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Introduction by Peter Jackson, University of Glasgow

David Stevenson is one of the world's foremost historians of the First World War. His early publications included a seminal study on French war aims and an insightful overview of the international politics of the Great War.¹ Stevenson has also written a landmark study, *Armaments and the Coming of War, 1914-1914*, that was hugely influential in shifting the attention of scholars back towards the systemic causes of the conflict.² Stevenson then turned his attention back to the wartime period with what is still the best single-volume history of the Great War.³ He followed up with a superb analysis of the closing phase of the war.⁴ The book under review here is an in-depth analysis of the year 1917.

The year 1917 was the true 'fulcrum' of the twentieth century.⁵ It witnessed the entry of the United States into the war and its emergence as a major world power. It also saw the rise of a revolutionary socialist regime in Russia with global aspirations of its own. On both the eastern and western fronts the Allied Powers expended enormous human and material resources in futile offensives that resulted in horrific casualties but yielded little strategic gain. The result was a wavering of popular resolve to continue the fight on all sides. Britain and France, both possessors of global empires, were ever more dependent on American financial support as well as the assistance of their current and former colonial subjects. The course of the war in 1917 accelerated political and economic processes that had already begun to undermine imperial authority. Power was ebbing away and the structural conditions that would shape world politics for the rest of the century were taking shape.

These dynamics are the focus of this excellent book. The analytical lens through which they are studied is that of decision-making by political, economic, and military elites. Stevenson had produced "an analysis of decision-making, reconstructing it in depth, placing it in national and international context, and showing how decisions interacted" (v). Such an approach is much more expansive than it might first appear. Stevenson never loses sight of the political, economic and social contexts in which decisions were taken. Building on the insight at the heart of *1914-1918*, Stevenson argues that the course of the war was determined by choices made by political actors. These choices virtually always had consequences that decision-makers could not have been foreseen. But, for Stevenson, the horrific human losses and unparalleled destruction that resulted were the result of human agency rather than vast impersonal forces.

¹ David Stevenson, *French War Aims Against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

² Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³ The book was published in the UK as *1914-1918: the history of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004) and in North America as *Cataclysm: the First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

⁴ Stevenson, *With our Backs to the Wall: victory and defeat in 1918* (London: Penguin, 2011).

⁵ Here I borrow David Reynolds's much-cited concept of a 'fulcrum' deployed in "1940: Fulcrum of the Twentieth Century?," *International Affairs* 66:2 (1990): 325-350.

One of the great strengths of this approach is that it illuminated the interconnected character of politics and strategy in both domestic and international contexts. Decisions taken by the leaders in one state were the product of domestic economic, social, and political dynamics. But they were also reactions to the policy choices and military initiatives of other states. These decisions, in turn, shaped the perceptions and policy prescriptions of decision-makers in other states in an ongoing dynamic that shaped the course of the war in ways that were impossible to predict. Stevenson's focus on decision-making in this way sheds new light on the motivations behind decisions to reject peace, to enter the conflict, or to intensify military operations. It also helps us understand how prospects for an end to the fighting came to depend on decisive victory by one side or the other.

One of the most novel and interesting aspects of this excellent book is the global perspective it provides on the course of the war. This is undertaken first by tracing the evolution of Greece, Brazil, Siam (Thailand), and China from neutrality to belligerency. The calculations that lay behind decisions to intervene in all four states are examined in detail in an analysis that underlines the impact of the war in Asia and South America. Two further chapters consider the way conflict between European empires strengthened movements for self-rule in India and for a Jewish homeland. The case of India, in particular, illuminates the role of the war in undermining the legitimacy of European colonial rule. As Erez Manela and others have shown, these dynamics were only strengthened and accelerated by American entry and by the emphasis placed on democracy and self-government in the much-publicised public pronouncements of U.S. president Woodrow Wilson.⁶

Wilson's speeches were part of a wider process in which the First World War was transformed from a traditional great power confrontation to an ideological conflict that could be represented as a war for democracy. In 1915 Bertrand Russell could write that "[t]his war is trivial, for all its vastness. No great principle is at stake."⁷ By the end of 1917 such a position was no longer tenable. Revolution in Russia, U.S. entry in the conflict, and rise of the Bolsheviks transformed the character of the conflict in fundamental ways. The war had become a struggle between belief systems.

It was within this context that Wilson demanded Congressional approval for a war to 'make the world safe for democracy.' He drafted his famous 'Fourteen Points' in part at least as a response to the revolutionary challenge posed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The Tsarist, Hapsburg, and Hohenzollern empires collapsed into violence and political chaos animated by ethnic hatreds that were only intensified by discourses of nationalism and self-determination. More than any conflict since the wars of the French Revolution, the First World War had become an ideological struggle. Its meaning and significance differed radically depending on the perspective from which it was experienced. The transformations of 1917 would shape the course of international politics for the rest of the twentieth century. Their legacies are still reverberating through the international system today.

⁶ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anti-colonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ Bertrand Russell, "On Justice in Wartime" in R. Rempel (ed.), *Bertrand Russell: Prophecy and Dissent, 1914-1916* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 177; also cited by Stevenson on vi.

All three of reviewers in this roundtable are highly distinguished historians of the Great War. Daniel Larsen has written a series of path-breaking articles that have reshaped our understanding of the international dimensions of U.S. intervention as well as the role of intelligence in key decisions taken in London and Washington during the war. Jennifer Siegel is the author of prize-winning studies of imperial competition in central Asia and international financial diplomacy before, during, and after the First World War. Ronald Bobroff, for his part, has made key contributions to the literature on the Imperial Russian policy before and during the First World War. All praise *1917* for its clarity, scope, ambition and erudition. All agree that Stevenson's succinct and remarkably clear prose sets a high standard for all scholarship in our field.

