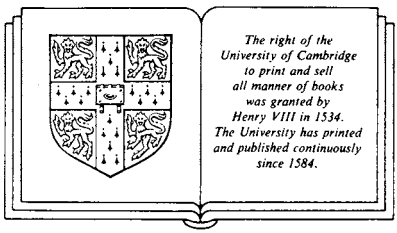
Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War

Essays in honour of
F. H. HINSLEY

Edited by

RICHARD LANGHORNE
Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

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First published 1985
Reprinted 1987
First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 84-17040

ISBN 0 521 26840 0 hardback
ISBN 0 521 52197 1 paperback

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1

Introduction

RICHARD LANGHORNE

(i)

Harry Hinsley is now the Master of St John's College, Cambridge, and in 1981–3 was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. The circumstances in which his journey to the Vice-Chancellorship began marked the second occasion in his career when electors preferred to make sure of having him rather than follow the dictates of established custom. He was the first Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge in modern times to have been nominated before having actually entered office as the Head of a College. His election into a Fellowship of St John's College was similarly unusual, since he was at the time a third year undergraduate and had taken no degree. This event, which took place in 1944, was at least partly the result of wartime conditions. He had come up to St John's in 1937 as an Exhibitioner – he became a Scholar in 1939 – from Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall. His background was a poor one and the school helped him financially by supplementing his Exhibition from the College. Even so, his circumstances as an undergraduate were extremely difficult. His success, however, was marked by a First Class in Part One of the Historical Tripos in 1938, and neither this, nor his habit of working his way round Europe during the Long Vacations were lost on the Master and the Dean of his College. Both recommended him when particularly intelligent young men were being sought for war service. He returned to St John's in the autumn of 1939 to begin his third year, and, having written one essay, found himself recruited into the British Intelligence Service for the rest of the war. How this happened and what it was like at Bletchley Park is described in Christopher Andrew's contribution to this volume. His third year was thus never completed, and, having by then been elected into a Fellowship, he eventually took a degree under the special regulations introduced by the University for those called away on war service.

His Fellowship was for research, since the College was anxious to fill the gaps in academic work which the war was causing as quickly as possible, and a few others were elected into Fellowships in other subjects at the same time. Such was the pent up demand for teaching after the war, however, that when he returned in 1946, it was not to any ivory tower but to a punishing teaching load. In 1949, he was elected to a University Lectureship in History. He became Reader in the History of International Relations in 1967 and a personal chair followed in the same subject in 1969. Eminence in the Faculty was followed by elevation in the College. In 1977 he was elected President of St John's, and in 1979, was elected Master and moved, with perhaps a touch of resignation, from his family home of many years at The Grove in Newnham, and from the great chamber in the Shrewsbury Tower in St John's Second Court, into the Master's Lodge. There, a large part of the former kitchen wing having been turned into a library, the official history of British Intelligence during the Second World War is hammered out and steadily emerges volume by volume.

This collection of essays is a present from some of his former pupils to Harry Hinsley on the occasion of his retirement as Professor of the History of International Relations at Cambridge. The number of contributors and the fact that they are now to be found working in so many countries gives an indication of how significant a research school in the history of international relations has developed at Cambridge. It is, however, as the contributors to this volume would be the first to recognise, only the tip of the iceberg. From the early 1960s the number of research students attached to Harry Hinsley began to grow, until by the late 1960s he was carrying a load which few other men would have allowed to happen, let alone, as he gave every sign of doing, actually enjoyed. Only a few of the contributors to this volume worked with Harry Hinsley in those years, and it should be said at the outset that there already exists another tribute to him from his students of that generation, but which could not be so called because he himself was its editor. During the late 1950s and 1960s, because of the operation of the then fifty-year rule, there was a great concentration of work upon the papers which were gradually emerging on British foreign policy and the outbreak of the First World War. In the late 1970s that work was collected, revised and published by the Cambridge University Press under the title *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (1977), and has subsequently been widely accepted as a definitive work. All those who worked under his supervision and then under his editorship would wish to use the publication of the present volume as an opportunity to express their gratitude and admiration to him, even though many could not be invited to contribute to it.

It would have been impossible to include contributions from all who wished to make them simply on grounds of size. As it is, this is a long book. It would also have been impossible because of the need to give to collections of this character a unifying theme, and there was no doubt from the response which the initial enquiry received that the clearest unifying theme which emerged was that of British diplomacy and intelligence during the Second World War period. Inevitably and sadly that left out those who would have written on general and theoretical questions, themselves so much an interest of Harry Hinsley himself, those who would have written on earlier periods, particularly on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and those who had an interest in the First World War and the Versailles settlement. The contributors to this volume therefore hope that they will only be the first to honour Harry Hinsley in this way.

