The Press, Public Opinion, and the Foreign Office: Developing the Bosnian Crisis of 1908

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Whalen Symposium Abstract

1. Background:

While there are myriad works on the origins of the First World War, there are relatively few English language works on the Bosnian Crisis of 1908 itself, and the majority of those that exist are dated. Likewise, there are works exploring the relationship between the British government and media, but few that are directly about that relationship during the Bosnian Crisis. Those that do deal with the Bosnian Crisis and the British response are not exhaustive, and typically only include the Crisis as one of several Balkan crises on the road to 1914. The Bosnian Crisis of 1908 provides an excellent case study in the interaction between the British Foreign Office and the press, particularly the *Times of London*. My approach to the issue is new in that I provide an overview of the Crisis itself, based on primary and secondary sources, as well as accounts from both the British Foreign Office, and *Times* correspondents, to offer a holistic view of British participation in the early weeks of the Crisis.

2. Methods:

I began my honors thesis project in the fall of 2015, starting with initial secondary source research on the Habsburg Empire, specifically what Anglophone perceptions of it were, and a historiographical essay on historians A. J. P. Taylor and R. W. Seton-Watson. In the summer of 2016, I was awarded an H&S Summer Scholarship, which I utilized to gather primary sources. I used two broad sets of sources: the archives of the *Times of London* found on microfilm and online, and the Foreign Office Records found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom. I was provided additional funding through the H&S Dean’s Office to travel to London to gather the Foreign Office sources. In the fall of 2016, I read and took notes on the sources, as well as wrote the initial draft of the project. My guiding question was: what effect did the media have on Foreign Office policymaking during the Bosnian Crisis?

3. Results:

My results were not what I initially expected, as the influence I thought would be there was not. However, upon additional research, I found a far more interesting answer to my question. Throughout the research process, my two main sources: Edward Goschen, the British Ambassador to Austria-Hungary, and Henry Wickham Steed, the *Times* correspondent in Vienna, both mentioned receiving information from unnamed sources. I eventually found a reference in an article that suspected that they were, indeed, each other’s sources. This is critical in understanding the relationship between the press and Foreign Office during the crisis, as they were both dependent on one another for information, and developed a symbiotic relationship due to that fact. Steed needed to know what the government was thinking and planning, so he could write about it and better understand the crisis, and Goschen needed Steed to better gauge the mood of the Austrian press and public.

4. Discussion and Conclusions:
Over the course of my project, due to political changes, it developed a significance that it did not quite have at its beginning. As tensions between the media and government in the United States continue to develop, understanding the history of media-government relations, their nature, and how they operate during crises has become more pertinent than ever. With trust between the two entities lacking, yet with media still dependent on governments for information, my exploration of their relationship in 1908 Britain can help to understand such relationships in today’s world. In particular, my research raises the question of: if the media and government develop a dependency on each other for their own purposes, in actuality, how free is the press?

5. Bibliography

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