policy-formation. Were the Cabinet led willy-nilly through the intricacies of diplomacy by the forceful character of Chamberlain, ultimately being willing to defer to his judgement and intellect? Or were they a group of like-minded men, responding collectively to the painful dilemmas imposed by Hitler's revisionism? What divisions existed within this body of senior politicians? Were Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister fundamentally at one? The history of the varying relationships between the two office-holders means that consensus cannot be taken for granted.⁴³

The answers to these questions will go a good way towards telling us who, among the elected representatives constitutionally responsible to the British people for protecting their security, actually exerted most influence over the crucial decisions of 1938–41, and whether either the constitutional theory of collective responsibility or the popular picture of Chamberlain's dominance over his Cabinet is accurate.

Beneath the whole attempt of decision-making analysis to build on historical work while asking different questions is an assumption that some historians, but perhaps not many scholars in other areas of International Relations, would instinctively share: that is, the belief that the nature and practice of decision-making procedures may themselves significantly affect the outcome of events. At the simplest level this is just the truism that an inefficient secretariat or intelligence service makes realistic decisions difficult. Less obviously, it points towards the distortion of rational policy-making that can result from such phenomena as intra-bureaucratic competition or cognitive dissonance, and from the very nature of choice and decision itself.⁴⁴

Working from such a starting-point, the aim here is twofold: first, to use the case-study to illuminate the practice of Cabinet government on foreign policy, and thereby to further our knowledge of top-

Table 1. *Six cases of Cabinet decisions on the issue of what kind of war to fight, October 1938–June 1941*

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- 1 The Polish Guarantee, March 1939
 - 2 The prospect of a Soviet alliance, April–August 1939
 - 3 Entry into war, 1–3 September 1939
 - 4 Hitler's 'peace offensive', October 1939
 - 5 The crisis over fighting on alone, May–June 1940
 - 6 Thinking about long-term war aims, August 1940–June 1941.
-
-

level group dynamics; second, to contribute to our understanding of an important period in recent British history, partly by a closer and more textual examination of Cabinet discussions than has yet taken place, despite existing treatments in print, and partly by the mining of new material in certain sections of the book.

The particular format employed involves, within the case-study of the years 1938–41, the analysis in detail of six mini-cases (see Table 1). The six share two important common features. First they are all examples of important decisions which had ultimately to be decided at the highest political level, and would therefore ultimately have to come to the Cabinet in some form. They were not decisions to be taken by permanent officials within the confines of a policy already laid down, or even decisions of the type where officials might feel free to use their discretion and to make new policy on the run. Secondly, they all deal with a unifying problem, that of how to cope with the central issue of war and peace, whether in the guise of the prospect of war and when to initiate it, or the reality of war and on what terms to prolong or conclude it. The phrase 'war aims' can usually be used as a shorthand for both. The interplay between the two themes, of Cabinet government and of war aims, is intended to serve each, so that the discussion of policy-making does not take place in a vacuum, while that of policy content is informed by an analysis of the impact of process.

The six mini-cases vary within their commonality, partly through the nature of changing events, and partly by deliberate choice on the part of the author so that Cabinet behaviour can be examined in a range of different conditions within those generally imposed by the stresses of imminent or actual war. The Polish Guarantee represents a situation where a new foreign policy, even a revolutionary change was initiated within the relatively short period of two weeks. The

crisis of the summer of 1940 is similar, in that it was reactive to unexpected and unwelcome events, but unique in the severity of the challenge it posed to the entire government of Britain. By contrast the debate over a Soviet alliance was perceived as being a process which would necessarily take up months rather than days, and would not always rank first on the policy agenda. Indeed its importance dawned only gradually on ministers. The September crisis and the response to Hitler's peace offer of 6 October 1939 both raised problems for the Cabinet of short-term implementation more than initiation, although both had the potential for divisions and the latter imposed the necessity of thinking about the future in the sense of the criteria to be used in judging when the war should end. The last short case deals with this same issue in a much longer time-frame, the year between losing France and gaining the Soviet Union. The war aims debate was also the result of internally generated needs as much as external stimuli.

Between them, these six cases should give us a fairly full picture of how the Cabinet handled foreign policy issues, even allowing for the fact that this soon became a period of maximum danger. In some ways the functioning of an institution, like a machine, becomes clearer when it is tested most strenuously. However it would be foolish to claim that generalisations can be based firmly on a single case, and that other circumstances would not produce different patterns of action. More realistically, the suggestion is simply that our understanding of how the Cabinet and perhaps top-level decision-making groups in other states handle foreign policy will be furthered by looking in depth, and systematically, at a period for which detailed archives are available and a period, furthermore, when the fundamental issues at stake in external relations were more starkly apparent than at almost any other time. The wartime cases will be treated at slightly greater length as they are covered rather less well in the existing historical literature than those from the last year of peace.

It is also important to stress briefly what this study is *not* attempting to do, so that it can be judged by its actual objectives rather than those which might easily be attributed in error to a cross-disciplinary venture. It is not attempting to provide a full explanation of why British foreign policy followed the course that it did, or even a full picture of the British foreign policy process at the time. To do this would be redundant in the first case and a massive undertaking in the