CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

International Relations was always meant to have impact.[1] That is, research under that umbrella was intended to make a difference in the world.[2] First established formally at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 1919, through the creation of an academic chair with that title, by a liberal political figure, David Davies, in the wake of the First World War, its mission was to understand the causes of war and to use that understanding to outlaw war.[3] Of course, that was a mission impossible.[4] But, it made clear the intended purpose, as with medicine, not simply to know and understand, but to improve the world, even if, as some scholars observed, there could be hidden or inadvertent, or problematic, consequences, whether in terms of race, colonialism and, or wider security practices.[5] Writing a century later, we might take on the mission to evaluate in which ways and to which extent that mission had any success — and, perhaps, as we write, someone, somewhere has no doubt taken on that grand challenge. Certainly, many examinations of a hundred years of International Relations must have been drafted, as

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[1] 'Impact is a key term in the present study. Throughout, we use it, fairly simply, to mean research making a difference' in the world. Although 'impact' is used, generally, is should be understood that this always means 'research impact' in the relevant contexts. We have tried to eschew any other use of 'impact' to avoid confusion. As a term, a subject and an agenda, it is discussed below, in this Introduction and, more fully, in Chapter 2.

[2] We wish to acknowledge the support and help and of all those mentioned in the Preface, as well as research funding from the School of Security Studies and SSPP, King's College London; AHRC-PaCCS-GCRF-'Art and Reconciliation: Conflict Culture and Community' (AH/P005365/1); and 'Art and Reconciliation', AHRC-GCRF 'Art and Reconciliation — Open Calls and the Living Museum: Innovation, Research and the History Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina' AH/S005641/1

[3] We offer a summary of International Relations, as a field, and an essential history of the creation of the Chair at Aberystwyth, below.

[4] See Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, London: Clarendon, 1979 and Revised Ed. London: Hurst and Co., 2008, for an unmatchable account of the enduring and almost ever-present phenomenon of war, and seemingly inevitable failures of attempts to end eradicate it — each attempt preceding armed conflict worse than anything that had gone before.

[5] See Duncan Bell, 'Writing the World', *International Affairs* Vol.85 No.1 2009, pp.3–22; and Robbie Shillam *et al* eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations* London: Routledge, 2015

were writing this volume.[6] But, maybe none of them would consider that original sense of making a difference in the world,[7] even if the core ambition to eliminate war might have been too unrealistic.

Moreover, as well as that historic desire to improve the world, even more, there was the increasing expectation outside research institutions — from funders, governments and publics — that some research should be having impact in the world. In the UK, impact (discussed as a concept in Chapter 2) emerged slowly in the 2000s, began to be seriously discussed around 2010, and was firmly at the centre of the agenda by 2014. Its emergence as part of a formal, bureaucratic evaluation exercise in the UK was an innovation that others would start to follow. The research impact agenda quickly came to have wide international purchase. Funding bodies in other European countries, such as Finland, Sweden,[8] the Netherlands[9] and Slovenia,[10] all came to value research impact, whether as potential set out in funding proposals, or as evidence of quality in research assessed. The notion was also introduced by the European Research Council, which sought 'customer and societal benefits.'[11] Beyond Europe, Excellence in Research for Australia innovated beyond its traditional focus on research *qua* research, evaluated by peer review, to seek to 'create and embed a culture of and expectation for research impact within Australian universities and in wider society.'[12] New Zealand also entered the 'impact' arena,[13]

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[6] The major journal *International Relations*, for example, devoted a special issue to the centenary, Vol. 33, Issue 2, 2019. Among other events, a conference in Italy including major figures in the field marked the centenary. 'International Relations at 100: The Liberal World Order and Beyond', ASERI, Uninversità Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 15 November 2019

[7] The tendency in politics and international relations has been to focus on theory and the field of enquiry, or discipline, itself. The nature of the field is discussed briefly below, but, for now, it might be sufficient to note the extent to which discourse concerns competition between different lenses, notably the dominant ones of 'realism' and 'liberalism' (although each of these had variants and alternative names, of course), and, perhaps, later notions, such as 'constructivism' and 'critical theory.' Any introduction to studying the topic will present these positions and frame study in relation to them — just one of them, as a preferred approach, or, more openly, all of them, as a selection. See, below.

[8] Gemma Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye: Impact Assessment and Academic Peer Review* Cham: PalgraveMacmillan, 2018, p.30

[9] The Netherlands' Standard Evaluation Protocol for universities, in 2015, considered 'relevance to society' of research and 'the quality, scale and relevance of contributions targeting specific economic, social or cultural target [*sic* — the authors] groups, of advisory reports for policy, of contributions to public debates, and so on.' Quoted by Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye*, p.30

[10] ARRS — The Slovenian Research Agency, for example, asks those making proposals to describe the 'potential impact achieved by the development, dissemination and use of the expected research results' and asks reviewers to judge that description in its evaluation process (www.arrs.si accessed at 29 July 2019)

[11] Quoted in Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye*, p.31

[12] Quoted in Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye*, p.30

[13] Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye*, p.70

while the US National Science Foundation had a long history of considering 'broader impacts' as a factor in its funding.[14]

