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 Introduction by Charles S. Maier, Harvard University

David Ekbladh's *Plowshares into Swords: Weaponized Knowledge, Liberal Order, and the League of Nations* follows the economic and financial agencies of the League of Nations until their displacement from Geneva to Princeton, New Jersey during 1940–1941. It invites us to consider their valuable statistical work and other studies during the turbulent economic interwar years as a positive achievement and thus, in effect, as a counterweight to the political failure of the League to avert a second world war. The book thus tends to second the newer and more positive, or at least more serious, evaluations of League achievement; to name only three, Patricia Clavin's *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations*, Susan Pedersen's *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, which focused on the Mandates system, and her programmatic statement in the article "Back to the League of Nations."¹ It also takes its place among valuable new contributions to the interwar global economy, such as Jamie Martin's *The Meddlers* and Quinn Slobodian's *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*.² An era once chronicled as a bleak period of diplomatic and economic failure—recall W. H. Auden's "low, dishonest decade"³—has emerged as a densely packed, often innovative interval of global interconnections, technological advance, and applied social science. Indeed, even as Ekbladh defends the League's role in this humming globalism, he focuses on the non-state proponents of what he calls liberal or progressive internationalism. Liberal internationalism tends to become a political agent in its own right, surviving the Second World War to renew an effort at global governance after 1945.

The three reviewers all praise Ekbladh for the archival excavation he has undertaken, but greet the book with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Stephen Macekura focuses on Ekbladh's emphasis on the Americans' role in the League's social science apparatus even as the US government officially stayed aloof from the League after the refusal of Congress to ratify US membership in it in 1919 and 1920. He provides a useful outline of the book's structure, but regrets that the author did not engage with the idea and the content of the "data" so assiduously collected. (I return to this point below.) Macekura contrasts the American policy makers and the US advocates who worked to perpetuate the country's rise to military ascendancy—the theme as well of Stephen Wertheim's recent critical history of US hegemonic aspirations⁴—with the social scientists' desire to shelter or perhaps acquire the talent of the League economists.

In fact, Ekbladh's chapter three does focus on the related contrast between the Roosevelt administration's reluctance to officially offer an invitation to the League's economic agencies (above all the International Labor Organization) and the efforts by private American research centers—the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, and the Rockefeller Foundation—to provide a refuge for the Geneva social scientists. The "technocrats," as he terms them, finally prevailed after the fall of France when even neutral Switzerland seemed vulnerable to German invasion. I would have appreciated some further history of the American social-science background in the preceding decade, which gave birth to the SSRC in 1923 and led to the landmark volume sponsored by the Hoover Administration, *Recent Social*

¹ Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2012); and Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112: 4 (2007): 1091-1117.

² Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³ W.H. Auden, "September 1, 1939," in W.H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, ed., Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 2007), 95-97.

⁴ Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

Trends in the United States, with its massive deployment of quantitative data.⁵ The American circumstances of 1940 might also have been evoked to a greater degree: President Franklin D. Roosevelt was running for an unprecedented third term in a country whose Congress had passed repeated Neutrality Acts between 1936 and 1939, and whose Irish-American and German-American voters still harbored strong suspicions of establishment Anglophilia. It took the Nazi successes of 1940 and the Battle of Britain to turn those sentiments around.⁶

John Krige, who has written major contributions on the interplay between scientific developments and national power, also terms the book “a major contribution to a growing body of literature that redresses [the historiographical] imbalance, tracing the individuals and projects that gave substance to the League’s internationally oriented technical missions, and highlighting its substantial contribution to the postwar reconstruction of a U.S.-led democratic world order.”⁷ He usefully recapitulates the major steps in Ekbladh’s exposition and follows the author’s lead in showing how the “liberal international elite” sought to draw the U.S. into informal quasi-membership. The review highlights the author’s argument for the delay in moving the threatened League agencies to American sanctuary. Roosevelt’s administration was willing to cooperate with League agencies in non-political work that was divorced from nation-state representation but was unwilling to deal with a League body in an official role. The League organized a new Committee for Economic and Social Questions to facilitate American technical cooperation and even sanctuary, but League Secretary Joseph Avenol, with an eye on German power, insisted that only one or more states could invite the Committee to relocate.

Despite accepting Ekbladh’s account in general, Krige points out that his story focuses on the US at the expense of other states, and he questions whether the scientific content of the Economic and Financial Committee could really be insulated from politics. He writes, “the deliberate identification of the League’s technical research with a liberal internationalist political agenda undermined the boundary between the technical and the political that had originally been crucial to its survival as an international organization....The fragile boundary between science and politics was blurred by economic data that was infused with liberal internationalist assumptions that ran counter to the totalitarian ambitions of Germany from, Japan, and the Soviet Union (all of whom left or were expelled from the League).”

I have to confess that I am confused by the treatment of “data” as deployed both by the author and his critic. Was it—I use the word as a singular noun—really “weaponized” as Ekbladh states? Not all political applications should count as weaponization. Numbers are crucial for any regime that wants an ambitious policy, whether for welfare, conquest, or defense. Data remains too vague a reference; it was potentially an asset for all sorts of programs. Is it really infused with liberal internationalist assumptions, as Krige says? After all, as Adam Tooze has shown, Germans thirsted for adequate statistics of their own precisely in order to mobilize more effectively for war.⁸ Data, moreover, had to be processed to become useful knowledge. Stephen Macekura is correct when he notes that “there is comparatively little within [Ekbladh’s] book about the processes of collecting and analyzing data.” I agree; and to my mind, a discussion of quantitative techniques would have added an important refinement. The book does cite Simon Kuznets’s development of

⁵ *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends*, with a foreword by Herbert Hoover (New York: McGraw Hill, 1934).

⁶ For a brief discussion with sources, see David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt’s America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001).

⁷ John Krige, *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); also Mario Daniels and John Krige, *Knowledge Regulation and National Security in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

⁸ Adam Tooze, *Statistics and the German State, 1900-1945: The Making of Modern Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

national income accounting, but other innovations were also crucial.⁹ The Soviets pioneered the input-output analysis that was needed for planning, which was further developed in the United States by the Russian émigré Vassily Leontief; the British developed operations research. The war offered a harsh lesson in how to maximize output under severe constraints. Data was an instrument and the US scooped up the League's intellectual property as it would later scoop up German rocket scientists.

Carlyn Biltoft, too, would like a more expansive consideration of “information,” and I am inclined to agree that like “data,” it is under-theorized, although I would not fault Ekbladh for not providing a history of the material infrastructure (such as undersea cables).¹⁰ Perhaps this longing for more of the science underlies Carolyn Biltoft's argument that there are places where “the analysis might have benefited from some additional conceptual reinforcement, including a deeper reading of the relevant literature on liberalism, information, power-knowledge, and even on the League itself.” She provides major bibliographical footnotes, although I would not fault Ekbladh for not providing a prehistory of the Washington consensus. It is true that the word “liberal” has multivalent meanings—ranging from *laissez-faire* to Ekbladh's implicit suggestion of progressive and often interventionist policies. She is correct, too, as Mark Mazower also stressed, that given its founding under decisive Anglo-French patronage, the League presupposed a world of unequals. (But Mazower also emphasizes along lines that anticipate Ekbladh's argument that the League was an important laboratory or university for international cooperation.)¹¹ And she suggests an alternative history of the League as an arena or as a semiotic referee for proposing or imposing alternative conceptions of the world. Ekbladh comes closest perhaps to her conceptualization of the League in his discussion, in chapter two, of the League Pavilion at the World's Fair, where the implicit mediatization of international rivalry was put into concrete form.