For Larsen, it is a "seminal work of scholarship" that brings together important literatures that have for too long existed independently of one another. Larsen singles out Stevenson's "remarkable mastery" of the literature on U.S. policy as well as his careful reconstruction of the multilateral political and diplomatic interactions that led to the U.S. decision to intervene in 1917. The result is a "uniquely comprehensive picture of the course of the war during 1917."

Siegel shares Larsen's admiration for the scholarship underpinning *1917*. Siegel praises the way Stevenson combines a "textured and detail-rich narrative" with a consistent focus on big themes such as the political transformation of the Great War, the decline of European imperial authority, and the rise of revolutionary politics in Russia and beyond. As Siegel notes, another of the book's many strengths is its comparative analysis of civil military relations within the great powers. Stevenson's systematic consideration of this issue throughout demonstrates the way a focus on decision-making can provide a new perspective on the course of the conflict.

Bobroff points to Stevenson's command of the strategy and diplomacy of the wide array of belligerent powers. The result is a masterful analysis that generates new insights into "the nature of the governments at war in 1917." Bobroff also stresses the extent to which a desire to shape the peace influenced the policies of both belligerent and neutral powers. The conviction that the U.S. must lead the way in designing a new world order was central to the American president's policy choices in 1917. Bobroff then closes with a slightly eccentric argument that ideology was "more pretext than cause" in the formulation of U.S. policy. This flies against Stevenson's careful assessment of Wilson's thinking. Bobroff acknowledges the importance of "Wilson's concerns about America's role in determining the lines of the post-war world." These concerns were ideological in character. They rested on a vision of how international politics should be organised and a resolve to impose this vision in the peace settlement to come.

The reviewers make relatively few criticisms. While praising Stevenson's "look to the world beyond the West," Siegel points to the "unfortunate if understandable reliance upon western – above all British – sources and secondary literature." Larsen, interestingly, notes that the book demonstrates that there was "an intangible shift in the global zeitgeist in 1917" and regrets that Stevenson has not said more about this phenomenon. One could push this point further. The 'shift' to which Larsen refers was far from intangible. The unparalleled suffering and destruction caused by the war invigorated transnational activism for a new approach to world politics. This activism long predated the outbreak of war in 1914. The idea of a 'society' or 'league' of nations designed to promote peaceful co-operation and the rule of international law was, after all, European in origin.

It had been the subject of considerable civil society discussion during the pre-war decade.⁸ The war created political space which alternative visions of world order were able to exploit in order to secure a wider audience for their ideas. Transatlantic campaigning for new institutions to preserve peace were thus an important element in the wider context in which decision-making took place. There is a large and growing literature on the impact of the war on the transnational peace movement, as well as the impact of this movement on politics and policy-making. Much of this literature is distilled in William Mulligan's excellent *The Great War for Peace*.⁹ It is a bit surprising to see no reference to this question in *1917*.

These criticisms do not detract from Stevenson's achievement in providing an accessible yet scholarly analysis of one of the most pivotal moments in the history of international politics. This book will take its place among the fundamental works on the history of the Great War. Stevenson's place as one of the most penetrating and insightful historians of this seminal conflict is further established with the publication of this superb book.

Participants:

David Stevenson, MA, Ph.D., holds the Stevenson Chair of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His books include *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); *1914-1918: the History of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004); *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); *1917: War, Peace and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). He is currently researching the British home front in WWI—the engineering strike of May 1917.

Peter Jackson holds the Chair in Global Security at the University of Glasgow and is also Research Professor at the Norwegian Defence University. He is the author of a range of books and articles on the subjects of the history of international relations, modern and contemporary France and intelligence studies. Jackson's most recent books are *La France et la menace nazie. Renseignement et politique, 1933-1939* (Paris, Editions Nouveau monde, 2017) and *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). He is now co-writing a history of intelligence and the state since 1789 with Sébastien Laurent of the Université de Bordeaux.

Ronald P. Bobroff is Associate Professor of History, and Director of Global Education, at Oglethorpe University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Among his publications are *Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) and "War Accepted but Unsought: Russia's Growing Militancy and the July Crisis, 1914" in Jack Levy and John Vasquez., eds., *The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 227-251. He is currently writing a history of the Franco-Russian Alliance.

⁸ See, for example, the essays in Léon Bourgeois, *Pour la Société des nations* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1910).

⁹ Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Daniel Larsen is a Junior Research Fellow at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. He completed his Ph.D. at Christ's College, University of Cambridge, in 2013, and his main area of study is British and American policy in the First World War. His current book project reconsiders American mediation diplomacy and British war policy during the period of American neutrality, and he has published several articles, in *Diplomatic History*, *Intelligence and National Security*, and the *International History Review*.

Jennifer Siegel is a Professor of History at The Ohio State University. She received her B.A. and her Ph.D. from Yale University and specializes in modern European diplomatic and military history. She is the author of *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia* (I.B. Tauris, 2002), which won the 2003 AAASS Barbara Jelavich Prize, and *For Peace and Money: French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars* (Oxford University Press: 2014). She has published articles on business history and intelligence history, and co-edited *Intelligence and Statecraft: The Use and Limits of Intelligence in International Society* (Praeger, 2005). Before joining the faculty at Ohio State, Dr. Siegel taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Boston University, Yale, and Bennington College. She is currently working on a history of the diplomacy of the First World War.

Review by Ronald P. Bobroff, Oglethorpe University

With his newest examination of the First World War, *1917: War, Peace, and Revolution*, David Stevenson offers readers a more thorough analysis of a pivotal year in the evolution of the global conflict than he made in his earlier study of the entire war, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War*.¹ This book stands on its own, however, as he adopts a different approach to the problems presented by the many developments of the time. The result is a work useful not only for scholars but for a broader audience as well.