It was hardly surprising that funders, often backed by governments — but, even those, not, would want to see their investments have social, economic, cultural, or some other, benefit, given increasing trends of accountability and concomitant bureaucratisation.[15] In that sense, without having a formal 'impact' agenda, not only the US government, which had an obvious interest in practical research, but also the major US foundations, all sought to fund research that would make a difference in the world. For example, the John T. and Catherine D MacArthur Foundation and its International Peace and Security Programme,[16] was committed to funding research that might affect major issues, such as nuclear deterrence, in the Cold War, whether through its research and writing fellowships, its support for doctoral and post-doctoral work through the US SSPP (Social Science and Public Policy) Program, or via its core, long-term funding to six or seven institutions. Similarly, the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment would seek to support what it viewed as positive change in the world — and would not renew funding, where there was little evidence of a difference being made.[17] The same was true of small funders, such as the US Institute of Peace,[18] or the US Congress-backed Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars,[19] with its particular focus on public policy. With the growth

[14] Quoted in Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye*, p. 70

[15] John O'Regan, and John Gray, 'The Bureaucratic Distortion of Academic Work', *Language and Intercultural Communication* Vol.18 No.5 2018, pp.533-48.

[16] See www.macfound.org/tags/peace-security/ accessed at 29 July 2019.

[17] Ford and ; https://carnegieendowment.org/programs accessed at 29 July 2019.

[18] See www.usip.org accessed at 29 July 2019.

[19] The Wilson Center is distinct from most other major funders because its work is focused at the centre in DC, providing programme and open competitive opportunities for scholars and practitioners to work in complete academic freedom on subjects of their choice, but, in the nature of the Center and those who tend to seek to work there, scholars and fellows, generally work on topics of real world influence — most notably, around the time of writing, on US-China relations, following the opening of its Kissinger Institute. For a sense of the Wilson Center's range of global thematic and regional research, see www.wilsoncenter.org/research accessed at 29 July 2019.

of the impact fashion, even smaller funders, such as the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation,[20] began to lose their traditional commitment to pure research on violence (not that it ever opposed research that made a difference).

Yet, despite the original purpose of the field, the history of funding committed to making a difference though research, and the growing external pressure in the 21st century, there was no focus on that issue, as such, among academics in the field. Our purpose is to provide that focus, for the first time. In the following pages, we seek to examine in which ways and to what extent academic research in politics and international studies has had impact, not exclusively in terms of official research assessment, but using that prism. In doing so, we also to consider what, in terms of peer review and external evaluation of research, might characterise 'world leading' research impact (issues discussed below).

The Questions: Impact in International Affairs

The point about 'world leading' research was a particular trigger for this study and the sense that, in the UK, politics and international studies, as a field, had relatively underperformed — all the more so, given the original essence of that field, in the aftermath of the 1914-1919 War – or, even, before it, in terms of the 'politics' part and the mission of APSA – the American Political Science Association, in 1903. Already, in 2008, before 'impact' had emerged formally as a factor, one prominent scholar, who went on to come a very senior university figure and was already, at that point, in leading funding council roles, bemoaned the outcome of the national evaluation process, at that point called the RAE (Research Assessment of Excellence), saying that the 'discipline had shot itself in the foot' — a view shared by many others at the annual convention of the British International Studies organisation, the professional organisation for the field, after publication of the outcomes. This meant, in essence, that the peer review panel had been too mean, or too harsh, in its assessments, in relation to others subjects, where average outcomes were higher. Politics and International studies lost out, given that these exercises determined the dispersal of Quality Research funding, so more money went to other areas. Whether this outcome was purely meanness on the part of that politics and international studies panel, or whether panels in other areas had simply been generous, the key point was that the approach of the panel had, overall, damaged the subject.

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[20] Traditionally, the Harry Frank Guggenheim gave small grants for work on 'violence, aggression and dominance' with a completely open call and no expectation of anything beyond scholarly work — though it did have an interest in research making a difference in the world, evidenced, *inter alia*, by its support for what was summarised as 'the Freedman project' at King's College London, led by Gow, which sought to appreciate the nature of Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman's combination of scholarly and policy world success, with both Freedman and the Foundation 'committed to the aspiration to use the very best research possible on conflict and violence to work for a real and beneficial difference in the world.' (James Gow and Benedict Wilkinson, 'Preface' in Benedict Wilkinson and James Gow eds., in, Benedict Wilkinson and James Gow, eds., *The Art of Creating Power: Freedman on Strategy* London: Hurst/New York: OUP, 2017. For the Foundation itself, see www.hfg.org accessed at 29 July 2019.

That trend continued in the renamed REF (Research Excellence Framework), in 2014. The research excellence exercise was conducted with four 'main panels' and various 'sub-panels' under their umbrellas. Universities (and cognate research organisations) submitted individual 'units of assessment' to the relevant sub-panels. The 'main panels' covered the broadest types of activity —although not actually labelled, the panels covered: A — Medicine; B — Science and Technology; C — Social Sciences; D — Arts and Humanities. Each of those main panels subsumed several units of assessment — of which, there were 36, in total — each with a sub-panel for evaluation of submissions. One of those 36 units was Politics and International Studies, Unit of Assessment 21, under Main Panel C.

