

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL_MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

**Name: HOWARD MICHAEL_MICHAEL HOWARD WITH
BRIAN BOND LONDON_MONO 1&2 PAL METAL TAPE HI
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S1

09:59:26:07

The subject of this interview. Professor Sir Michael Howard was born in 1922, educated at Wellington College and Christchurch, Oxford. His studies were interrupted by war service with the Coldstream Guards and he won military cross in Italy and was also wounded. He is held for university chairs at King's College, London, two at Oxford and finally at Yale and has recently retired, which will be discussing his publications later. So suffice it to say that he has done more than any other individual in the English speaking world to foster military history and war studies. I met Michael first in 1959 through the good offices of Sir Basil, Little Hart. I did my postgraduate research with him at King's College London and was recruited by him to the department in 1966. We have cooperated on various projects since then. Looking back, Michael, it may seem obvious to other people that you were born to be a military historian, but I think things didn't work out quite so simply as that. No, it was as with so many people's careers, it was a result of pure accident. My speciality at Oxford, where I studied under Hugh Trevor Roper and Keith Fling at Christchurch, was early modern English history, and I was recruited as an assistant lecturer at King's College London in 1947 to do precisely that. However, before I joined the staff at King's College, I had produced a work of military history, which was the war history of the regiment in which I served. I was recruited to do that by the regimental authorities because I was a historian and I was at the time to lose end. And that gave me a certain interest in the writing of military history, a certain interest in military affairs. But nonetheless, I went back to being, as I thought, a straightforward English constitutional historian. But a few years later, in 1953, the University of London decided that they wanted to revive a obsolete or defunct post in military history, which had existed in military studies which had existed before the war. And they decided that rather than getting some immensely distinguished retired soldier to do it, which was what

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

had been the habit up till then, they would find what was hopefully a promising academic who showed a certain amount of interest and and invite him to develop the subject. At the time, my research had run very much into into the soil. I was lost interest rather, in what I was doing. And this was, I thought, a marvellous opportunity to develop a new subject virtually from scratch. And I jumped at it and never regretted it. And of course, I remember days shortly after that, that military history then was.

S2

10:02:23:05

Still.

S1

10:02:25:14

Rather popular in universities, but there wasn't a great deal of it being taught compared with now. And it really has become a a growth industry. So obviously you were in at the very well start. It was then what one would now call operational history, almost pure and pure and simple. Yes. The history of armed forces in war and the conduct of war. And I began at a time when, as a result of the Second World War experience, it was generally realised that it was a great deal more than that. And the senior authorities at the University of London who are responsible for setting up this chair, among them Sir Charles Webster, diplomatic historian Lionel Robbins, and economist Keith Hancock, the official historian of the British Economy at War, got hold of me and said, What we want you to do is to develop the study of war in the round. By all means focus upon military affairs. But we do want you to realise there's a lot else to it involved. And with their sage advice, I then did broaden my sights fairly considerably and changed the subject. The title of the subject from military studies to war studies, which I'm glad to say it still is the department of which you are teaching. Yes. Over the years we've had 1 or 2 crises when.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN
S3 10:03:48:01

Wars seem to be very unpopular with certain elements in the universities, and there was talk of changing it to some euphemistic title. But I'm very glad to say I agree with you that we do study war and that's what we should call ourselves, being ashamed of it. If we could go back a little to your student days at university, most of us are a great deal to some inspiration, some individuals who have. Really started us on the path. I wonder if you care to reflect on on your time at Oxford in that context.

S1 10:04:19:11

Well, I was set on the path of history itself at a very, very early age. I want I'd always wanted to be a historian. I can't remember particularly why, but I remember at the age of about 6 or 7, I wrote a short play about the execution of Charles the first. Um, I was, however, at school I was taught by 1 or 2 superb masters who really whetted my appetite at Oxford. As I said, Keith finding that the the Nestor of 17th century historians as Dan was, and his pupil have a roper who took me on who I think was a person I was closest to in my earlier, earlier years. He was always enormously kind and and supportive through really difficult years. And he taught me what I think is one of the most important things in historians, how important it is to write good English, how important it is to be readable, to write reasonably elegantly so that people enjoy what they're reading. I think he.