In his response David Ekbladh reaffirms that he felt the need to challenge the story of US non-engagement with global politics, a narrative that in fact served those who preached intervention from the 1930s into the postwar period. From the viewpoint of scholars who have recently been excavating the story of America's global politics in a period of so-called isolation, such as the critics assembled here, this demonstration was unnecessary. Still, the intent of a book matters. I think that the intention of this one in fact transcends what the author himself falls back on: namely to illustrate how science, funding, and American goals became important even as US policy was so stand-offish. It is worth recalling that even if liberalism was more multivalent than the author suggests, there was an alternative concept of the world that was bent on rejecting any of its meanings and it was very menacing.

In the end, though, the League was conceived of as a forum that was supposed to provide more than social-science expertise. Ekbladh quotes Keynes's sardonic comment: “It is a strange reflection that [Jan] Tinbergen's book [*Statistical Testing of Business-Cycle Theories*] looks likely as far as 1939 is concerned, to be the principal activity and *raison d'être* of the League of Nations” (60). Keynes was presumably sniping at a rival approach in economics. But the comment compels us to ponder again where the League and liberal internationalism fell short of their headlined objective.

⁹ Simon Kuznets, *Economic Growth and Structure: Selected Essays* (New York: Norton, 1965).

¹⁰ For an interesting start see Heidi Tworek, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 143-153.

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Carolyn Biltoft is a global intellectual historian and an Associate Professor of international history at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Her work focuses broadly on the structures, infrastructures and mentalities of an increasingly global modernity. Her first book, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth and Power at the League of Nations* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), presents the League as a global public stage for the production and contestation of diverse "truth claims" in an era of totalitarian political, economic and ideological projects.

John Krige is Professor Emeritus in the School of History and Sociology at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. He has recently published, with Mario Daniels, *Knowledge Regulation and National Security in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022) and the edited collection *Knowledge Flows in a Global Age. A Transnational Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

Stephen Macekura is Associate Professor of International Studies at Indiana University-Bloomington. He is the author of *The Mismeasure of Progress: Economic Growth and its Critics* (Chicago University Press, 2020) and *Of Limits and Growth: The Rise of Global Sustainable Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). He is co-editor, with Erez Manela, of *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Review by Carolyn Biltoft, Geneva Graduate Institute

In *Plowshares into Swords*, David Ekbladh's careful text returns to the long-disputed subject of the United States' relationship to the League of Nations, though from a different starting point. Like other scholars, Ekbladh argues that even after the United States' government failed to embrace the League officially, American technocrats, private funders, and public figures still cultivated that body.¹ Unlike others, Ekbladh traces how a diverse cast of American characters sought to extract the organization's rich informational deposits, for the League's numerous technical sections continually mined and processed raw data, turning it into vital transnational knowledge, especially in the domains of trade, finance, national income, and "international development."² According to Ekbladh, the United States then used this League-generated data to secure and promote its particular brand of "liberal internationalism" in an increasingly global, technological, and economically integrated modernity (10).

The book's primary contribution rests in Ekbladh's meticulous archival reconstruction of the varied storylines, behind-the-scenes conversations, and decision-making processes at play. The text is replete with accounts of the efforts of technocrats, financiers, adventures, asylum seekers, and even political giants, all carrying letters, statistical volumes, calculators, microfilms, maps, and official orders, as they shuttled back and forth across the Atlantic, in the service of liberal internationalism. In this way, the text offers an additional demonstration of William Appleman Williams's thesis on the continuously non-isolationist bent of American foreign policy in the age of total wars, both hot and cold.³ In that frame, the book's most important and novel contribution is that it skillfully unfolds the multi-stage process wherein the United States *domesticated* the League's transnational knowledge-production organs. The narrative identifies a number of stages. In the first, before 1929, a group of Americans who still believed ardently in the promise of transnational cooperation went *towards* the League. Here, Ekbladh reconstructs the decisionmaking of private funding agencies (such as the Rockefeller foundation), and individual experts as they sought both to contribute to and retrieve information from Geneva.

The second stage of the domestication project grew out of a series of crises management experiments, the most important of which was the global slump of 1929. As the League gathered experts from all over the world to tackle the interdependent nature of global depression, Americans took notes on the value of multi-perspectival expert opinion and the uses of comparative transnational statistics. Then, in 1938, came the

¹ Ludovic Tournès, *Les États-Unis et La Société Des Nations (1914-1946)* (New York: Peter Lang AG, 2015); Tournès and Arby Gharibian, *Philanthropic Foundations at the League of Nations: An Americanized League?*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022).

² Some texts either missing from or under-utilized on this point are first and foremost Louis W. Pauly, *The League of Nations and the Foreshadowing of the International Monetary Fund* (Princeton, NJ: International Finance Section, 1996); also Antony Anghie, "Nationalism, Development and the Postcolonial State: The Legacies of the League of Nations," *Texas International Law Journal*. 41:3 (2006): 447–463; Carolyn Biltoft, "The League of Nations and Alternative Economic Perspectives," in *Elgar Handbook of Alternative Theories of Economic Development*, ed. Gosh Jayati, Rainer Kattel, and Erik S. Reinert (Cheltenham, UK: Edgar Elgar Publishing LTD, 2016), 270–280; José Antonio Sanchez-Roman, "From the Tigris to the Amazon: Peripheral Expertise, Impossible Cooperation and Economic Multilateralism at the League of Nations, 1920-1946," in *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations*, ed. Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 43–64. More generally, see: Olivier Accominotti et al., "Black Man's Burden, White Man's Welfare: Control, Devolution and Development in the British Empire, 1880–1914," *European Review of Economic History* 14:1 (2010): 47–70; Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2019); R. Srivatsan, *History of Development Thought: A Critical Anthology* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012).

³ William Appleman Williams and Henry W. Berger, ed., *A William Appleman Williams Reader: Selections from His Major Historical Writings* (Chicago: I.R. Dec, 1992), 75-76.

rumblings of a second global war. As peace in Europe faltered, League staff and representatives rushed—with American support—to set up a League Pavilion at the New York World’s fair in 1939. What Ekbladh shows is that the exhibition, which was designed to garner American public support for the then-fragile project of international cooperation, ended up serving as a kind of proxy secretariat and so, too, a foreshadowing of things to come. The final stage of domestication played out as the European conflict became all-out war and the United States’ government *officially* helped relocate the League’s Economic Section to Princeton, NJ. This act granted asylum not only to the League’s economic “databases” but also to valuable human and intellectual capital. The New Jersey-based arm of the League then constituted a think-tank on the kinds of economic knowledge that would first help the Allied forces better fight the war, and then plan for the global order that would come at the conflict’s end.