In his earlier work, Stevenson split 1917 between two different parts of the book, the earlier on the stalemate resulting from the Germans' failure to drive their offensive in the west to victory in the autumn of 1914, and the latter on the transition to new techniques and a renewed war of movement that with American involvement led to the end of the war. Here, Stevenson offers a long 1917, spanning the German debates in late 1916 over the recommencement of unrestricted submarine warfare through their last push for victory via Operation Michael in early 1918.

1917 was a year of exhaustion and realignment in which neither the Allied coalition nor the Central Powers could find the right combination of measures to defeat the other, but neither side was yet willing to compromise its war aims enough to find a settlement. Looming large in most major decisions on both sides that year were the effects of the Russian revolution in March 1917 (new calendar) and United States' entry into the war as a combatant. These developments did give the war a character more of a struggle between democracies and autocracies. This clearer ideological divide colored the propaganda campaign in the West. But maintaining the resilience of populations was a factor in a number of decisions about operations and peace feelers made by governments. Also behind many decisions was a concern about one's relative strength, with regard both to one's allies and enemies, at the eventual peace conference and in the post-war world. And Stevenson draws these arguments out beyond the confines of Europe to show their meaning for areas around the globe that were pressing issues during this year. His chapters on the move toward self-government in India and on the Balfour Declaration offer compact, close readings of events that led to major changes in India and Palestine that are tied well to the resonances of the rhetoric and the development on the ground in the war.

This book primarily examines policy: military strategy, diplomatic approaches, and political measures. It uses the battles throughout the year as lenses through which to see how the themes combined for different combatants, but it does not describe in serious detail the evolution of the battles themselves. In taking this approach, it concentrates thus on the policy makers in each of the major combatants: monarchs (when they mattered), heads of government, foreign ministers, generals, and revolutionaries-cum-policy makers. Broader popular and socio-cultural forces make their appearances, but primarily via their effect on the decisions of the men in power.

Stevenson draws out his argument at first through chapters that in rough chronologically order capture the developments of the war and the major countries involved. Thus, the chapter on unrestricted submarine warfare is his window into the German experience, the one the U.S. response is his examination of that of Washington, and the next on convoys (and a later one on the road to Passchendaele) highlights the British

¹ David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), published in the United States as *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic, 2004).

experience. Chapters on Tsar Nicholas II's abdication examines the imperial Russian experience, one on the Nivelle Offensive focuses on the French, one on the Kerensky Offensive exposes the flaws of the Provisional Government (and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies) in post-Romanov Russia, finally using Caporetto to discuss the sometimes neglected Italians. The subsequent chapter on peace negotiations brings Austria-Hungary into view. An unusual treat is offered by the first chapter of the next section, that on the global effect of the war, which highlights the decision making of the four major neutral states to enter the war during 1917 – Greece, Brazil, Siam, and China – while the section ends with chapters on both the growing internal and external challenges to continued British rule in India and on the British rationale behind the Balfour Declaration on a Jewish national home. The final chapter that includes both the Bolshevik revolution and the planning for Operation Michael draws out the changes both countries had faced. Each chapter contains enough pre- and early-war context for the non-specialist reader to grasp the issues at stake both in national development and in the particular countries' involvement in the war.

This review will now examine three of the themes of Stevenson's *1917* that this author finds particularly compelling.

A central theme to the work is the nature of the governments at war in 1917. The fall of the Romanov dynasty followed by the rise of dual power in Russia, coupled with the entry of the U.S. into armed conflict, made the First World War, on the face of it, an ideologically simpler conflict, that of democracies versus autocracies. But while there was propaganda value in the simplification, especially in helping to bring in neutral states on the Allied side, none more so than the U.S., Stevenson describes how approximate that evaluation was by examining the decision-making in the major players on each side.

In Germany, the story conforms better with the paradigm, as by 1917, the Reichstag had little power, Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg had declining influence over decisions, and the duumvirate of Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff increasingly controlled the direction of German policy. Kaiser Wilhelm II mattered little. A real value of Stevenson's treatment is his extensive analysis of the Austro-Hungarian part in the 1917 events. Emperor Karl plays a major role in the events, and the balance among him, his civilian ministers, especially Foreign Minister Ottokar, Count Czernin, and the generals is well laid out. While Czernin showed some independence at times, Karl is shown to be far more in control of decisions in his empire than Wilhelm II was by the end, though of course events and the balance of strength between Austria-Hungary and Germany meant that by the end of 1917, Vienna was conforming to Berlin's line.

In the 'democracies,' Stevenson shows the variety of models. Stevenson rejects the British ambassador's description of the U.S. government as "more autocratic than in Germany, Russia, or Turkey," (37) showing a president who was sensitive to public opinion, and who consulted with Cabinet and Congress in the process of deciding to enter the war. Stevenson does note, however, that when President Woodrow Wilson consulted with senators in February 1916, no Republicans, who were close to controlling the upper house, were included – supposedly, none could be found on the day (53). This tendency of Wilson's to neglect the opposition would undermine his plans for American peacetime engagement.

Great Britain and France each possessed healthy democracies, but Stevenson highlights limitations to civilian control over the armed forces in each country. For Britain, the Cabinet ultimately pushed a reluctant Admiralty to try convoys to protect shipping being decimated by the renewed unrestricted submarine warfare. With the Third Ypres Battle, however, Prime Minister David Lloyd George appears to have been unwilling to challenge stubborn military insistence in the planning for the offensive. While in *1914-1918*, Stevenson does

not offer a conclusion on why the British Cabinet did not prevent Passchendaele from becoming so bloody, here he appears to lay the blame at the feet of a government that did not keep watch over a military it had warned not to repeat the Somme. This is primarily a sin of omission rather than commission; General Sir Douglas Haig “would have submitted to a Cabinet ruling,” had it ordered a change, but the Cabinet was too divided and Lloyd George too weakened to end the slaughter earlier (203).