(ii)

To be supervised by Harry Hinsley was a unique experience. A supervision with him was apt to be remarkable just as a physical fact. It was sometimes difficult to decide whether pupil and supervisor were more endangered from what appeared to be an imminent collapse of the surrounding piles of books – probably awaiting review in the *Historical Journal* – or from fire, arising from many matches inadequately dowsed in ashtrays full of spent tobacco. It was evident, too, that he had other commitments: to the administration of the University, for example, whose functionaries needed and were willingly given his time on the telephone, and to his College, both at an administrative and a tutorial level. Harry Hinsley did not share the craze for confidentiality which came to mark so much of 'student relations' in the 1970s, and many will remember with delight his refreshing habit of dealing with many wholly different problems, tutorial and academic, apparently almost simultaneously and certainly in front of what might have become a considerable audience. The Editor has never forgotten the tantalising glimpse given by a conversation never to be concluded when Hinsley the Tutor was interrupted before he could receive the answer to the question 'and what happened, my boy, *after* you set fire to the factory?' The point of this, however, is that no one in that situation was ever in any doubt that Harry Hinsley's whole attention was on them and their problem, whatever the surrounding distractions. And if this was so in the brief encounter in his crowded room when calling to make an appointment, how much more was it so when actually engaged in the discussion of draft chapters, or the quotidien problems of research. The combination of enthusiasm, quite extraordinary reserves of energy and a virtually faultless memory, all of which must have been stretched to the full during the years

when he had over twenty research students, never failed to give inspiration. Whatever the problem, whatever the level of discussion, early stages or nearly completed final draft dissertation, no one left him without feeling reinspired, convinced of the importance of his work and certain of its having been given the most sympathetic, but also the most rigorous examination. The final admonition was and is delivered in that familiar, absolutely individual growl, 'keep cheerful, and don't let the work get you down'. At that moment being cast down never seemed remotely possible but the admonition told you that he understood how frighteningly lonely the essential independence of research could be. The essential independence of research was something not only sympathised with but also honoured. There was never pressure to come for frequent supervision, but instead the growing realisation on the part of the student that it was always possible to see him quickly and that any work handed in would be read with uncanny speed and commented on with great insight. And it should be said that these characteristics have remained with him despite the overwhelming obligations of the headship of a large College and the vice-chancellorship of the University of Cambridge.

The number of Harry Hinsley's research students increased greatly in the very late 1960s, and this enabled him to establish his own seminar in international history, held in his vast yet crowded room which occupied the whole first floor in the Shrewsbury Tower in the Second Court of St John's College, and subsequently in the Master's Lodge. Not only was the seminar practically useful once the number of students interested in international history had grown so large, it also found its place as part of a new atmosphere which that period generated in the University's attitude to graduate students in arts subjects. If there was a contemporary tendency to feel ignored and under helped – which no student of Harry Hinsley's could or did feel – this was the kind of enterprise which could meet the problem. The seminar became famous. Gently and often amusingly directed from behind clouds of pipe smoke, current research students could try out their latest interpretations of their material, describe what archives they had found, visitors from abroad – an increasingly common phenomenon – could be cajoled into presenting their own latest topics and existing teaching historians in Cambridge could from time to time be induced to talk to the seminar about their own research. The sessions could often be exhilarating and provided at once a sense of companionship and a sense of the broad scope which the history of international relations offers and which was represented by the wide range of subjects being studied under Harry Hinsley's direction. This breadth did not provide any apparent difficulties for Harry Hinsley himself, nor any constraints upon the life of the seminar. The reason is touched on by Jonathan Steinberg in his

contribution to this volume. He comments on the fact that Harry Hinsley did not, because of the war, come into academic life possessing the usual research experience in terms of method, but he did come with a formidable experience in analysis. This was reflected in the way he reacted to the work of his pupils, or to the papers presented at the seminar. He did not primarily react to the archival problems, or to the methodological problems, though both could and did engage his careful attention, he reacted to the wider implications of what had been discovered or reassessed; and he would comment rapidly, almost electrically, on the true significance of what he had just heard or read. It was these flashes of illumination which made supervision by him or attendance at his seminar so memorable and so valuable.

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The contributions to this book divide into four sections. The first, including this introduction, is principally concerned with Harry Hinsley himself: his role as a supervisor of research, his published work, which is reviewed by Jonathan Steinberg and his recruitment into the wartime intelligence service. This last is discussed by Christopher Andrew in the context of an account which contrasts recruitment from Cambridge into both the Russian and British intelligence services. The second section includes three widely differing aspects of pre Second World War international politics. Bradford Lee reconsiders the relationship between strategy, available resources and the competence of commanders as applied to the collapse of France in 1940 and the defence policies which had dominated the ten years preceding it. He uses models drawn from the situation of NATO in more recent years to breathe new life into what has been a long running and sterile argument. He has also been able to make use of newly released archives in Paris which have served to underline the financial and political considerations affecting French policy. Only after stability was restored to the franc in 1938 could serious rearmament begin, and rapid as it then turned out to be, it was too late to sustain French strategy when the ultimate test came.