While Ekbladh provides ample and novel evidentiary threads, there are places where the analysis might have benefited from some additional *conceptual* reinforcement, including a deeper reading of the relevant literature on liberalism, information, power-knowledge, and even on the League itself.⁴ Given the book’s eventual focus on the importance of economic knowledge in geo-politics, there is a lack of attention to the role that American financial institutions played in facilitating the League-brokered loans for new or reconstituted nation-states in Europe, as well as to the competition between League loans and stabilization programs devised by Edwin Kemmerer, the influential Princeton economist. This lacuna is all the more striking since those programs also facilitated the codification of “liberal” financial categories and concepts of best practice, which in turn laid the groundwork for what came to be called the “Washington Consensus.”⁵ Such thematic oversights in fact grow out of the book’s sometimes-reductive conceptual framework, which the author summarizes as such:

⁴ On power knowledge in the modern world, see Kenneth Cmiel and John Durham Peters, *Promiscuous Knowledge: Information, Image, and Other Truth Games in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020); Marc Flandreau, *Anthropologists in the Stock Exchange: A Financial History of Victorian Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). On information and communication networks in geopolitics and finance see, for example, Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Simone Müller and Heidi Tworek, “The Telegraph and the Bank: On the Interdependence of Global Communications and Capitalism, 1866-1914,” *Journal of Global History* 10:2 (2015): 259-283; Simone Müller, *Wiring the World: The Social and Cultural Creation of Global Telegraph Networks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Rita Zájacz, *Reluctant Power: Networks, Corporations, and the Struggle for Global Governance in the Early 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019); Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, “World History in a Global Age,” *The American Historical Review* 100:4 (1995): 1034–1060. For discussions of the many definitions and internal contradictions in the long intellectual trajectories of “liberalism” see in particular: Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014).

⁵ See Juan H. Flores Zendejas and Yann Decorzant, “Going Multilateral? Financial Markets’ Access and the League of Nations Loans, 1923–8,” *Economic History Review* 69 :2 (2015): 653–678; Michel Fior, *Institution globale et marchés financiers: la Société des Nations face à la reconstruction de l’Europe, 1918-1931* (Bern : P. Lang, 2008). Patricia Clavin, “The Austrian Hunger Crisis and the Genesis of International Organization after the First World War,” *International Affairs* 90:2 (March 2014): 265–278. Just for a few potentially relevant works on the history and historical logics of financial diplomacy and “international development” en route to the Washington Consensus see: Marc Flandreau, *Money Doctors: The Experience of International Financial Advising 1850-2000* (London: Routledge, 2005); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); John Marangos, *International Development and the Washington Consensus: A Pluralist Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2020).

For modern global life, a steady stream of information about economics, health, and other aspects of human experience was as indispensable then as it is now. This study uses “information” as a broad rubric. It is equated with data, meaning verifiable facts that can be a means to reasoning and understanding. Within the purview of this study, most often the term ‘information’ refers to statistics compiled or generated by a variety of groups for various ends. Where information becomes deployable, it takes on the power conferred by analysis. It becomes knowledge (20).

This series of interlinking definitions provide the entire explanatory framework for the book; information is a political Swiss-army knife, used for constructive or destructive ends. Then, the argument goes, because the League produced so much information-cum-knowledge, the United States naturally came to see the hegemonic value of adding that soft but weaponizable power to its own arsenals.

Along these same lines, there are a number of items missing from the text’s *mise-en-scène*. Beneath, there are under-sea cables. Above, radio waves and airplanes. At least since the nineteenth century (and one could argue much longer), the structures and mentalities at work in framing and shaping geo-politics played out, in part, through information and communications infrastructures. By extension, in the interwar moment, the League itself became a battleground for geopolitical struggles to shape the knowledge and narratives that would in turn help facilitate the control of the material world, including those less tangible but still material information and capital flows.⁶ In particular, as I and others have argued, because the League itself operated as global knowledge production center, any number of actors and agents sought to seize its filing cabinets and microphones and to use its “billboards” to advertise both private and political agendas.⁷ Then too, there is the question of the League’s imbrication in the long, complex and always in some-way illiberal history of “liberalism.”⁸ The story Ekbladh re-tells of the League’s Secretary General Joseph Avenol’s flirtation with Vichy, for example, is in fact tied to the League’s inherent and perpetual internal contradictions: the body housed and certified imperial preferences, and tolerated totalitarian characters, right alongside other efforts towards international peace and social amelioration.⁹

⁶ For an elaboration of this point see Biltoft, “Sundry Worlds within the World: Decentered Histories and Institutional Archives,” *Journal of World History* 31:4 (2020): 729–60.

⁷ This is one of the primary claims of my book, Biltoft, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). Also along similar lines both Mark Mazower and Charles Maier have argued effectively in different ways that the League alternately got caricatured as either “public” hero or the *bête-noir* of competing geopolitical narratives, each with designs on the hegemonic control of territory and resources; see Charles S. Maier especially in his discussing of Carl Schmidt in *Once within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016); see in general Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Then too, on this “control of narratives” point, see: Daniel Laqua, *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Daniel Laqua, “Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order,” *Journal of Global History* 6:2 (July 2011): 223–247.

⁸ For the League at the center of and imbricated in the battle between fascism and anti-fascism and the question of empire and territorial acquisition see: Maier, *Once within Borders*; Akami, “Liberal Internationalism Reconsidered”; Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone, eds., *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2020); see too Amalia Ribí Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁹ See chapter 6 of Biltoft, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations*; see also Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, 2015; Alison Bashford, “Population, Geopolitics, and International Organizations in the Mid Twentieth Century,” *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008): 327–347; and Sarah Shields, “Forced Migration as Nation-Building: The League of Nations, Minority Protection, and the Greek-Turkish

It is not that Ekbladh's narrative fully ignores these elements. Rather, the book simply asserts that the growing data/knowledge requirements of "liberal internationalism" *wholly* explain the gradual pushing of the League from the periphery to the center of U.S. strategic interests. A more explicit engagement on the "why" rather than just the "how" would have lent more depth and breadth to the analysis. Take, for example, the classic episode wherein the United States government explicitly supported transplanting the League's Economic Section from Geneva to the Institute for Advanced Study. Ekbladh suggests that the economic experts and expertise housed in Geneva were—in and of themselves—so valuable so as to render their relocation worth the risk in war time. But what was the nature of that value? While the League's information channels and processing centers were indeed unique in their transnational comparative nature, they were neither "secret" nor exclusionary, and much of the data had already been published at periodic intervals.¹⁰ The fuller rationale of relocating the Economic Section to American soil cannot have been *singularly* about protecting the "data" itself.