While the discussions after 2008 might, or might not, have changed the approach of the newly constituted sub-panel, overall, in terms of its evaluation of research 'outputs' (publications), a degree of meanness appeared to be applied to the novel element in the exercise, 'impact.' As an unknown aspect of the exercise, no one could have a clear sense beforehand of that which might actually constitute 'world leading' research.[21] Many, including senior figures at our own King's College London, involved in some of the pre-REF discussions, believed that the top categories would only rarely be achieved.[22] With no benchmarks and past experience to guide, the 2014 results apparently confirmed this, with the outcome for impact seemingly about right, as some commentators judged.[23] Four universities had done very well, each gaining an average some way over 70 per cent 4*. A few others had done rather well, averaging scores in the 60s. This was not, perhaps, an unreasonable outcome, given the novelty of the exercise and the uncertainty surrounding it. But, it was also, surely a little underwhelming for a subject area with the idea of having impact at its very origin and core. This was reinforced when other UoAs' results were considered, which outperformed Politics and International Studies.

Reasons for any relative underperformance could be speculated. Impact was a new item on the agenda, so, perhaps, no one was ready for it. Yet, two factors bring this possible explanation into question. The first and most immediate is that, almost out of sight and unnoticed (see below), 111 impact case studies entered in that same REF exercise, spread across a range of subjects and disciplines in 35 submissions,

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[21] Each university's submission to a particular unit of assessment was evaluated for originality, significance and rigour, against five possible ratings: Unclassified; 1* (One Star) — nationally recognised; 2* (Two Star) — internationally recognised; 4* (Three Star) — internationally recognised; and 4* (Four Star) — world leading research. In terms of Impact assessment, the descriptors were gauged in terms of reach and significance – see Chapter 5.

[22] Thankfully, such judgements were misplaced and those of us who regarded work as likely to do well were closer to the mark — as those involved acknowledged ex post facto.

[23] Christopher R. Moran & Christopher S. Browning, 'REF impact and the discipline of politics and international studies', *British Politics* Vol.13 2018, pp.249–69

achieved 100 per cent top 4* rating for the impact parts of the submission. Secondly, as noted above, international studies was intended to make a difference and, especially, from the US, had been funded to do so, for example by the MacArthur Foundation. If anything, Politics and International Studies should have been in the forefront of successful research impact. In the end, this makes the relative failure a greater challenge to understand, which is the purpose of the book that follows.

That general sense of 'could have done better' might simply be reason to investigate further to see if that really might have been the case, in addition to the overall question of considering how well the academic field had performed, over its first century. However, a stronger one is evidence that achieving 100 per cent 4* impact was possible, which accentuated the sense of politics and international studies' underperformance. In July 2017, Dr. Steven Hill, then Director of Research Policy at the body responsible for the research excellence exercises,[24] made a presentation at an event organised by the TCCE (the Capital Cultural Exchange) on research impact and the arts,[25] which the more senior of us (already long-interested in matters of research impact) attended. Incidentally, one of his slides revealed something very interesting. An 'impact' submission in Unit of Assessment 35 had achieved 100 per cent world leading impact, the maximum rating of 4* for the whole of its submission. This ran against all expectations and assumptions, such as those heard across the span of international studies and, as already mentioned, in senior circles at our own university, that complete success was unrealistic and unachievable. Performance in Politics and International Studies, on first look, appeared to confirm the same understanding, though high performance was clearly not impossible, as Oxford was rated 84 per cent 4* and a couple of others clearly in the 70s' range. But, complete success, even for the most successful submissions was assumed to be impossible. And, yet, there, to be glimpsed in Steven Hill's presentation, was a case in the arts that gained a full score. That really cast a shadow on international affairs, a field in which research impact ought to be intrinsic. On further inspection, having broken the prejudice barrier that 100 per cent 4* would be impossible, and starting to looking around, more and more instances were found across various disciplines, that shadow became longer and stronger.

The perfect outcomes in a range of other units of assessment prompted the sense that politics and international studies seemed to have underperformed — whether that reason was the self-harm to their field of panel members, as had been believed in 2008, or simply, that the accomplishments across the

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[24] At that point, Steven Hill was Director of Research Policy at HEFCE — the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the body responsible for the REF (albeit that separate funding councils for the other constituent countries of the United Kingdom delivered the REF in their respective jurisdictions). Subsequently, he gained the new title of Director of Research, after reorganisation of research funding in the UK created a new overarching body, UKRI — UK Research and Innovation — came into being, and research in England became the responsibility of Research England.

[25] Dr. Steven Hill, 'Developing Your Research Impact'. *Hack-a-demia 2.0*, TCCE (The Capital Cultural Exchange), London, 10 July 2017.

subject area had not been consistently world-leading, at any institution. This posed serious questions about international studies. Why did the field of politics and international studies relatively underperform in terms of 'impact' in the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014? Why did no submission in the unit of assessment gain a 100 per cent 4* — that is, world-leading — impact rating? While previously, this might have been presumed to be because it was simply too difficult to achieve, as many had assumed both before and after the 2014 exercise was conducted, there was evidence from other disciplines that this presumption did not stand.