Donald Boadle looks at the reign of Sir Robert Vansittart at the Foreign Office. He notes that Vansittart has not been thought of as a notable administrator of the Foreign Office, and indeed was apt to slide away from awkward projects for innovations by pleading pressure of work created by the turbulent international politics of the period. But in the interests of spreading his gospel of the danger emanating from Germany, he did undertake significant internal reorganisation and redeployment, particularly designed to put policy towards Germany in the hands of officials who

shared his views. The result was to create two poles of opinion within the Office, which by 1936 were so antagonistic as to make it easier for the Cabinet to follow the strong lead given by Chamberlain. At the inter-departmental level, and particularly perhaps in relation to the Services, Vansittart's unwillingness to follow a consistent path of reform and cooperation, and his attempt, insufficiently supported, to establish an economic relations section within the Foreign Office, led to jealousy and frustration, and to the emergence of a feeling among officials and ministers that he was erratic and unreliable. As his reputation suffered, so did that of the Foreign Office itself.

If Vansittart's attempts to maintain both the independence and the 'amateur' traditions of the Foreign Office represent the survival of one set of older ideas into new circumstances, Richard Bosworth's treatment of Italian fascism in historiography discusses it in another way. He shows how Italian historians responded to the highly traditional and expansionary elements in Italian policy while Mussolini was in power, rather than to the nature of the regime itself. Because of this, they were able to dismiss the regime and their role in it as easily as Mussolini was himself disposed of, and believed the slate to have been wiped clean. The consequence was that after the war there was no distinct break in the Italian historical tradition, nor any serious intellectual pressure upon the Republic to become a new kind of regime, stimulating new approaches to the problems of post-war Italy.

The third and largest section of this book contains contributions which all deal with aspects of the way Churchill and the War Cabinet handled the earlier stages of the Second World War. Ronald Zweig discusses the quixotic effects that misinterpreted military intelligence can have. The example is Palestine, where the local political administration tried to convince the Cabinet of the danger posed by semi-secret Jewish organisations equipped with hidden supplies of arms. Their intelligence reports sent to London suggested alarmingly high quantities of arms – higher than was probable. The intended effect was to stimulate a policy of searches and confiscation, but the actual result was to convince the Cabinet that such a policy was too dangerous to pursue. Churchill's favourable stance towards the Jewish position in Palestine certainly helped, but it is plain that the decision of the Cabinet in 1943 to alter the anti-immigration policy laid down in a 1939 White Paper was affected by a particular interpretation given to military intelligence.

Even more difficult questions of interpretation, this time of a political kind, are discussed in Denis Smyth's account of the problem faced by the Cabinet in deciding how to deal with the conflicting embarrassments caused by the presence in Britain of the last Prime Minister of Republican

Spain, Juan Negrín. The Franco regime protested warmly and frequently about Negrín's presence in England, and alleged that he was engaged in political activities, which he equally warmly denied. This pressure gave great anxiety to both the Foreign Secretary, Halifax, and to the ambassador at Madrid, Hoare, who were engaged in trying to prevent Spain from joining the Axis, following the fall of France. They argued strongly for Negrín's preferably voluntary departure from Britain. To what extent Franco's attitude would actually be affected by ejecting Negrín was uncertain, and Attlee, supported by other Labour ministers, protested forcefully against putting any pressure on him to leave. They not only had a natural sympathy for Negrín's past and present position, but were also concerned that both at home and in occupied Europe Britain's resistance should be seen to arise from a profound, even revolutionary, vision of a new and more fairly organised society which would be created in Europe after the war. No such crusade was compatible with the voluntary or compulsory departure of Negrín, even for the sake of helping to keep Spain out of the war. The disagreement was sharp, and surfaced embarrassingly in Parliament despite the pressures of the war. The result was that Negrín's asylum was maintained for the comparatively short period which elapsed before the question was rendered largely irrelevant by Franco's neutralist policy and by Labour's acquiescence in the failure of Britain's stand to develop into a 'people's war'.