An attempt to answer that question more fully might have included more background information into why the Institute of Advance Study become the chosen relocation site. In that vein, Ekbladh briefly refers to figures such as Albert Einstein as "exiled luminaries" (280). What goes unmentioned is the fact that Einstein was also a former member of the League's International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (I.C.I.C.), who landed in Princeton precisely to "weaponize" his proprietary knowledge of nuclear physics—speaking of plowshares into swords. By contrast, none of the esteemed economists who relocated to Princeton were in the business of bombs, nor were they even precisely in the business of economic *secrets*. What made their knowledge "valuable," according to Ekbladh, is simply that modern warfare had come to play out more and more on economic terrain and using economic weapons.¹¹

To avoid this somewhat tautological argument about "weaponized knowledge," Ekbladh might have engaged more extensively with the existing literature on the League itself. This may have provided a more fulsome answer to the League's Economic Section's transplant to the United States, especially given that the United States ultimately dismantled and then created an entirely new international organization on American soil. What is missing, then, is a more throughgoing conceptualization of the role—including the informational, and the power-knowledge dimensions—that League already played in geo-politics. For instance, Ekbladh cites my own work as contributing to a reading of the League's production and dissemination of information. My book in fact argues, however, that the League was not just a site of "expert knowledge," but a veritable multi-national media corporation, and so too, a global site for the production and counter-production of symbolic capital. I claim that to even *participate in* (or to not participate or to publicly withdraw) the League was to acquire valuable tools for broadcasting a state's (or a platform's) position or positionality on the world stage.

Population Exchange," *Journal of the History of International Law* 18:1 (2016): 120–145. There are many other sources on the question of the League's problematic relationship with the darker sides of so called "liberalism." While these subjects move away from Ekbladh's direct claims, they still are revelatory of the kinds of "knowledge" the League helped produced in the name of "liberal" policies, which, in the end, replicated forms of imperialism.

¹⁰ See the beautiful piece by Jo-Anne Pemberton, "New Worlds for Old: The League of Nations in the Age of Electricity," *Review of International Studies* 28:2 (2002): 311–336.

¹¹ A few random sources that might have strengthened the conceptualization on these points, even when not directly linked to the given episode, include: Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Thomas C. Mills, *Post-War Planning on the Periphery: Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy in South America, 1939-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); and Carl P. Parrini, *Heir to Empire: United States Economic Diplomacy, 1916-1923*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969).

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Proceeding this way, then, we might re-read the United States' initial public distance, later semi-public but non-*official* participation, and then the eventual outright absorption of the League's Economic Section, in terms of different kinds of symbolic capital. In the latter case, *signaling* the acquisition of the League's intellectual property was perhaps at least as valuable as the knowledge itself, if not more, especially after 1941. Then too, there is the fact that as the hegemonic, financial, and informational center of the world-system had been shifting westward since 1919, the branding rights on the production and certification of economic and financial knowledge were shifting westerly in turn leading up to World War Two. That shift was mostly completed by 1945, when the United States played its part in dissolving the League brand altogether, in favor of the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, etc. As I have suggested elsewhere, part of the ability to "govern the world" through the proxy of these centers came first by affixing them with a new label— *made in the USA*.¹²

With all that said, however, *Plowshares into Swords* offers us a storehouse of valuable and hitherto unexcavated materials that help us re-think certain dimension of inter-war geopolitics and the place of the League of Nations within them. While the book might have delved more deeply into the categories it mobilizes, there is no doubt that it makes a very important contribution. Above all, Ekbladh's study reveals the extent to which the League of Nations—as a knowledge project more than one of so-called collective security—remained central to American hegemonic ambitions between 1920 and 1945.

¹² See Bilotft, "Decoding the Balance Sheet: Gifts, Goodwill, and the Liquidation of the League of Nations," *Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics* 1:2 (2020): 379–404. See also the final chapter of my *A Violent Peace*.

Two distinct yet related historical currents, both fed from the same source—the search for international solutions to secure world peace—merged in the formation of the League of Nations in 1919.¹ The one was political. Championed by US President Woodrow Wilson, it called for an international organization of states to manage disputes in a parliament of nations that sought to avoid conflict while respecting national autonomy. The other was “scientific.” It drew inspiration from the proliferation of international bodies dedicated to defining the multitude of technical standards needed to hard-wire the transnational circulation of information in a globalizing world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² In 1920, the US Senate delivered a crippling body blow to Wilson’s political project. It refused to ratify a scheme that the majority saw as engaging the country in entangling alliances with European powers, and that would restrict Congress’s ability to decide foreign policy. This was just the first of a number of setbacks that undermined the political credibility of the League’s assembly of member states as an organizational framework for securing world order. However, the Senate’s rebuke not only left the League’s supplementary role as a source of technical expertise intact. It encouraged the Secretary General to institutionalize the putative distinction between science and politics to promote the League’s technical mission, in which participation was open to all non-member states, using it as a lever to enroll the US in this agenda. Liberal internationalists seized the opportunity. They used the League as an organizational platform to rebut isolationism and to build an enduring legacy of harmonized national statistical data that revealed the interconnectedness and interdependence of international society, “rendering the globe legible” (11). The political failure of the League to secure world peace and to provide collective security has dominated its historiography for decades.³ David Ekbladh’s book is a major contribution to a growing body of literature that redresses the imbalance, tracing the networks of individuals and projects that gave substance to the League’s internationally oriented technical missions, and highlighting its substantial contribution to the postwar reconstruction of a US-led democratic world order.

While the US was not a de jure member of the League, and so was uninvolved in its formal diplomatic deliberations, it played a major role de facto in shaping its technical agenda. Transnational networks of liberal activists, academics, and policymakers turned the League into a “super-university” or “think-tank,” as we might call it today, that developed a “high level of expertise on international problems,” thanks to lavish support from the Rockefeller Foundation, above all.⁴ John D. Rockefeller himself provided two million dollars for a library wing at the League’s headquarters at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, which accumulated

¹ This paragraph owes much to Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012). See also Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² Emily S. Rosenberg, *Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World: 1870 -1945* (Cambridge MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2012).

³ This is particularly so with historians and political scientists of international relations. Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, “Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of its Economic and Financial Organization,” *Contemporary European History* 14:4 (2005), 465-92, survey this situation and note that even Akira Iriye in his *Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Los Angeles Press, 2002) fails “to recognize the economic and financial dimensions of the League’s work” (468). Further references to this absence are available in Ludovic Tournès, “American Membership in the League of Nations: US Philanthropy and the Transformation of an Intergovernmental Organization into a Think Tank,” *International Politics* 55:2 (2018), 852-869.

⁴ Tournès, “American Membership in the League of Nations,” 866. See also Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

vast amounts of empirical data that provided policymakers with the tools of global governance. Initially, the focus was on social problems that called for coordinated international responses: the plight of refugees, human trafficking, the opium trade, pollution control, epidemiology, and so on. In the 1930s the Depression, and its global consequences, elevated the management of international trade to a core concern of the liberal internationalist establishment. The League's Economic and Financial Section (EFS) became "a critical part of a regime of data collection that also included national governments, domestic research institutions, and the labor of individuals" (59), who were convinced that no national economy could isolate itself from "a play of international forces in the international sphere" (58). The political mission of League in 1919 was to secure world peace in the aftermath of the horrors of the First World War. One of the major "technical" missions of the League in the 1930s was to produce the knowledge needed to inform liberal policies that would secure the standard of living and economic wellbeing of people all over the world in the aftermath of the Depression.