Were other subject areas better? Were the panels involved 'softer', or more self-protective of their domains? Chiefly, what were the characteristics of those full-score submissions? Were there common features to them, and how might those features be related generally to the understanding of impact, and, in particular, to impact in international affairs? These are the questions with which we are concerned in the remainder of the present volume, along with that initial enquiry: after 100 years, and given its *raison d'êtr*e, to what extent has academic research in international affairs had the real-world impact its founders hoped to achieve?

Contexts

This is a distinctive and groundbreaking study. No book, or article, has focused either on questions of impact in international affairs and politics, or on the characteristics of 4* Impact — world leading impact. The closest reference points, on impact, are the work by Mark Reed and his colleagues at Newcastle University and by Gemma Derrick, at Lancaster University, both discussed below. On the international affairs side, there is nothing comparable to that which we attempt in this volume. From these statements, it is clear, however, that there are two contexts for our analysis: international studies and research impact. In the present section, we shall briefly address these contexts, better to situate our research.

As noted already, the subject known as 'International Relations', 'International Affairs', 'International Politics', or 'International Studies' marked its centenary, in 2019. Many scholars use these terms interchangeably, though distinction can operate between them. What they all have in common is that they are concerned with matters that cross the boundaries of states — where states are qualified by the quality of 'sovereignty' (legally and politically) and mutual recognition of that status,[26] and the terms

[26] 'Sovereignty' — the fundamental concept in both international politics and international law — concerns the supreme rights not to be told by outsiders what to do within the given domain and to be able to decide on matters within that domain. States thus qualified are established by mutual recognition of possessing that qualification and enter into relations with one another in an international society, where, because of the nature of sovereignty, there is no overarching superior, as was indelibly captured in Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics,* London: Macmillan, 1977.

'nation' and 'state' are taken to be synonyms.[27] 'Affairs' is probably the most open of these terms, though 'Studies' is also quite open, but limited to scholarly observation and evaluation, in some way. By contrast, 'international' 'affairs' might also embrace any form of practice that crosses borders, or is defined by the differences between actors on different sides of borders. It allows for anything connected with life between states and across their borders. 'International Politics' is the most narrow, in the more obvious senses, because it focuses on one area of activity — albeit one that can embrace many different aspects. But, it clearly sets boundaries that distinguish it from 'International Economics', or 'International Law.'

'International Relations' is the most common and possibly most problematic of these various terms, however. It is broad enough, intrinsically, to embrace international economics and international law, as well as any other matter crossing boundaries between states. This catholic version of international relations can often be better designated with lower case, to distinguish it from the version that is largely the focus of university departments teaching and researching the discipline titled International Relations, with capitals, often, to designate its status as a noun.[28] That version, while not excluding breadth, became largely focused on theory and a concomitant tussle between different ideological views, in essence, of politics and the international world. This struggle was in place, in effect, from the very start of the study of international relations. We sketch this in the following paragraphs.

Founded by Welsh and liberal politician David Davies, as already noted, in 1919, at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, the impetus was very much to focus on peace and, with the First World War only just finishing, to conduct research on how to prevent war — indeed, with a legal aspect, to outlaw it.[29] However, the first incumbent of that chair, E.H. Carr, a great historian, especially of the Russian

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[27] The term 'nation' has two distinct uses that reflect different ideas of being 'born together.' One stems from the French Revolution and distinguishes 'people', generally, from the 'nation', those who belong together in a state. The other version concerns those born together in blood, irrespective of state-territorial circumstances, sharing common symbols and practices. See, for example, James Mayall, *Nationalism and international society*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations: 10, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[28] There are many useful introductions to international relations; for those seeking a general guide, the following can be useful, as a fairly modern and comprehensive approach: John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations*, 6th Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

[29] The University of Wales, Aberystwyth, later to be Aberystwyth University, in its own right, continued to become one of the leading places in the word for the study of International Relations. David Davies' own role was recognised with the creation of the David Davies Memorial Centre, which focused on research on diplomacy, peace and security and human rights, and its journal, *International Relations*, became one of the prominent publications in the field; originally, the Centre was based in London, close to parliament and reflecting its political roots, but, at a point of generational change, and with an appropriate sense of harmonisation, it was re-located to be hosted by Aberystwyth.

Revolution and the Soviet Union, developed a perspective on the years between the two world wars, captured in his seminal, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939*, that brought into question what he termed 'idealism' — the thinking, by those such as David Davies, that hoped to eradicate war in favour of peace, arguing effectively that it was misguided and misplaced. Instead, Carr urged the need for 'realism' — by which, he meant a focus on being realistic, on being pragmatic and on the empirical necessity of dealing with those who did not share the same 'idealist' visions for the world.[30]

That tension between 'idealism' and 'realism' permeated the study of International Relations subsequently. In contrast to Carr's 'realism' as a call for a sober sense of empirical reality, an ideological, theoretical interpretation of realism emerged. This views the world, and international politics, in particular, in terms of material self-interest and benefit, where rational actors, focus on the maximisation of power to achieve, above all else, security – that is, the security of the state, in a world defined by states in an insecure, anarchical set of relationships with each other.[31] International studies came to be dominated by theoretical debates between this realism and various opposing perspectives – idealism, liberalism (or liberal institutionalism),[32] English School thought, socialism, Marxism, 'critical' perspectives,[33] and also 'constructivist' approaches – although these are sometimes, as with Alexander Wendt's innovative introduction of the term, simply seeking to be contenders to the crown of political

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[30] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939: The Politics of Power and Security*, London: Macmillan, 1951 (originally, 1939).

