



The Tory World: Deep History and the Tory Theme in British Foreign Policy, 1679-2014

Jeremy Black

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Political decisions are never taken in a vacuum but are shaped both by current events and historical context. In other words, long-term developments and patterns in which the accumulated memory of what came earlier, can greatly (and sometimes subconsciously) influence subsequent policy choices. Working forward from the later seventeenth century, this book explores the “deep history” of the changing and competing understandings within the Tory party of the role Britain has aspired to play on a world stage. Conservatism has long been one of the major British political tendencies, committed to the defence of established institutions, with a strong sense of the “national interest”, and embracing both “liberal” and “authoritarian” views of empire. The Tory party has, moreover, at several times been deeply divided, if not convulsed, by different perspectives on Britain’s international orientation and different positions on foreign and imperial policy. Underlying Tory beliefs upon which views of Britain’s global role were built were often not stated but assumed. As a result they tend to be obscured from historical view. This book seeks to recover and reconsider those beliefs, and to understand how the Tory party has sought to navigate its way through the difficult pathways of foreign and imperial politics, and why this determination outlasted Britain’s rapid decolonisation and was apparently remarkably little affected by it. With a supporting cast from Pitt to Disraeli, Churchill to Thatcher, the book provides a fascinating insight into the influence of history over politics. Moreover it argues that there has been an inherent politicisation of the concept of national interests, such that strategic culture and foreign policy cannot be understood other than in terms of a historically distorted political debate.

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