This step threatened to dissolve the carefully constructed boundary between disinterested scientific knowledge and engaged political action that had rationalized the League's technical mission when it was founded. The EFS turned the "plowshare of cooperation" to build a liberal international economic and political world order "into a sword of confrontation" with fascist and Communist regimes that advocated quite different 'solutions' to the economic and political chaos that marked the early 1930s (68). The US government could no longer watch from the sidelines as the succession of disasters that led to World War II slowly unfolded. "If an international system is to be restored," wrote the Australasian economist John Bell Condliffe in 1940, "it must be an American dominated system, based on a Pax Americana" (69).

The liberal international elite now had to devise a strategy to "draw the United States [government] closer, even entice it into quasi membership on the basis of technical relations" (76). The League's pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939, which is discussed in chapter 2, prepared the ground for this eventuality. It gave material substance to the notion of a shrinking world in which "human contacts increase[d]" due to modern communication and travel technologies, creating "new problems" to which "international cooperation is the only solution" (84). "No Nation Escapes Depression," one exhibit screamed (84). US Secretary of Agriculture and New Dealer Henry Wallace, who was photographed with Woodrow Wilson's widow at his side, gave his imprimatur to the agenda in a speech at the opening of the American pavilion. Prosperity in the US and worldwide depended on international trade. "We are closely associated with the whole world, whether we know it or not and whether we like it or not," he said (98). Wallace praised the League for its ambition to "create a world community, composed of free nations and free individuals living in peace and order" (98).

The challenge for the League to adapt to this new political opportunity was taken up in Geneva. A new Committee for Economic and Social Questions was established to serve as a "hub of information and knowledge that states could draw on and use for their own policies" (114). The League had redefined its role as "a service provider critical to maintenance of liberal order [...]," and the US would play a major role in it (116). The fiction that this was simply a refashioning of its technical mission to serve the needs of its member states was maintained: when the new structure was officially adopted in December 1939, the Second World War had already depleted its membership, and it expelled the Soviet Union for attacking Finland. The political consensus that subtended its new role was not contested, and dropped out of sight.

The now-blurred boundary between the technical activities and the political role of the League came back to haunt it in the summer of 1940. As first Belgium and the Netherlands, and then France, capitulated to the German onslaught, and with Britain still not dominating the skies over the Channel, there were growing fears that Switzerland's neutrality would not protect the League from being disbanded, or worse still, being taken over by the Nazis. The Reich's Minister of Economics promised that a victorious Germany would pursue its autarkic economic policies after the war that had secured its resurgence before it—installing an economic agenda in Europe that was anathema to liberal internationalists. There was widespread agreement that the

League's functions should be relocated to the United States if possible. In June 1940 a high-level meeting at Princeton University sent a "cordial invitation" to the League's (French) Secretary General, Joseph Avenol, to authorize the transfer of a vast collection of statistical material generated by the Economic and Financial Section, and some of League personnel, from Geneva to the Institute for Advanced Studies located there (148). Avenol refused, arguing that he could only do so if the "initiative were taken by one or more states" (148).

The Roosevelt administration played into his evasive tactics (there were doubts about his precise relationship to the Nazis). The American Consul General in Geneva was informed that the US could not risk the *political* costs (my emphasis) of welcoming "the technical services of an international and intergovernmental organization of which this government is not a member" (156). What is more, this would need Congressional approval—an initiative that the government was not prepared to take at the time. Ironically, it was the Vichy government that broke the deadlock: it announced that France would take no further part in the League (though remaining a member) and Avenol was ordered to resign. The next day he publicly agreed to move the EFS to the United States. The deliberate identification of the League's technical research with a liberal internationalist political agenda undermined the boundary between the technical and the political that had originally been crucial to its survival as an international organization. It also almost led to its dissolution during World War Two.

Ekbladh's book focuses on the history of United States in the League. From being a nonmember that played an important role in promoting its apolitical technical vocation—thanks to the substantial financial support provided by the Rockefeller Foundation—the US was slowly but surely drawn officially into its activities. In the wake of the Depression and the rise of fascist and Communist regimes in Europe, a "super-university" that produced a stream of highly respected technical reports on issues of global concern became a technical service that provided useful knowledge for the national authorities who devised policies that took account of the social and economic interconnection and interdependence of the world. The fragile boundary between science and politics was blurred by economic data that was infused with liberal internationalist assumptions that ran counter to the totalitarian ambitions of Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union (all of whom left or were expelled from the League). Lingering fears in Washington that the US was being dragged into "entangling alliances" by the back door were quelled by eminent political and intellectual figures at home and abroad who saw the US as the savior of the League and as the uncontested leader of a postwar democratic international system. The US would not be 'entangled' in alliances. It would shape them in its interests, the universal interests of democracy and individual freedom. Not everyone saw it that way. As Frank McDougall, an economic adviser to the Australian Prime Minister, put it, "There is a tendency [in Washington] to desire to work out American solutions to world problems and expect other countries to accept these without much demur,"—an attitude that some "highly placed people" could regard as "American interference or even American imperialism" (201).

Ekbladh's dense and detailed analysis of the League's technical history keeps very close to the documents, often making it difficult to see the wood for the trees. The title and subtitle do not help to clear the undergrowth. Plowshares and swords are introduced into the text almost in passing (see my quotation above from 68). The concept of "weaponized knowledge" in the subtitle is barely ever used and is never developed in any detail—though it is one of the most important keywords in the index, having more than a full column of subheadings attached to it. It seems to cover any knowledge-related matter that is discussed in the book, beginning in about 1940 when the League assumes the role of a technical service available to national governments dedicated to the "fight" against totalitarian regimes. This ecumenism dilutes the analytical value that these concepts could have to throw light on the mechanisms that articulate knowledge with power.

The key actors in Ekbladh's narrative are elite individuals who shared liberal international values, and who sought to engage "America" more actively in the technical missions of the League, a role that is easily

overlooked if one focuses only on its diplomatic mission. However, the book seldom mentions the attitudes of other governments to this fashioning of the League's program, and to the growing, not to say dominant, influence that the United States assumed in the 1940s. This was not universally welcomed, as McDougall's remark cited above makes clear. This absence is to be expected when one considers the archival sources that inform the narrative. The majority are papers of eminent individuals. Government papers in just one national repository (outside the US) were consulted, namely, the National Archives of Australia. The book's US-centric story of an international organization clears the way for future accounts that discuss the position taken by other countries, notably the member states, to the League's technical programs, to their politicization, and to the role of the US government that was transformed from that of a nonmember state that carefully depoliticized technical issues to that of a dominant political force in the League and its postwar successor.