David Reynolds also deals with the agonising period following the defeat of France. He discusses the decision not to pursue peace negotiations but to fight on, describing it in practical rather than the romantic terms to be found in Churchill's own account. Churchill himself is shown to have had private doubts, and was in any case compelled to be sensitive to the views of Halifax and Chamberlain, both still powerful figures in the Cabinet. As time went on, the successful evacuation from Dunkirk seemed to give resistance a better chance, and by the end of 1940 both Halifax and Chamberlain had retired from the scene, thus removing potential opposition. Churchill's stance then became quite definite. But it is shown to have been based on wrong assessments of intelligence. He believed both that the Americans would join the war quickly when the Presidential election of November 1940 was over, and that, in any case, there was a strong likelihood of being able to defeat Germany by blockade and heavy bombing without embarking on a military campaign across continental Europe, which Britain alone could not have initiated or sustained. Far better but unexpected arguments were provided by Hitler himself when he decided to invade Russia in 1941.

It is British attitudes and strategic assessments in respect of the consequent Anglo-Russian alliance which are discussed by Sheila Lawlor.

Churchill's disposition, despite the emotional tone of his letters to Stalin, was to offer minimum help to the Russians despite their persistent demands for increased assistance. In this he was supported by the generals, who tended to regard their new ally with contempt. But, in the Cabinet, Eden immediately became the protagonist of the Russian cause, wanting more supplies sent to Russia and the opening of military operations in the West. He also wanted an early middle eastern offensive, as a means of boosting Russian morale, as well as being in support of British interests. Sheila Lawlor concludes from her discussion of these early British reactions to Russia's position as an ally that the problematic decisions which dominated the last years of the war had their origins in this very early stage.

Problems caused by the Russian alliance emerge, too, in Mark Wheeler's discussion of the process by which the British government secured recognition of each other by both Tito's partisan movement in Yugoslavia and King Peter's government in exile. The complications involved were enormous, but the stakes were high: the goal was to create the best possible chance that by adding the loyalty of the Serbs to Tito's movement, which the British believed the King could deliver, Tito might be prevented from falling into total reliance on the Russians. To achieve mutual recognition, pressure had to be brought upon the King and his ministers, as well as a very delicate handling of Tito himself. But the most striking achievement was the correct assessment which the British, particularly Churchill himself, made of the strength of Tito's movement and the certainty which they felt that in some form or other he would rule in post-war Yugoslavia. How to respond to that realisation, and, in particular, how to safeguard the future of the King, provoked disagreements between Churchill and Eden which had to be resolved. Mutual concessions by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Office, long and frustrating negotiations with Tito and the King, a German assault on Tito's Drvar headquarters, an unaccustomed American intervention and the inexorable advance of the Red Army finally brought forth a result: the Tito–Šubašič agreement of June 1944. It was not an agreement that was likely to last, and it did not. But there was no doubt that the British had done as much as they could both for King Peter and to relieve Russian pressure on Yugoslavia. Nor, in the end, was their belief that Tito would prefer to avoid complete dependence upon Russia wrong.

A. E. Campbell looks at one of the consequences of American entry into the war when it did come: the doctrine of unconditional surrender. There has been much controversy surrounding both the origins and effects of President Roosevelt's statement at Casablanca, but this discussion points to the conclusion that it was made principally to reassure American

domestic opinion at a time when it was uncertain as to the wisdom of having dealings with men such as Admiral Darlan, or diverting military operations to North Africa at all. As to the consequences, A. E. Campbell's conclusions are radical. He thinks that closer investigation suggests that whether the idea had found expression at Casablanca or not, other attitudes and policies of the allied powers would in any case have compelled the total defeat of Germany. Nor does it appear that the campaign in Italy could have been shortened by any retreat from the doctrine, since the Italians were not able to be genuine parties to negotiations had they been on offer. The true significance of the American position was the clear illustration that it gave of the difference between the United States and the other allies: only the Americans had no secondary war aims which might be forwarded by adopting one method of defeating Germany rather than another. Their only interest in Europe was the rapid and complete defeat of the Nazi regime.

The last section of this book concerns an aspect of the post-war period and is given to Patrick Salmon's discussion of the invasion of Norway, as it was dealt with at the Nuremberg Tribunal. The trials of Admiral Raeder and Alfred Rosenberg included the charge of waging aggressive war against Norway. The particular case of Norway suggested two possible defences, both of which were of great concern to the prosecution. One was that the German invasion was essentially defensive or preventive. This was a defence used by Raeder's not wholly effective defence counsel, and, although it was given little chance of success because the British government effectively resisted attempts to gain access to the relevant papers, Patrick Salmon concludes, after examining them, that such a defence could not have been successful. The second possible defence was that of *tu quoque*, and throughout the trials it was in general resisted by both prosecution and the Tribunal alike. It was, however, successful in the trial of Admiral Doenitz for naval war crimes. Had more British documents been available, the prosecution might have had more difficulty than it did in preventing the tribunal from considering the weight of the *tu quoque* defence in the particular case of Norway. Patrick Salmon concludes that the verdict of guilty was not unjust, but that aspects of the management of the Norway trial certainly were.