S3 10:05:27:01

Was a splendid model. Still is, of course, in terms of his lecturing and his writing and without flattering you at all. I think this is one of your very great assets that all you write is extremely readable and this is something that is so often lost to view, I think, with with researchers who are very good scholars but really don't put over their ideas in such a way as to interest the wider public as distinct from a few specialists who have to read what they've written.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1 10:05:52:12

Well, I also, I suppose, learn to write because I started in, I would say, journalism. Exactly. The book review. Yes. Again, at a fairly early stage.

S3 10:06:03:08

A very important discipline, a.

S1 10:06:04:17

Very important discipline. And when I began war, memoirs were starting to pour out. Week. You'd flood. Yes. And a friend of mine, somebody who taught me at Wellington, Cuthbert Worsley, who was then literary editor of The New Statesman.

S3 10:06:20:17

C.S. Worsley Yeah, that's right.

S1 10:06:22:12

And he was utterly bored with the idea of military affairs and was delighted to find somebody who. The books. Yeah. And I started reviewing for The Statesman. They went on to review The Observer and went on to review for the Sunday Times until eventually I was really writing a review a week. Yes.

S3 10:06:38:12

It can be rather stultifying.

S1 10:06:40:10

It can be certified. It is good for you.

S3 10:06:43:04

Yes, it makes you very quickly. It makes you.

S1 10:06:45:06

Want to read the books.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:06:46:09

You mentioned earlier that you didn't take a doctorate. You did a little research, but formally it didn't lead to higher research degree. But I think you would say that your equivalent in research and writing really made your name was your study of the Franco-Prussian War, which won the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize in 1961. Tell me how you came to tackle that subject and really what it meant to you in the broader context of your development.

S1

10:07:13:00

Well, you're quite right. I didn't take a doctorate. I was the last generation of scholars who was able to get a university post without the meal ticket of the doctorate.

S3

10:07:23:17

It was me to you.

S1

10:07:25:16

I'm glad to say.

S3

10:07:27:04

Hangover from it.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:07:28:05

Yes. And the first thing that I had to do when I went to London was to start lecturing on subjects utterly remote or at least fairly remote. From my own interest, I was put on to lecturing about European history from 1750 to 1914. Not, not not English history at the beginning of the Civil War. Yeah. So the research which I was starting to hinge was on certain certain individuals in the long Parliament was put on hold when, while I gained a thorough mastery so far as possible of European history in the 18th and 19th centuries, which I found on the whole a great deal more interesting. Then I was briefed to become a military historian, and I was a little doubtful where I would begin or rather where I would end. Should I focus upon the Napoleonic period or on the 20th century or what? And so I decided to choose something in between the Franco-Prussian War, which I think I can say at that stage was not regarded as very a very serious war, but seemed to me to be the the saddle point between pivotal point in the.

S3

10:08:40:09

19th century.

S1

10:08:41:04

Between 18th century warfare, which reached its apogee in Napoleon war and the sort of craftsman's and industrial.

S3

10:08:50:23

Yes, indeed.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN
S1 **10:08:51:14**

And by examining the way in which the Franco-Prussian War was fought, I thought I'd be able to see how and why the conduct of war change. But I discovered it did a great deal more than that. It taught me the importance of civil military relations. The relationship between Bismarck and Moscow. And at that moment, Gordon Craig had produced his superb book on the politics of the Prussian Army, which had an enormously important influence. Sure. The importance also of culture and war, the difference between culture of the French elites and the culture of the Prussian elites. Sure. The impact of technology on warfare. The the element of popular participation, conscription, volunteers, everything in a way was there. And it was it provided for me, as you're quite rightly say, the kind of taproot which somebody else's thesis might do. But it was a taproot which broadened out into so many other subjects that I barely really knew where I was going to go from there. Now, if I been left to myself, I would probably then have cloud on to 1914, looking at the way in which military affairs developed during that period. Yes. As it was, I wasn't even myself. I was asked by Sir James Butler to take on a volume in the official history of World War Two. And I then found myself plunged into archival research of the of the British conduct of the war. And that got me interested in World War Two. And in Britain and the British conduct of the war and civil military relations as well. Shall I go on as well? No, I think we might.