Review by Stephen Macekura, Indiana University

Microfilm saved the day. As Nazi troops raced through France during May and June 1940, a crisis brewed in Geneva, Switzerland. Surrounded by territory controlled by the Axis powers, the few remaining members of the League of Nations' staff worried about one of the organization's most valuable assets left: its data. With a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, League officials hurriedly used microphotography technology to capture the volumes of economic, agricultural, and social statistics compiled by the League's Economic and Financial Section (EFS). As League officials longed for rescue—an offer from the United States to move the League across the Atlantic had yet to materialize—at least the League's extensive information and detailed analyses of global economic issues could be more easily smuggled out of the war-torn continent. And later in July, when the US government finally sanctioned the move of the EFS to the United States, League officials carried the microfilm documents through France, Spain, and Portugal before setting sail. They safely arrived, microfilm rolls in hand, to their new home in Princeton, New Jersey, a few weeks later.

David Ekbladh recounts this episode—and many other compelling anecdotes like this—in his new history of the League. The story of the microfilmed data's clandestine rescue elucidates two major themes that he explores in his book. The first is that the United States, though never formally a member of the organization, had a much richer history of engagement with the League than many historians have appreciated. The second theme explains why. In Ekbladh's telling, the League's most valuable work came not through its failed efforts to maintain the peace in Europe, but rather via its technical work related to international economic life, global public health, and agriculture. Ekbladh uses a staggering array of archival materials from former League officials, civil society groups, and national governments scattered across Europe, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand to argue that many influential American experts and government officials viewed the League's data collection as a vital component of their quest to strengthen “liberal international society” in a time of world war (2).

Ekbladh argues that although the US government's policy towards the league was inconsistent at best, a small but influential group of American citizens imbued the League with great significance and helped to sustain its work during the most harrowing times of the 1930s. US policy stemmed from American leaders' ambivalence about the League. While presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt looked askance on the League's political work, they “invested”—as many American intellectuals did—in the League's specialized, technical agencies because they believed such work “could still serve an American vision of liberalism that increasingly defined its own interests in global terms” (18). Furthermore, for a “cadre of internationalists” in American universities, government agencies, and think tanks, the League's technical work “provided a means to further the end of creating facilities for a liberal order” (19).

Americans such as the New Dealer Winfield Riefler, lawyer and administrator Raymond Fosdick, and journalist Arthur Sweetser found the League's technical work so valuable because information was a necessary component of the liberal international order they hoped to build. A liberal order based on economic interconnection and cooperative problem-solving necessitated accurate data on a scale that few existing organizations had the capacity to collect. “The goal” of such information collecting and analysis of its significance, “was to make the globe legible,” Ekbladh explains (10). In an era defined by economic depression, uncertainty about the viability of global capitalism, and the threats posed by fascism and Bolshevism challenges to liberal internationalism, understanding the world was the first step for managing it.

Ekbladh characterizes their nascent liberal internationalism as fundamentally technocratic. Resolving social, economic, and political problems such as hunger, insufficient nutrition, low agricultural yields, monetary instability, and trade disputes, as well as technical issues like how states ought to quantify national income and product accounting or measure individuals' “standard of living,” all required reliable and mutually agreed-

upon information. As Susan Pedersen and Jamie Martin have likewise demonstrated, the League's technical services provided the basis for early instances of international economic intervention into the sovereign space of nation-states that later became far more widespread through organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.¹ As Ekbladh shows, Americans fruitfully worked through and alongside the League and its staff to inform American policymaking, too.

Ekbladh intertwines his two primary, interrelated themes through four very long chapters. The first chapter establishes the myriad dimensions of the League's technical work and American internationalists' interest in it up to 1939. Chapter two focuses on the League's pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, using the internationalist pageantry of the event to reveal how American internationalists kept the League's "relevance in visions of postwar settlements" to this internationalist cadre. Chapter three provides the gripping details of the League's escape from Geneva and trip to Princeton. And the fourth chapter shows how, from their perch in Princeton, League officials and American internationalists began the process of planning relief, reconstruction, and development during the war itself. The lengthy coda at the end of the book provides revealing biographical sketches of key figures as they used what they learned from League to construct new international organizations in the post-war years. These very long chapters would have benefited from some concision (and separation into shorter chapters) in order to strengthen the narrative punch of his story. But in each, Ekbladh makes excellent use of individual anecdotes excavated from his voluminous archival research to convey his larger themes.

The stories of key individuals elucidate important continuities between the League and the post-war international organizations. One strength of the book is that Ekbladh reveals that there was a strong continuity between the international society that took shape during the high tide of the League and the post-World War II era of American hegemony. Picking up threads that Susan Pedersen and Mark Mazower have discussed, Ekbladh shows that for many individuals the League served as a formative space that affirmed the virtues of a cosmopolitan outlook and created valuable experience in international organizations that they parlayed into influential post-World War II positions.² Alexander Loveday, who directed a variety of League technical services during the early 1930s, worked for the UN in the United States before becoming the warden of Nuffield College at Oxford University. Frank McDougall, who oversaw the League's pioneering work in nutrition and agriculture, helped conceive and then construct the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). And the New Zealander John Condliffe, who authored many of the League's *World Economic Surveys*, settled into a tenured professorship at the University of California-Berkeley, from which he advised the United States government on its foreign aid policies during the early Cold War (235-243). Ekbladh wisely follows these figures each of his chapters. Their career trajectories support his argument about the extent to which the League shaped the post-1945 international order. These individuals' experiences also reveal that international society formed individuals just as much as individuals shaped international society. The League created a constituency of international civil servants who were eager to rebuild organizations and maintain social networks they had established during the most optimistic periods of the interwar years.

As for the information the League collected and studied, Ekbladh convincingly argues that his small circle of American internationalists and leaders (including, eventually, President Roosevelt) placed great significance in the League's technical work, but there is comparatively little within his book about the processes of collecting and analyzing data. He offers a few examples of how the League's analysts used and depicted data effectively,

¹ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire, and the Birth of Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

² Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *The American Historical Review* 112: 4 (Oct. 2007), 1108-1116; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 152-153.

such as John Condliffe’s influential “spider’s web” of collapsing world trade during the depression (which built on German economist Oskar Morgenstern’s diagram of Austrian and Germany’s declining exports, and which American economist Charles Kindleberger later repackaged to great acclaim, 56). But there is far less on who collected the data on which these visualizations and analysis rested and how the process of data collection came about. Who went out into the field to collect it? What surveys or other related methods did they use? And why and to what extent did the League’s technical work differ from earlier forms of private and voluntary scientific and technical cooperation, which had been a feature of international society for nearly a century?³ It is less clear why the League’s material was so valuable and how the League’s staff went about actually collecting this information. This would also have permitted Ekbladh to assess in much more detail the quality and depth of the League’s data itself, rather than just experts’ perceptions of its importance.