[31] The father of political realism was Hans J. Morgenthau, whose work is far richer and more subtle than many assume, or give credit for – indeed, the full interpretation of Morgenthau as, in effect, a Constructivist remains to be made, although Ned Lebow has made a creditable start. See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace*, brief edition New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993; Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders*, Cambridge University Press, 2003; other major figures succeeding Morgenthau include Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1979, and John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: Norton, 2001.

[32] For a limited number of surveys of the variety of views encompassed by Liberalism, Idealism and their variants see, for example: Michael P. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997; Joshua S. Goldstein, *International Relations*, 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 1999, Ch. 3; Tim Dunne, 'Liberalism' in John Baylis and Steve Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2001; Scott Burchill, 'Liberalism' in Scott Burchill *et al.*, *Theories of International Relations*, 2nd ed. London: Palgrave, 2001.

[33] See Burchill et al., *Theories of International Relations* and Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

realism,[34] rather than using the full potential of the approach.[35] Americans dominated these theoretical debates, simply because of the scale of the academic market there and the quality of its institutions, but the English School 'international society', cosmopolitan and critical approaches are important in other parts of the world.

While these theoretical arguments were driven by differing worldviews and interpretations of how policy in the real world should be founded and directed, for the most part, the scope of this academic discourse held little relevance for practitioners. Historically, the ISA – the International Studies Association – was formed in the US in 1959 to provide a forum in which scholars and policy practitioners could come together. The scope of this organization extends beyond theoretical debates, with sections on topics such as diplomacy, communication, security, development, law and so on.[36] Yet, theoretical disputes continued to dominate and impact remained limited – indeed, being rejected as the notion of 'professionalism' grew in the 1970s. This limited impact is surprising given the origins of the discipline, already noted.

When actual research did make a difference, occasionally, it was where the policy makers were caught off guard and did not have understanding and policy in place, and required knowledge and understanding, in a hurry.[37] When called upon, that knowledge and understanding was usually highly empirical, whether biomedical assistance on Bird Flu in the 2000s, or detailed area studies knowledge, for example, of the Yugoslav lands, in the early 1990s. With the possible exception of Lawrence Freedman's *The Future of War: a History*, which indicated just how wrong many research projections turned out to be with reference to war, there has been no attempt, so far, by international affairs scholars, despite the origins of the field, to consider the extent to which research has made a difference in the world. The present study will be the first contribution in that context, as such.

The other context for the book is that of research impact. This has been a slowly emerging field, evolving from older notions of knowledge exchange, or knowledge transfer. While we devote Chapter 2 to discussing the notion of impact, it is relevant to note, at this point, the ways in which our research

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[34] Alexander Wendt, *The Social Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.xiii; see also, Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make It: the Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 46 No. 2, 1992; and Smith, 'Reflectivist and Constructivist Approaches to International Theory' in Baylis and Smith (eds), *Globalization*, Ch. 11.

[35] James Gow, 'Constructivist Realism and Necessity' in Wilkinson and Gow (eds.) *The Art of Creating Power*.

[36] For the full scope see www.isanet.org, accessed 29 November 2019

[37] Sir David Omand, 'Observations on Whitehall and Academia', in Wilkinson and Gow eds., *The Art of Creating Power*.

relates to — and significantly differs from the small amount of work by others that do, none the less, provide some context for this book. First, the pioneers of research relating to impact, who did not necessarily use that term, was focused more on the problems of understanding the distinction between dissemination of research and whether research actually made any difference. As early as 1980, Knott and Wildabsky had identified the 'dissemination problem' and sought to illustrate the important gap between presenting research findings and any actual and identified implementation of that research.[38] Similarly, as the amoebae of the impact agenda were incubating in the first decade of the 21st century, Sandra Nutley and colleagues, pursued something of that same agenda, identifying the limitations of 'knowledge transfer' in the health sector, in particular, and seeking to push beyond them, chiming with calls for 'evidence-based policy' around the time of the first government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, in the UK.[39] These were pioneering studies, but they did not address the evaluation of excellent research.

Three studies, in the wake of the UK REF exercise, where 'impact' was introduced formally as an element of evaluation, for the first time, did begin to address that evaluation agenda. The first of these was a study by Jonathan Grant and the Policy Institute at King's College London, commissioned by HEFCE, the body responsible for the REF evaluation.[40] As a first cut on the innovation of impact evaluation in REF2014, Grant and his team harvested 6,247,292 words from the 'details of impact' section of 6,679 publicly available case studies submitted as part of the exercise (some case studies were confidential and not publicly available). Using a blend of text-data mining and qualitative reading of a selection of 1,000 of the case studies (guided by the research), this study identified 60 impact topics, 3,709 discrete 'pathways to impact' and a range of beneficiaries of research around the world. However, aside from noting the use of numbers in case studies, as support (which use was so varied and specific to cases as not to be comparable), the study made no attempt to gauge the characteristics of studies and provided no evaluation of the relative quality of the cases.