In France, for better or worse, the easing out of General Joseph Joffre and his replacement by General Robert Nivelle to command French forces on the Western Front, with fewer powers than Joffre had, “signaled a reassertion of civilian oversight” (119). Once doubts rose about Nivelle’s plan thanks to an apparent loss of surprise and a change of government in Paris, the new war minister, Paul Painlevé thought hard about ordering a cancellation of the offensive, but the weight of the French habit of leaving operational details to the generals to decide, the progress of preparations for the attack, concern about leaving the British in the lurch, and worry about the Germans attacking if the French did not, stayed the civilians’ hands. But within a few weeks of the commencement of the failed attack, the French government removed Nivelle from command, replacing him with General Philippe Pétain, while General Ferdinand Foch became Chief of the General Staff. Both generals largely agreed with Painlevé, and civil-military tensions thus eased, while civilian control was demonstrated.

While the propaganda value of the clearer ideological lines was trumpeted after Russia had its first revolution, Stevenson’s analysis calls into question its real contribution to decision-making among the neutrals. Certainly, the issue of fighting autocracy came up in the American debate about entry. Secretary of State Robert Lansing in late March 1917 “stressed how the war now pitted democracy against autocracy, that only through spreading democratization could peace be made permanent, and that the League of Nations would fail if powerful autocracies were members.” (62) Wilson himself in his April 1917 address to Congress calling for a declaration of war framed his remarks as an issue of democracy versus autocracy. But as Stevenson shows by spending so much more time talking about the effects of unrestricted submarine warfare, the Zimmerman Telegram, and Wilson’s concerns about America’s role in determining the lines of the post-war world, the ideological angle was more pretext than cause. Much as how the issue of Belgium for the British government helped cover the more practical interests behind the Asquith government’s entry into the war, this ideological angle mattered less in Washington than the practicalities of the problem.

In the fascinating chapter about the entry into war of four hitherto neutral states, some of which have received virtually no other coverage in histories of the war, this competition between democracy and autocracy is unmentioned. Instead, issues of political control, self-determination, and unrestricted submarine warfare dominated these entrants’ thinking.

Indeed, unrestricted submarine warfare acts as a central factor in the development of the war in the long 1917 and is another of the important themes in the book. Stevenson picks up and expands his argument from *1914-1918* that the German decision to engage in unrestricted submarine warfare in order to achieve victory was a gamble not unlike that wagered in the summer of 1914 when Germany staked everything on its support for Austria-Hungary during the July crisis. The key difference, Stevenson notes, is that while the 1914 move, if predicated on the evolving Schlieffen-Moltke Plan of effectively winning a European war in northern France, was a rash move decided by a tiny circle of men, the 1916 decision to recommence unrestricted submarine warfare was a deliberate decision, the result of much correspondence, many meetings, and a great deal of disagreement among the monarch, civilians, army, and navy leadership. Ultimately the greater influence of the newly influential Hindenburg and Ludendorff made the difference, but Stevenson notes that

this decision was part of a pattern of failed and even counter-productive political initiatives that left the German war effort worse off than if cruiser rules had been maintained in the battle against shipping to the Allies.

Nonetheless, given the reluctance of the British Admiralty to turn to convoys, and the early rate of success in sinking allied shipping, the German campaign at sea came close to success. But the combination of the morale boost and physical support brought by American belligerency with the British eventual success with convoying and British and American shipbuilding blunted the effect of the campaign and instead the quicker contribution than expected of the U.S. to the war effort in Europe turned the tide and led Germany to risk one last desperate attempt to end the war on its terms in early 1918 with Ludendorff's Operation Michael. While the effect on Germany was marginal, it is worth repeating how neutrals joined the war in part because of unrestricted submarine warfare, especially Brazil and Siam, for whom the attack on shipping was a significant concern (282, 285).

Another important contribution of this book is its highlighting of the role that consideration of the peace conference and the post-war world played in the decision-making of many participants in the policy process. Repeatedly, one reads that calculations about possible strategies involved not just the prospect of winning the war, but how such a strategy might position a country to influence or even control the peace-making process and its results.

At first, the Americans thought that by participating in the war, in the limited fashion that the United States' underwhelming preparation would allow, they would have a full voice at the eventual peace conference, and this was the basis for Wilson's continued hope of moving toward a "Peace without Victory," a moderate end to the war that would lead to democratization and international structures for avoiding future conflict (66). By the summer of 1917, as he responded to Pope Benedict XV's Peace Note, Wilson's expectations had increased, and he spoke of the need for regime change in Germany in order for a future peace to be lasting. By late 1917, Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo was remarking on the leverage Washington would acquire from the Allies' growing indebtedness to the U.S., but Wilson did not wish to show that cudgel before the peace conference. The utilization of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was also planned from a perspective not only of helping the war to end more quickly but also from the decision about where the AEF could give the U.S. the most political influence. By the spring of 1918, Wilson "now sought peace through victory" that would allow the U.S. to force the Germans to the table and push Wilson's newly revealed Fourteen Points as an alternative to the grasping Allied war aims that had been revealed by the Bolshevik's embarrassing publication of wartime secret treaties (394).