Attending more concertedly to the data itself would also have allowed Ekbladh to show how collecting certain types of data and implying specific types of statistical analysis might have enabled or limited the different policy choices of postwar leaders. Ekbladh’s discussion of the League’s data and its myriad uses raises questions about the relationship between information, model-building, and politics. Regarding national income accounting, for instance, Timothy Mitchell has argued that the adoption of national income in federal budgeting permitted a new politics of future-oriented forecasting. The calculation and projection of potential growth rates, for example, amounted to “a new prognostic structure in which a future was mobilized as a mode of adjudicating and managing claims in the present,” which in turn required political interventions to stabilize the collection and production (and reproduction) of only the types of information that were necessary for producing aggregates of national economic activity.⁴ Activities that were not counted and calculated—from domestic household labor to subsistence agricultural production—were consequently devalued. To what extent and in what ways did the League’s data exclude certain aspects of international economic and social activity, and to what effect? Here, too, more detail on what was collected—and what was not, and why—would have deepened Ekbladh’s analysis.

Likewise, Ekbladh’s discussion of the influence of the League’s most ardent American champions on Roosevelt and post-war planning leaves open questions about how the experience of the League shaped US visions for international order. After all, US post-war plans were not just based on an idealized rule-bound international order, where issues of trade, nutrition, and food production could be studied and coordinated by technocratic organizations. American military primacy and the capacity to project power anywhere in the world were even more foundational to the emerging postwar order. As Stephen Wertheim has recently argued, Roosevelt displayed scarce interest in international organization at the start of the war. He even rejected Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s suggestion that he include a mention of international organization in the Atlantic Charter in 1941. Yet, influenced by post-war planners in the Council on Foreign Relations and State Department, the president and other leaders came to view the United Nations as a way to grant public legitimacy to the new reality of US military primacy—which was more noticeably defined by a vast overseas network of military bases than reams of data—to a domestic audience that might reject this new approach to foreign policy.⁵ Analyzing the extent to which the League’s most ardent American supporters reconciled the realities of American power with their most lofty aspirations for a broadly liberal order could illuminate how technocratic internationalism did (or did not) support military primacy.

³ See Mazower, *Governing the World*, 94-115; Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 121-136.

⁴ Timothy Mitchell, “Economentality: How the Future Entered Government,” *Critical Inquiry* 40:4 (2014), 484.

⁵ Stephen Wertheim, “Instrumental Internationalism: The American Origins of the United Nations, 1940-1943,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 54:2 (2019), 265-283; Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020).

Ploughshares into Swords is a valuable contribution to the growing scholarship on the League of Nations.⁶ It will interest historians of US foreign relations, international organizations, and twentieth century global history, and it provides an entry point for subsequent studies into the epistemic infrastructure of international order and US hegemony over the past century.

⁶ For recent books that address various aspects of the League, see, for instance, Martin, *The Meddlers*; Pedersen, *The Guardians*; Amala Ribí Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organization 1921-1946* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009); Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022); P. Sean Morris, ed. *The League of Nations and the Development of International Law: A New Intellectual History of the Advisory Committee of Jurists* (London: Routledge, 2021); Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Response by David Ekbladh, Tufts University

Let me begin with the necessity of thanking the reviewers, Carolyn Biloft, John Krige, and Stephen Macekura, for their considered comments as well as their valuable time. The verve of Charles Maier's introduction earns him my particular appreciation. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge H-Diplo and its team of editors. On numerous occasions I have benefitted from their yeoman work. Their efforts have kept this "web 1.0" institution not merely operational but relevant in a time when substantive dialogue is so necessary in all realms of public life, including academia.

I also appreciate that the reviewers took seriously book's effort to explain how a slate of international actors—governmental, non-governmental, and international—that were committed to liberalism worked as part of an "international society" to foster international conditions they favored. Here, the book's focus on the League of Nations is more utilitarian than fundamental. It is not about the League per se, but the liberal "international society" that surrounded it and used it to further its ends. My choice of the League was merely based on the fact that as a focal point it made this collaboration visible after other histories had obscured it. A foundational point is that "technical" issues—running a gamut from communication, standardization, health, disarmament, and economics—were seen by figures at the time as critical to the maintenance of the type of international system these varied actors valued. All of these issues required information gathering. The League excelled at this, particularly in the realm of economic data collection and analysis. Its Economic Section was perhaps the best exponent of this talent, and was lauded and supported by actors internationally. Some of its most fervent allies were academics, foundations, and a stable of influential policymakers in the US. This interaction assured that foundational ideas flowed from the League to the US and from the US into the League in the interwar years. It was also why, in the critical summer of 1940, US non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the direct support of the US government, transplanted the Economic Section from Geneva to the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton. That set of exiles, leavened by a set of international figures who had worked with and through the League at other points, influenced the shape of the Allied war effort and the world that followed. But, again, this interaction and influence was less about the League than the demands of liberal order.

This story has long been glossed over or ignored in the literature, so it was heartening to see how the reviewers understand the extent to which the book is grounded in new primary research. Scholars working on topics on which historical consensus has become inertial need to delve deep into detail. In part, this is necessary because of the persistence of a narrative of US nonengagement.¹ However, this tale was partially crafted by liberal internationalists themselves during and after World War Two. Since this has now become ingrained in how historians and the public represent the period, there was a need to demonstrate the close nature of US-League collaboration at some important levels and moments. Digging deeply and internationally was also a way of getting around narratives that have ossified in US history, international history, and even international relations about the lack of US-League interaction. Even some of the new histories of the League tend to shy away from the US, with notable exceptions.² Many stories recover how other forces appreciated

¹ Recent general histories of US foreign relations generally follow this intellectual furrow. See George C. Herring, *The American Century and Beyond: U.S. Foreign Relations, 1893-2015*. 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Robert Kagan, *The Ghost at the Feast: America and the Collapse of World Order, 1900-1941* (New York: Knopf, 2023).

² An example of the new work that connects the US to the League is Ludovic Tournès, *Philanthropic Foundations at the League of Nations: An Americanized League?* (New York: Routledge, 2022). Other important works that give a fresh view of the importance of the League but underplay the US contributions to some larger global themes are Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: University Press, 2015) and Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

and shaped basic elements of global interaction before the “Pax Americana” and the Cold War. While these stories are not wrong, they unintentionally tend to recapitulate the assumption that the US, in whatever form, was either silent or not present.

Ironically, such views mirror the limitations in the historiography on US postwar planning. How the US would reshape the world of tomorrow at the pivot of the twentieth century has too often been limited to a tale of certain American elites. The trouble with the view is not that US officials did not have their own agendas, whether ambitious or pernicious (or both). They did. However, the US was not only part of an international alliance, but used the ideas that emerged from longer international debates not only to pitch its war aims, but even to conceptualize them.

This existing exchange opened the doors to other actors, particularly those from smaller states who had been quick to see international bodies like the League as a platform for projecting their thinking into global discourse. Here I happily follow a vibrant trend in recent international history. New work has a willingness to acknowledge the agency in smaller states and nongovernmental groups in the construction of key elements of the postwar world, particularly when it came to economic issues.³ However, these and other smaller actors had already proven adept at using the hub of “international society” that was represented by the League to raise the profile of their ideas and influence of particular advocates. It suggests that fresh subaltern histories that redefine some broad global themes in the postwar world as well the UN system share connection to the interwar years.⁴

Plowshares shows how a more thorough international framework not only explains how ideas moved in and out of the US, but also provides an understanding of why other peoples and states invested in a “Pax Americana,” or at least held their noses. This internationalizing of certain aspects of the story is not to suggest that Americans were innocents somehow being led around by clever outsiders. Obviously, the US had enormous power to build a postwar settlement to its own tolerances. But scholars can at times isolate scholarship too much from global currents that helped frame American ambitions, the institutions they built to execute them, and the reputations used to legitimate them.