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[38] J. Knott and A. Wildavsky,., 'If dissemination is the solution, what is the problem?' *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization* Vol.1 No.4, 1980.

[39] Sandra M. Nutley, Isabel Walter, and Huw Davies, *Using Evidence: How Research Can Inform Public Services*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2007; and Huw Davies, Sandra Nutley, and Isabel Walter, 'Why 'knowledge transfer' is misconceived for applied social research', *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy,* Vol.13 No.3, 2008.

[40] King's College London and Digital Science *The nature, scale and beneficiaries of research impact: An initial analysis of Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 impact case studies,* Research Report 2015/01, Prepared for the Higher Education Funding Council of England, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Scottish Funding Council, Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust, London: HEFCE, 2015

Mark Reed and his colleagues, at Newcastle University (and also Sheffield, Leeds and Northumbria) , have done most to consider the evaluative outcome of REF2014 impact case studies. This continuing research (as we write) produced articles,[41] as well as Reed's spin-off research and training company, Fast Track Impact, with its website (fasttrackimpact.com), offering guidance on 'how to achieve 4* impact.' This research has focused on discourse analysis of high-scoring and low-scoring ICSs in REF2014 — the kind of language used and the actions it describes, and the way this use of language correlates to higher, or lower, rated case studies. The focus on pathways is useful and can guide understanding of both the presentation of impact and also, likely (though not clearly established) its substance, as language is likely to reflect substance, in such an exercise. However, despite the references to '4*', or 'world-leading' impact, it is evident that the research does not distinguish between that level and the 3* one below it, and so does not address the top level, *per se*. Nor, aside from the generic sense of use of active and concrete language over more passive and vague language, does this valuable work consider the characteristics that represent quality achievement in impact.

Finally, Gemma Derrick's landmark book *The Evaluator's Eye,*[42] is a pathbreaking study of how peer and lay reviewers carried out their roles in Main Panel A (medical, health, biological, agricultural, veterinary and food sciences) for REF2014. This is a remarkable piece of social research that offers excellent insight on how panel members approached their work and interpreted issues of impact and assessment, including the ways in which group dynamics quickly led to shared understandings of that which would represent levels of achievement and particular characteristics accompanying those levels. However, while an excellent and valuable study, it does not address the elements that characterise research impact judged to represent evidence quality, nor, crucially, is there analysis of what actually was evaluated as 4*, world leading research — not, of course, Derrick's purpose, which was to focus on the social processes and issues involved in peer evaluation.

It is evident that no study of impact has either identified what constitutes highest-level, world-leading research impact, in relation to the UK research excellence exercises, or independently of it. Nor has any study on impact focused systematically on international studies — just as nothing in the realm of international affairs, until this book, has analysed the difference that research makes. Just one initiative considered the impact issue in the context of Politics and International Studies – a special issue of *British Politics*.[43] For the most part, the diverse articles in the collection considered issues of impact,

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[41] Bella Reichard, Mark S. Reed, Jenn Chubb, Ged Hall, Lucy Jowett and Alisha Peart Pathways to a top-scoring impact case study. *Palgrave Communications* (in press at the time of writing)

[42] Derrick, *The Evaluator's Eye*

[43] 'Special Issue: The Impact Agenda in British Higher Education' *British Politics*, Volume 13, Issue 3, September 2018

mainly the various difficulties surrounding it, albeit linked to the field, both broadly and in niche contexts, such as intelligence studies.[44] Just two of the articles provide assessment of the impact achieved by the field. One is the excellent survey introduction by Christophers Moran and Browning, which discusses the relative performance of the field in the first REF impact exercise, judging it to be reasonable, given the tangle of inherent problems they identify. However, they do this despite identifying the same mission to make a difference that we highlight above. Rather than gauging against the expectations that mission might create, or the correlation between that mission and outcomes achieved, instead, they interpret results against the entangling triffids they see as limiting the field's scope for impact.[45] The only article that examines impact in international studies specifically is devoted to noting that none of 43 cases studies it considers from 'top' submissions reflected a 'critical' perspective.[46] Although the article shares several of our observations about some scholars' resistance to engagement and the unsuitability of some approaches to making a difference, and urges a different approach, its core position is limited to identifying the absence of 'critical' research, rather than considering the character and quality of that which is there. None of this investigates impact itself in the field.

That investigation is our mission. The book is novel as a study of impact in international relations, as an analysis of international studies in terms of impact research, and unique, in any sense, in its inquiry into, and identification of, the characteristics of world-leading, highest calibre research's making a difference in the world, following the REF process. As such, we believe that it will be of value and interest to those working in each of these fields, as well as to many others, including those interested as what are often labelled 'beneficiaries' and those tackling the issues of research impact and presenting it for evaluation purposes, in the UK and around the world.