Others shared this concern of course. Both London and Paris were concerned to bring the war to a conclusion while they still had significant bargaining power, before the Americans gained too much influence. For France, this jockeying for position was visible even before American entry. Late in 1916 and early 1917, while Nicholas II still ruled, the French obtained the Tsar's agreement to their extensive goals in the Franco-German borderlands, and to seal claim on such changes, a successful French offensive was required. As the British planned their own offensive in Belgium, similar thinking ruled. After Nivelle failed, General Sir William Robertson wrote that the objective of a new British offensive "is not primarily the direct defence of French soil, but to win the war and secure British interests" (175). General Jan Christiaan Smuts, advising Lloyd George, argued that "it will mean much for our future prestige if (as at Waterloo) we are in a position to strike the final blow" (177). In the late stages of planning, Lloyd George, never enthusiastic about the Haig's plan, worried that the offensive, if it went wrong, could severely weaken Great Britain, and [h]e "did

not want to have to face a Peace Conference some day with our country weakened while America was still overwhelmingly strong and Russia had perhaps raised her strength” (188)

For the neutrals who entered the war in 1917, the peace conference was also a major factor in their thinking. For Greece, it played an important role. Soon after Eleutherios Venizelos had been put back in power by the Allies, he highlighted among his goals the agreement of the peace conference to the expansion of Greece, not only in lands that had been lost but even, implicitly, lands that modern Greece had not possessed. For China, the leadership hoped early in 1917 that participation in the war would convince the eventual conference to restore control of Shandong to Beijing from the Japanese. After the United States called on neutral states to break relations with Germany, the Chinese cabinet was willing, on the surface of things because of unrestricted submarine warfare, but in reality because “unless China acted it would have no voice at the peace conference” (292). Unsurprisingly, Japan opposed Chinese entry into the war because of the pressure that would be put on its interests on the Chinese mainland. While neither Greece nor China received what it hoped from the peace conference, Siam had what Stevenson describes as the best luck of the minor neutral interventions. Bangkok, too, saw the opportunity to have weight in the peace conference by joining the war on the Allied side. King Rama VI felt in May that if Siam did not enter the war now that U.S. entry made Allied victory more likely, Great Britain would come out of the war with even greater leverage in the region, making it harder for Siam to get a renegotiation, if not cancellation of unfair treaties. Ultimately Siam got the changes that it sought.

Overall, Stevenson offers an informative look at policy-making in a crucial, transitional year in the First World War. This is not a military history or a social history of the period, nor does he claim to adopt those analyses. He draws out how civilian and military leaders around the globe grappled with some of the same concerns about ideology, war aims, and limiting the human cost, while setting up their countries for the greatest influence and power in the post-war world. His attention to the minor neutral entrants (Greece, Brazil, Siam, and China) and imperial questions (India, Palestine) broadens the scope of the work to include resonances of these themes usually missed in similar studies. The reader wishing for a quicker look at the whole war can get the gist of Stevenson’s thinking about 1917 from his *1914-1918*, but *1917* itself rewards the reader who seeks a closer look at how the year played out and its wider resonances.

Review by Daniel Larsen, Trinity College, University of Cambridge

David Stevenson's newest book is a rich and important work giving us an impressive, bird's-eye view of the world-shaking events of 1917. Stevenson has devoted his career to the study of the First World War, and the fruits of that career are on remarkable display as he weaves what is simultaneously an extraordinary, multilingual synthesis of the broader field and yet also one that significantly improves upon it by bringing to light a profoundly extensive range of archival material. The book offers a series of authoritative accounts of the year's most crucial episodes, with a clear focus on their relationship to the course of the war.

Each one of the book's chapters is a considerable feat of scholarship. Stevenson takes on each of the great powers in turn, in a rough chronological order, admirably explaining key moments as diverse as the submarine battle between Germany and Britain, the entry of the United States, the Russian Revolution, the progress of the war on its various fronts, and the diplomacy happening behind the scenes. A great number of books and articles have been written about most of these subjects (a number previously contributed by Stevenson himself)¹, and the author deftly navigates the vast previous scholarship to present sharp accounts of these complex events, marked by clear and articulate historical judgments.

Stevenson's *1917* inherently invites a comparison with the late Keith Jeffery's *1916*.² Though both works aim to provide a global history of the war, Stevenson's is at once somewhat narrower yet significantly more comprehensive. Jeffery attempted to include a meaningful social-history dimension in his work, peppering his chapters with anecdotes that sought to bring to life the consequences of the conflict for ordinary people, and therefore the overarching military and political narratives are sometimes presented in a significantly condensed form. Stevenson, by contrast, tends principally to be concerned with decisions taken by decision-makers—his book begins with a very helpful eleven-page list of principal personalities—and his is one primarily of political, diplomatic, and military history. By more strictly limiting himself to world politics, Stevenson is able to engage more comprehensively with the key events and to offer a very clear and powerful overarching account of them.

Stevenson's book occupies a unique place in the historiography. Each chapter engages largely with what have previously been mostly separate bodies of literature. The most complete book review, therefore, would need to engage seriously with each chapter sequentially in order to fully place Stevenson's multiplicity of contributions within the existing scholarship. As a sampling, to serve as a broader indication of the work's profound quality, this review will focus on two (which also happen to most closely coincide with this reviewer's areas of expertise): the chapters on the entry of the United States and Great Britain's introduction of the convoy system.

The chapter on the American entry into the war provides an excellent summing up of the extensive existing American historiography on this topic, enriched by the author's own study of the primary documents.

¹ David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004); Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

² Keith Jeffery, *1916: A Global History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Stevenson ably and succinctly traces and summarizes the German-American conflict over submarines from its origins to the American declaration of war in April 1917. Any new student of the American entry will find in Stevenson's endnotes virtually all of the significant literature previously published. Stevenson does not meaningfully challenge this body of literature, but the chapter is nevertheless remarkable for its mastery of it, condensing into thirty clear pages what has previously been an enormous, unwieldy historiography.

Even more significant is Stevenson's chapter on Great Britain's introduction of the convoy system. Despite how crucial it was for Britain to contain its shipping losses in 1917, the British historiography of the war has lacked a good, clear account of the British response to Germany's submarine warfare in 1917. Stevenson has burrowed deep into the primary documentation and succeeds in crafting such an account, succinctly and deftly presenting it in a mere twenty pages. His conclusion that the War Cabinet sought to get the Admiralty to consider a convoy system at the same time that the Admiralty itself was deciding to give such a system a small trial is deeply interesting. The convoy system gradually grew, and the data presented showing the convoy system's ultimate impact is similarly fascinating.