Connected to this scholarly insulation is the way in which President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s limited interest in unified international organization early in the war has become a trope that recent work perpetuates. That is where digging for new perspectives pays dividends. Ambivalence about a general system of collective security or a big international organization is very different from a commitment to renewing an extended sinew that would support international interaction. Such assumptions mean we have overlooked the fact that, like other members of “international society,” Roosevelt saw technical activities as integral to a functioning world order for much of his career.

As a small part of its larger conclusions, *Plowshares* recovers Roosevelt’s consistent support for international technical work, which dates back into the 1920s and which he regularly restated while he was president. While this halting internationalist may not have discussed a single large organization in the early war years, Roosevelt and key figures around him appreciated the importance of international bodies to do the technical work that

³ Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021); Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁴ In terms of redefining the UN see the very interesting work emerging from The Invisible History of the United Nations and the Global South project at Leiden University, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/the-invisible-history-of-the-united-nations-and-the-global-south-invisihist#tab-1>

they saw as indispensable for liberal order. In 1942 alone, the president met with numerous international figures and discussed their agendas. Roosevelt took the advice of his wife, Eleanor, to invite the irrepressible Australian advocate and League veteran Frank McDougall to “dinner and a movie” (203). There the two discussed his ideas which would become the basis of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the first of a slew of new international technical bodies. Other significant actors inside and outside the Roosevelt administration already understood how liberal life with its thirst for reliable information to grease the wheels of global economy, facilitate cultural exchange, buttress efforts to secure public health and a slew of other issues, rested on technical services and thus understood such things had to be part of any postwar system.

Precisely because of this extensive but willy-nilly investment in a diffuse group of smaller international technical bodies during the war by the US and Allied powers, the broader question of international organization was disjointed as the war came to its conclusion. The leaders of the UN alliance quickly registered that they would need technical services to buttress their war aims, which offered rising standards of living to all among a host of other promised war aims.

This is why toward the end of the war some of the League exiles, particularly the typically restrained Englishman Alec Loveday (leader of the League exiles in Princeton), were pulling out their figurative hair. Loveday, who had worked closely with various US wartime organizations and contributed to the Council on Foreign Relations’ storied War and Peace Studies program, viewed the uncontrolled construction of a variety of international bodies to perform technical work as an administrative mess (218-219). Established narratives overlook the fact that the even the Bretton Woods organizations were conceived before the encompassing United Nations Organization was born. Loveday’s informed plea was for a broader body to house a disparate set of institutions that many parties already understood would have a basic role in a postwar world. While this sort of commitment was articulated by an exiled international civil servant, many people already grasped a larger truth: those bodies not only had to exist but needed to be coordinated. This small story gets to the importance of the sort of technical activity that the League cultivated but is was hardly the only reason that a UN Organization was built. Nevertheless, it underlines the reality that in order for liberal order to be reestablished and extended, a slate of established technical capacities would have to be installed in what were planned as its keystone institutions.

It is the relevance of these putatively technical services to the dominant issues of the period that resonate in the book. This relates to Krige’s point about greater discussion of some of the plans and analysis that emerged from work of various League exiles. These were myriad, particularly if you include various UN plans of the Allied World War Two military alliance that drew on League data and the expertise of exiled officials during the war, but that was not the goal of the book. The book seeks to draw out the vital element of the utility of technical issues to larger questions and the construction of institutions in international politics and strategy was the vital element; I was after the bigger structures into which those smaller plans were to be slotted.

Technical work was reflective as well of larger global trends and interactions. Biltoft is right that the League’s work—even its work in the escape of the exiles in 1940—was built on other sinews of interconnection from cables to ideology to aircraft. That is a reliable point, but one that could be applied to most international and global history. An aim of the book was not to recapitulate elements that other scholars—including Biltoft herself—have ably discussed. Rather, it was to show that these technical issues were not only analytical but instrumental to some of the bigger political and strategic questions Biltoft’s review alludes to and that *Plowshares* discusses. The economic research the League and related bodies did was considered among the best (and often the only) work on the subject in the world. It was so important that it was worth the investment of influential actors in US society, including the US government. This is why at the critical moment it rose to the level of political and strategic importance in the manner Biltoft rightly suggests. Splitting up the League in 1940, as the book explicitly draws out, was way to preserve working parts for the US and Allied war efforts. It

also turned out to be a means to prevent the cooptation of influential international institutions by Germany or its clients.

A focus on the larger aims of various figures and how the resonance of their ideas and research could undergird and legitimate larger political action of the book. Before the war, the economic research and analysis provided by League and related bodies fleshed out the concept of a “standard of living.” This concept offered solutions to the Depression and explicated a broad policy of economic appeasement in the 1930s that were turned into live ammunition once it became a shooting “war of ideas.” A UN victory was pitched as a means to deliver measurable improvement in the lives of peoples around the world. Measures and metrics defining the “standard of living” as well as the concept itself could be used to make war aims clear for a global audience as well as build the institutions to implement these plans. Putatively technical topics that were hammered out by a variety of international contributors found political and, again, strategic currency in a global war.

This is said while acknowledging one of Krige’s points. When discussing ways of revealing the global economy in a global depression and then a global war there are always more perspectives that could be included. Time, resources, and life span can make this easier said than done. In fact, these limits are one of the reasons that I chose the League as a hub for the book’s analysis. It dramatized some of these relationships in a manner that made much-obscured histories visible, but it is obviously not the sum of all of them. Throughout the book the reader is reminded that this is *part* of something larger. The League was undoubtedly influential within the larger pale of liberal internationalism, but its operations and example were just a *part* of that broader community. The work of exiles linked to the League clarifies how many issues and aims were analyzed and implemented during the war but is assuredly only a *fraction* of what is an enormous story.

I’ll rest on what my interlocutors praise, that by highlighting how an “international society” works there can be further inquiry into what is undoubtedly a complicated, yet rich terrain. Like all profitable scholarship, I trust *Plowshares* raises as many questions as it answers. The League archives just went online and there are innumerable other parts of liberal “international society” connected to it that are aching to be explored.⁵ However, that is only one perspective on global ferment. There is plenty of work to do on a variety of other global actors and perspectives that consider the contending “international societies” that were grouped around anti-colonialism, fascism, communism, socialism, Pan-Africanism and myriad others. Detailing all the flora of “international society” will show a much more interesting, complex, and diverse story than we have been telling ourselves up to now.

⁵ The whole of the League’s archive became fully available last year through the website of the Library and Archive website of the UN office in Geneva, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/>.