Scope and Methodology

The present study forms part of a continuing programme of activity evaluating and investigating the evaluation of the impact of academic research. That activity began around 2010, as 'impact' began to permeate discourse of research funders and assessors, in the UK, in particular. That addition to the lexicon spread quickly, both in the British context and internationally, infiltrating every discipline, or field of academic inquiry. It certainly ran through our own focus of research on security, conflict and justice, and the broader contexts of politics and international studies, in which we work. This study

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[44] Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman, 'Impactful scholarship in intelligence: a public policy challenge', *British Politics* Vol.13 2018, pp.374–91

[45] Moran and Browning, 'REF impact and the discipline of politics and international studies'

[46] Jan Selby, 'Critical international relations and the impact agenda', *British Politics* Vol.13 2018, pp.332–47

covers relevant research in those domains, but also, in our quest to understand the characteristics of quality and a perceived under-performance in politics and international studies, reflecting the universal in university, it stretches across the galaxy of research. The aim of the study is to evaluate impact in international affairs, in the round, in an attempt to understand the seemingly weaker-than-could-be-expected performance of politics and international studies in the formal UK septennial research accountability and evaluation exercise, in 2014. It does not focus on 2014, but builds a picture in relation to research activity and findings, and knowledge generated, in the past, over a longer timeframe. In particular, this investigation, to assist in research selection, considers investments made by funders, especially the UK research councils in the 21st century, such as the pathbreaking series of 'New Security Challenges' programmes directed by Stuart Croft, within the realm of international affairs and security, broadly. This, inevitably, is an exercise that lacks precision and involves an element of chance — identifying funded research, in the first instance, and then selecting within that collection research that relates to our field. The study we present includes analysis of research and research funding, and impact activity and potential, on this basis; but, we recognise that there are limitations to our study and that, aside from the need to be compact for a volume, such as this, there might well be gaps in our approach that have eluded us. None the less, we judge that the research and our findings hold value, despite any such lacunae.

The research covered by this study includes projects funded solely by one funder, or, in collaboration with others. In particular, we consider research funded by bodies such as the ESRC, the AHRC, DFID, the MoD and DSTL, and the FCO,[47] in the UK — the first two, research councils, the rest government departments that significantly fund, or co-fund, international-focused research. We also consider research underpinned by funding from major international sources, notably US foundations, such as Ford and MacArthur. There are two reasons for this. First, it reflects a general global trend to conduct interdisciplinary and interagency research, requiring activity that 'in partnership with other stakeholders' would produce 'a portfolio of high impact, interdisciplinary research contributing to UK security objectives', in the terms of one research funder.[48] Secondly, it facilitates our inquiry. It is not possible to examine each research project ever funded in detail — let alone those conducted without external support. Therefore it makes sense to target investigation on major investments, such as programmes co-funded by the ESRC, the AHRC, DFID, DSTL and the FCO, in particular, which gave a directed focus for relevant research. A critical mass of funding and research, therefore, was formed by these programmes and their projects — or 'investments' as the funders would term them. This emphasis is not, however, to the exclusion entirely of other research. But it does reflect economy of engagement,

[47] These acronyms are for: the Economic and Social Research Council; the Arts and Humanities Research Council; the Department for International Development; the Ministory of Defence and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory; and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

[48] *ESRC Strategic Plan 2009-14 Delivering Impact Through Social Science*, Swindon: ESRC, No Date

given the potential volume of material and the scope of our study. Beyond this, as described a little more fully in Chapter 4, for our evaluation of REF impact case studies, we have relied on the publicly available information and sets of studies as presented by REF2014, identifying both outcomes in relation to international studies and, crucially, those across the full spectrum of REF submissions, where achievement of the top-level, 'world-leading' '4*' (Four Star) evaluation was achieved.

The process of selecting material to investigate is one part of the mixed methodology adopted for the study. The variety of methods used all constitute qualitative research (aside from simple arithmetical processes, such as categorisation of projects, or counting of case studies, or processing numbers found in the research). Assessment of social science research impact – including identification of impact itself – is a problematic area, discussed later, throughout the book, but especially in Chapter 2. The use of quantitative approaches, especially to gauge 'economic impact' is particularly, if not completely prohibitively, one aspect of the difficulty. As one study for the ESRC noted 'economic evaluations are only relevant in certain circumstances' and even then 'should be applied in the context of broader qualitative assessments.'[49] The principal method adopted was empirical, critical evaluation of documents for all aspects of the research. The range of documentation included: a selection of material from REF and Research Councils; reports by researchers on projects, where available; publications and other forms of output; and official documents. In the course of our research, overall, but not for this particular study, we conducted informal consultations with a small selection of relevant people, informal conversations, and informal interviews;[50] these were conducted over many years, however, and not for the purpose of this study. We mention them, because, inevitably, these contacts inform the research in some ways, as part of our context and culture — we cannot undo our knowledge and understanding. But, they are not used directly and do not contribute substantially to the work here. In a similar vein, lesser aspects of research included observation and participation while attending events — actions and perception that help form our understanding, and which we cannot 'unlearn' or distinguish from the general understanding we have developed. In addition, internet searches were used, which did not merely identify documents, although this was surely the main achievement, but also undoubtedly influenced us through passing 'chatter' and discussion. In one part of our research, based in the School of Security Studies at King's, we used a questionnaire, but the responses to this aspect of the research were limited and make no necessary contribution to the research presented, although we, again, cannot exclude some influence for that overall process. That said, we must declare strongly that only the process of interview could bring out the most relevant material, when seeking to identify impact with investigators — questionnaires elicit only data of very