These represent but two of twelve such accounts. By drawing together so many different threads, Stevenson's approach is able to present a uniquely comprehensive picture of the course of the war during 1917. The connections among the various locales rapidly build. Stevenson pays careful attention to the economic dimension, often backing up his accounts with lists of important statistics when relevant. He also has made an effort to include the intelligence dimension, with occasional references to the various countries' intelligence apparatuses.

In the final part of his book, Stevenson seeks to broaden out his study into other parts of the world. Brazil, Siam, China, India, and Palestine are offered as case studies of the war's impact in South America, Asia, and the Middle East. These five case studies provide an excellent snapshot into decision-making in and regarding these parts of the world. Each case study is well chosen and illuminating, although Africa is perhaps somewhat conspicuous by its absence. Stevenson gives these studies, particularly those of India and Palestine, the same superb treatment as the book's earlier chapters. The accounts of the Zionist movement and of Britain's attempts to contain the war's impact in India each form important contributions.

As a work focussed on a single year, however, there is perhaps one missed opportunity. It becomes very clear from the book that there was a fundamental, intangible shift in the global zeitgeist in 1917, one manifested not only by the peoples of the war-torn countries of Europe but in places less directly affected by the conflict. One picks up a sense of this shift throughout, and it comes out most strongly in the chapter on India: British officials based there repeatedly warn London that limited reform measures that might have sufficed the previous year now no longer would. A bolder approach to Indian self-rule, these officials insisted, was now required—a change they attributed to the global forces at play in 1917. Stevenson, however, never quite interrogates exactly what this global shift is or attempts to articulate precisely how we should understand it. By taking such a broad approach, he allows the reader to pick up on this shift inductively, seeing its differing guises and consequences in various parts of the globe. This makes sense, as this shift must inherently be a bit nebulous; seeking to explain it in concrete terms might well be akin to trying to pin down a cloud. But even so, the insights that might have resulted from such an attempt, however tentative it might have been, could have proven fascinating, especially as no other scholar could be as well-placed to attempt it.

This is a scholar's book, written in a dispassionate, scholarly style. Considering its length—clocking in at 480 pages—the book is perhaps not quite as readable as might be ideal, particularly in view of the drama inherent

in the events of 1917. (Each chapter is admirably succinct but with twelve the overall length nevertheless mounts.) For any scholar working on the First World War, it is, however, very much worth the patient effort it requires, and given its comprehensiveness, it should prove an essential work for a much broader scholarly audience.

This is, and will remain, a seminal work of scholarship on the First World War. Profound research is presented with painstaking care. This book uniquely illuminates one of the most consequential years of the twentieth century, and does so with unparalleled breadth and depth. Stevenson has provided us with a historical triumph, and it should serve as a vitally important and oft-consulted work for years to come.

Review by Jennifer Siegel, The Ohio State University

In the final pages of *1917: War, Peace & Revolution*, David Stevenson, whose oeuvre has centered on the international history of the First World War, acknowledges the generally arbitrary nature of demarcating historical questions by the temporal constraints of years, decades, or centuries.¹ Yet in the nearly 400 preceding pages, Stevenson makes a strong case for why 1917 is a year deserving of individual attention, albeit with a month or two of grace on either side. His discussions of the predictable metamorphic topics of the February and October Revolutions in Russia and the entrance of the United States into the war, as well as the often under-emphasized non-Eurocentric questions relating most particularly to the Middle East and Asia, demonstrate that the decisions taken in 1917, even if formulated in 1916 or implemented in 1918, were of fundamental importance. In Stevenson's telling, we have a year in which not only the war was transformed, but the world.

Stevenson details the obvious transformations of the war from one in which, at the year's outset, the war 'still remained Germany's to lose' to one in which, at year's end, an allied victory with American assistance was, if not at hand, clearly attainable (397). As this pivotal year progressed, allies were lost through revolutions and gained through the decisive missteps and underestimation by the Central Powers; the example and assurances provided by the United States provided further motivation for more prior non-combatants to enter the fray. Men and materiel were wasted in failed offensives and counteroffensives on the Aisne, in Flanders, on the Isonzo, and in Galicia. In the process of Stevenson's rigorous recounting of the ways in which the decisions taken in 1917 produced the outcomes of 1918, a recurring theme shines through, that of the nature of civil-military relations in the war. Stevenson is unquestionably interested in the delicate balance—and sometimes struggle—between civil and military leadership. Time and time again, he outlines the ways in which control was either ceded or seized by one group or the other, with dangerous consequences.

In Germany, Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg's steady and increasing loss of authority to the German military and the army high command of Chief of the General Staff Paul von Hindenburg and First Quartermaster-General Erich Ludendorff allowed those who favored unrestricted submarine warfare to win the day. Stevenson describes a Berlin with "the army, the navy, and the civilians...treating each other as quasi-sovereign entities" (26). Bethmann feared that "open conflict would break out between the OHL [the *Oberste Heeresleitung* (German High Command)] and the government...[and decided that] they, as the weaker party, must set aside their own better convictions for the sake of internal peace" (28). The internal peace that came from the OHL's victory over the civilian government on the question of unconditional submarine warfare, of course, broadened the war by bringing in the United States and a number of other previously neutral states, demonstrating the dangers of a military triumph in this internecine squabble and internal competition for decisive authority.

¹ Professor Stevenson's important work on the First World War includes: *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); *The Outbreak of the First World War: 1914 in Perspective* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1997); *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004); and *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

In France, it was the civilians who triumphed over the military, as Chief of the General Staff Joseph Joffre was eclipsed in favor of General Robert Nivelle, the hero of Verdun who was named commander-in-chief, Western Front, and who favored a policy of rapid progress on a narrow front that was preferable to the parliamentarians, who feared that time was running out both militarily and politically. They were convinced that the war must be won in 1917, and thought Nivelle's plan of attack was the best way to bring that about. At best, the civilians chose the wrong man. As Stevenson writes: "He appears a classic example of a man who rose beyond his ability, and lacked the astuteness needed for high office" (143). At worst, the "Nivelle offensive" that followed was an outright failure. 134,000 French soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured in the first ten days. However, in France, the triumph of civilian over military authority that Nivelle's appointment had signified was not met by a military counteroffensive when the civilian-backed Nivelle foundered. Rather, Stevenson emphasizes the fact that the French politicians did not relinquish their control of national strategy once they had regained it in 1917. The suggestion is that this was to their advantage, and the advantage of their alliance, although Stevenson offers no more than the ultimate Allied victory to justify that suggestion.

In Britain, the outcome of the civil-military competition was more complicated, but the message far more explicit. On land, Prime Minister David Lloyd George sought to reduce the role of military professionals in determining policy, as he felt that "in a large number of instances throughout the war the advice of the experts had proved to be wrong" (184). He did, however resist the temptation to take strategy entirely out of the hands of his military advisors, as his support for the failed French-led Nivelle offensive in opposition to Britain's military professionals had chastened him. As Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the British War Cabinet, observed during the desperate fighting of the Third battle of Ypres: "The P.M. is obviously puzzled...how far the Government is justified in interfering with a military operation" (203). At sea, however, Lloyd George felt no such restraint. As the debate raged over merchant marine convoys vs. ship dispersal, and Britain faced a tripartite crisis in shipping, food, and allied supply, the civilian government had no qualms about pushing for the implementation of the convoy system that Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, then First Sea Lord, felt was unnecessary. The admiralty ultimately capitulated, having been forced to acknowledge that "the [convoy] system is regarded by the Cabinet as our salvation," as British Admiralty Anti-Submarine Division Head, Sir Alexander Duff, put it (81). Winston Churchill, who became the British minister of munitions in July, later evaluated the outcome of this scuffle in 1931, mincing no words in his assessment of the victory of civilian over military authority: "'the politicians were right and admirals wrong', the amateurs with searching minds had prevailed over the professionals, and 'no story of the Great War is more remarkable or full of guidance'" (86). Stevenson's treatment of the civil-military debate indicates that he would not disagree.

The largest potential contribution this textured and detail rich narrative could make, however, lies not in its discussions of the transformation of the war, but in its discussion of the transformation of the world. In the third section of the book, Stevenson casts his glance further afield than the trenches and brutal offensives or the U-Boats and blockades that typically dominate general histories of the war. In highlighting the decisions to intervene in the war by not only the United States but also Greece, Brazil, Siam, and China, Stevenson points the reader towards recognizing the ways in which the First World War changed the relative position of non-European states in the global system, ending Europe's global pre-eminence. Similarly, his two chapters covering the British moves towards accepting 'responsible government' in India and the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine—in direct conflict with promises made to the Arabs and to their Great Power allies, alike—underscore the erosion of imperial power that the war engendered. And his concluding chapter, touching on the October Revolution, foreshadows the way the Bolshevik ascendancy in the context of the war shook the system in ways that dominated nearly the entire century that followed. Stevenson is right to include

the February Revolution and its aftermath in the sections discussion of the transformation of the war, and the October Revolution as one that transformed the world. The Bolshevik decision to withdraw from the war only formalized the already recognized practical withdrawal of Russia from anything other than a defensive stance after the failures of the Kerensky offensive. The real import of the Bolshevik Revolution was in the way it shaped the century that followed.

Stevenson's look to the world beyond the West is admirable, and offers some of the fresher discussions in the book. That said, the section, like the earlier considerations of imperial and provisional-government Russia, is somewhat constrained by an unfortunate if understandable reliance upon western—above all British—sources and secondary literature. It is true that the designation of India as a candidate for responsible government was a decision made in London, but a greater consideration of Indian agency, for example, might have done more to contextualize the impact of that decision on the war and the world to come. Similarly, Stevenson does an excellent job highlighting both the ways in which the war impacted the Russian revolution and the ways in which the revolution affected the war, demonstrating just how “the unfolding of the war and the revolution were inextricably interlinked” (145). However, even in the chapters on the two critical revolutions, the Russian voice seems relatively absent and filtered through western interpreters, particularly when compared with the author's treatment of the decisions and decision-makers of the other great powers.

These small quibbles, however, do not seriously undermine Stevenson's accomplishment. In *1917*, he has offered both scholars and general readers an intricate and inclusive examination of a year that would prove to be decisive for the outcome of the war and the world order and disorder that would follow it. While covering vast amounts of territory and a cast of seemingly thousands, he manages to lose neither the thread nor his readers, thanks in no small part to a useful collection of maps and an even more useful “List of Principal Personalities.” These touchstones keep all of the fighting and diplomatic fronts, at the very least, no more muddled for the reader than for the decision makers of the day.

Throughout the book, Stevenson lays out the transformational decisions of 1917, “to intervene, to repudiate compromise, and to attack” (394). Yet he regularly proposes that the wiser course in 1917 might well have been to have done nothing. Britain, France, and Russia all undertook costly offensives that drained their resources and weakened their immediate positions. Germany pursued an undersea offensive through unrestricted submarine warfare, sacrificing U.S. neutrality in the process; and, as Stevenson argues, the German and Austro-Hungarian offensive at Caporetto did more to bolster Italian resolve and to spur Italian recovery than to pave the way to peace. Stevenson makes clear, however, why the civilian and military leadership, alike, felt that action was the only available option. As General Ludendorff glumly surmised: “otherwise it is not foreseeable how we should bring the war to an end. But the others also do not know how to do it” (144).