[49] *Taking Stock: A Summary of ESRC's Work to Evaluate the Impact of Research on Policy and Practice,* No Place: ESRC, February 2009, p.18

[50] Interviews involved a mixture of informal consultations, interpretive biographical and semi-structured approaches.

limited value, in that context. However, as the purpose in this project is not to tease out examples of research impact (a key activity that we undertook as part of our overall research project), but to examine top level research impact and impact evaluation, no research interviews substantively, or directly inform the study presented here, although we have used these in another context.[51]

The Book

This introduction has established the contexts for this study and posed a series of questions. These include the initial and overarching challenge: after reaching 100, to what extent did international studies fulfil a founding purpose to make a difference in the world? They also include the crucial, more focused and refined version of that question: to what extent, as it seems *prima facie*, did the field of politics and international studies relatively underperform in terms of 'impact' in the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014? Why did no submission gain a 100 per cent 4* — that is, world-leading — impact rating? And, we can add, if there was underperformance, why was this the case? The initial mission of international relations, much in the scope of research funding to the area, and the demands of evaluation exercises, all make the relative failure of the field a challenge to understand. That is the purpose of the book that follows, having posed the challenge in this first chapter.

In Chapter 2, we examine the notion of 'impact' itself. As impact has become a 'trend' in academic and policy discussions, establishing that which constitutes 'impact' has become a challenge in different contexts. There are small, perhaps subtle, differences in use of the term 'impact' between different organisations. Impact can mean the 'influence' of research or its 'effect on' an individual, a community, the development of policy, or the creation of a new product or service. It relates to the effects of research on our economic, social and cultural lives. The degree to which a change must be beneficial is, of course, debatable — especially as benefit can clearly be in the eyes of both beholders and those affected (or not). In any case, conventionally, as we set out in Chapter 3, impact can occur in four types: Conceptual; Instrumental; Capacity Building and Procedural. This typology informs the remainder of the book.

Having established an understanding of research impact and its types, in Chapter 4, we present a brief historical overview of impact in the field of international affairs. First, the chapter considers the impact question in international perspective, particularly, though not exclusively, with reference to the United States and funders providing the resources to support research and researchers focused on making differences in societies, practice and policy, in the US and globally. The second section analyses the 'impact' of British international and security research before the advent of the official institutional

[51] We would not be surprised if our experience in using questionnaires were shared by others, finding them disappointing and sometimes complicating already difficult judgements; nor would it be surprising if others found that interviews helped significantly in making those sorts of judgement.

impact agenda. This research finds that things were uneven with a few striking successes, indicating some potential for world leading outcomes in REF2014, but also disappointment and a general sense that impact had been underwhelming. In the final section, the top outcomes, in Politics and International Studies in REF2014, all somewhere short of the 100 per cent 4* levels, are discussed. The review reinforces the sense that in REF2014, Politics and International Studies underperformed.

Having reviewed the scope of research impact in international affairs and questioned performance of the sector in the UK REF exercise, we turn to the question of identifying 'world leading' research, in terms of that exercise. We do so in two ways. First, in Chapter 5, before presenting our own research, we give a critical exposition of pathfinding, insightful research on language and discourse in high-scoring (3* and 4*) ICSs in REF2014, led by Mark Reed and his Fast Track Impact team. Although this analysis does not isolate 4* ICSs and would be insufficient as a template, it provides valuable evidence of how to achieve 4* research impact, which is complementary to our own understanding, but completely different in nature and findings. Our analysis is presented in Chapters 6 and 7. The chapters present the results from a study of 111 4* Impact Case Studies (ICSs from REF2014, know certainly to have achieved the highest level. The chapters entail a unique analysis of 'world leading' (4*) research in REF2014. We judge that the consistency of features identified gives a reliable foundation for understanding what constitutes a 4* ICS. After consideration of all 111 ICSs that were judged to be 4*, 'world leading' in 2014, we conclude that 8 elements are common to known 4* research ICSs.: 1. Long-term Research and Impact Context; 2. Quality/Significant Research Funding; 3. Clear Engagement/An Embedded Role in Implementation; 4. Resource/ Financial Commitment to Impact; 5. Quotes as Evidence and Presentation; 6. Breadth/Range/Multiplicity/Cumulative Effect; 7. Creating Something New/Transformative for Beneficiaries; 8. News Media and Public Engagement. These are presented with examples in the course of the two chapters, with the first five covered in Chapter 6 and the remainder in Chapter 7.

Finally, in the Conclusion, we review the analysis presented as a whole. In the final chapter, we return to the question of the relative failure of Politics and International Studies in REF2014, in light of the analysis of 4* ICSs in Chapter 4. First, we review issues of impact and the typology introduced, including the innovative procedural impact and the significance of media and public engagement that may constitute a fourth type of impact, alongside the triad of conceptual, instrumental and capacity building identified in Chapter 2. In the second section, we summarise that which constitutes 'world leading' research impact and indicate the eight characteristics in the quest for 4*s, along with reflection on our research findings. In the final section we address 'why POLIS fails', considering the nature of the subject and forms of knowledge, as well as what might be a relative 'mean spiritedness' about the field in the past, where the discipline has been said to 'shoot itself in the foot.'