Author's Response by David Stevenson, London School of Economics and Political Science

I would like to thank the editors of H-Diplo for arranging this roundtable; and also to thank Ronald Bobroff, Daniel Larsen, and Jennifer Siegel. They have read my book with commendable care, and I appreciate their kind words and thoughtful comments.

1917 grew out of my previous work on the First World War, although it also seeks to break new ground. In addition to publishing an overview of the conflict, I have produced more detailed studies of its origins and termination.¹ I have written less about what drove the struggle onwards during its terrible middle period, except on the diplomacy of one country, France.² This is the central issue that *1917* investigates, although this time by examining all the main belligerents, as well as the interactions between them. It seeks insights relevant not only to the war of 1914-18 but also more generally to armed conflict.

The book focuses on a single year. As Bobroff points out, this means a 'long' 1917 extending from the German and American peace notes of December 1916 to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the 'Michael' offensive in March 1918—though more particularly the 'short' 1917 between the two Russian Revolutions of (by the Western calendar) March and November. But even the calendar year 1917 corresponds quite closely with the second of the two major turning points in the war's development. During the first turning point, in autumn 1914, the initial mobile campaigning gave way to a prolonged military stalemate. During the second, the headline events were the Russian Revolution and American entry, which made the conflict more clearly an ideological contest between autocracy and democracy. Moreover, as Siegel observes, whereas in early 1917 Germany could still have secured at least a favourable draw, by early 1918 Berlin's decisions for unrestricted submarine warfare and for the Ludendorff offensives made it highly likely that it would lose and went far to determine how and when it would do so. Finally, whereas at the beginning of 1917 the pre-1914 balance of power and Europe's international and domestic political systems remained surprisingly intact, the Bolshevik Revolution and American intervention upset them both more radically and irrevocably. In 1916 months-long battles inflicting hundreds of thousands of casualties had horrifically transformed what was imaginable militarily. In 1917 American soldiers being shipped across the Atlantic and the ultra-Left controlling the biggest country in the world similarly transformed what was imaginable politically. Both government officials and ordinary citizens had to grapple with extraordinary uncertainty and fluidity, as old moulds cracked and anything seemed possible. A sense that the world was shaking under men and women's feet stands out from the documents. Larsen highlights that sensation in his comments on my chapter about India.

1917 is meant to be an international history, not written principally from any one country's perspective but covering all the Great Powers, as well as smaller ones. In fact the United Kingdom and the British Empire bulk larger than I initially expected, and this is not only due to the richness of the London archives but also because the British Empire really was in many ways at the zenith of its influence, as its European Allied

¹ David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane; 2004; US edition: *Cataclysm: the First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2007); *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011 and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

² Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

partners faltered and before America's resources were unleashed. In addition, the book is essentially a political history. This is not said in the least to denigrate the new approaches to the Great War's military, social, and cultural dimensions that in recent years have so enriched historical understanding (and still less its economic history, which remains neglected). Nonetheless, a concentration on decision-making seemed the best framework for a new synthesis, provided that decision-making was placed in context. To some extent my model was Ian Kershaw's *Fateful Choices*,³ with the proviso that Kershaw examined the first half of the Second World War whereas I examined the second half of the First. Hence one of my themes is war weariness: and why, despite it, political and military chiefs still rejected peace initiatives and authorized new attacks. Governments and their military establishments did not simply fly on automatic pilot once the decisions for war were taken: on the contrary, a succession of further decisions (mostly less intensively studied than those of 1914) were needed to make the conflict what it became. By 1917 few in authority could retain illusions about the human cost of resisting compromise and of launching new offensives. Often their discussions were contentious. Partly for these reasons, high-level debates were better recorded than they had previously been, in contemporary diaries and minutes and by retrospective inquiries. The documentation makes it possible to analyse more closely *how* decisions were taken, the institutional framework, the play of personalities, and the arguments deployed. I have tried to represent both sides in these deliberations, often in participants' own words. Where the process was fractured and chaotic (as in the Russian Provisional Government), that too must be acknowledged.

Three generalizations stand out. One, as Bobroff underlines, is that politicians looked to the future, and to how the war's conclusion would shape the peace settlement. German, Russian, and Italian leaders approved disastrous offensives in part because they feared time was against them. British and French leaders did likewise, but came to realize that American entry made possible a longer game. Second, and related, leaders felt they must keep the initiative. Unless they acted, the enemy would do so, and unpredictably, so that even remaining passive and doing nothing were dangerous. Third, partly due to such beliefs, both sides still felt that the best way out of Europe's war trap was through victory, and neither yet considered victory unattainable. The Russian Revolution and American intervention helped persuade the Central Powers and Allies respectively that it was feasible and desirable to carry on. Having once initiated armed conflict, governments found it extraordinarily difficult to extricate themselves, and their predicament resembled those of other governments in other stalemated wars.

The reviewers speak well of the book's discussion of 1917's global significance. For this writer, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia proved relatively fresh and unexplored terrain. American entry should be seen as part of a third wave of interventions, following those by Japan and Turkey in 1914 and Italy and the Balkan states in 1915-16. By December 1917 every major global Power was, at least nominally, at war. Many countries – Siam, China, and America itself – wished to challenge the pre-1914 European-dominated global order, whether the 'informal empire' exemplified by East Asia's unequal treaties or the formal empire exemplified by Britain's Raj. In India the change was as much psychological as tangible: but both many Indians and many British came to assume that London's rule was not perpetual and that eventually it would end. There is a larger study to be undertaken on how the conflict energized nationalist movements outside Europe (and among the losers within Europe) and enfeebled multi-ethnic empires, whereas in France and Britain it eroded nationalism's appeal. That, however, is a subject for another book.

³ Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940- 1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).