S3 **10:10:38:24**

Come back to and I said, I think we should come back to your work on the two official history volumes that you did in a broader context later. But I think we should come to the big name of Clausewitz, the presiding genius of our field of study. I think he's been a big influence in your in your career. I'd like to to ask how you first encountered him. I think that's implicit in what you said a moment ago. But to add, what particularly interested you when you first came across his great work?

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:11:09:00

Well, I was put on the man who told me a better read. Clausewitz was the then professor of history of war at Oxford. Yes, he said two books, which I ought to read. One was the recently appeared collection of essays by Edward Mead. Earl Baker, which was enormous. Yes.

S3

10:11:29:07

A classic. Yes.

S1

10:11:30:21

Yes. Showed one the rage one had to cover. And he said, Well, you better read this. And I thought I better, which I. I did with great reluctance.

S3

10:11:39:10

You read it. You read him. If I may interrupt you in the the three volume I read three.

S1

10:11:43:21

Three.

S3

10:11:44:12

We'll come to that.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:11:45:22

Which was not the most scintillating translation. And I, I very rapidly saw the point where there are so many, many point placements. But the point which grabbed me particularly was what he had to say about friction in war. What in the Army, as you know, and got to know as Murphy's Law, if anything can go wrong, it will and I never seen that idea expressed in highly intellectual form as it was there. And my brief experience of war had convinced me that this was really the essence of war. It was utter total confusion, everything going on. And he seized on this as being the really significant point about much more significant, I think, really, than his famous thing about war being an essential part.

S3

10:12:41:24

Yes.

S1

10:12:43:13

And so I realized she has a man who really knows what he is writing about and is worth studying. Yes. And started making him the focus of my teaching achievements. Um, now with you, one of my first graduate students was Peter Perry.

S3

10:13:00:10

Indeed, yes.

S1

10:13:01:24

And Peter went back to Princeton and interested Princeton University press in the idea of doing a complete edition of all Clausewitz's Works, which never actually happened. But they did ask me to undertake the translation of On war itself, and that occupied 4 or 5 best years of my life. And the thing which I think is probably I'm proudest of having done was people are going to read go on reading that long after that. And this was a true joint.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:13:29:16

Effort with Peter Parry. His a very interesting collaboration, I think. I think you would concede that Peter is in a sense, the great one of the great scholars, whereas your range has been.

S1

10:13:40:09

He has been.

S3

10:13:40:24

Wider.

S1

10:13:41:22

He has lived with Clausewitz and his his his great book and Clausewitz in the stage, wonderful piece of work. And in the translation I my knowledge of German is run of the mill. His knowledge of German is superb and the way in which we handled it was that he would translate from the German say, if this is roughly what it means to English, and I would then try to put it into reasonably elegant and concise. Well, I think thousands.

S3

10:14:06:12

Of readers, maybe more than that, are very grateful to you for that. And perhaps it would leave me to ask. I think it's fairly clear that your translation does now hold the field and sold pretty well. This means that people must be reading it somewhere and one wonders who they are and what it is that they're getting from.

S1

10:14:22:15

Well, I'm delighted to say they are. I still get a fairly handsome royalty. Yeah. As to persevere every year, but. And the people who are reading it are mainly up till now have been officers in the United States armed forces.

S3

10:14:35:20

Lessen our forces. I rather suspect.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:14:38:04

Less in our forces.

S3

10:14:39:15

They need a praise.

S1

10:14:40:11

I think that officers in our forces read a great deal. I think they.

S3

10:14:44:23

Need a ten page pre-civil war. I think really well, that's another matter.

S1

10:14:49:22

When they're good, they're very, very good. When they're learning, they're very, very learned. But in the United States, which really does take military education extremely seriously, yeah, Clausewitz is absolutely at the center of all their studies. And one can see the degree it is if one examines some of the statements in the philosophy of General Colin Powell, both at the time of the Gulf War and at the time of his refusal to get involved in Boston. It constantly is quoting classics and saying war is the instrument of policy. What is the policy that Clausewitz said? Nobody, nobody goes to war or nobody in their senses go to war unless they know what they mean to achieve by it. And Colin Powell turning around to the White House and say, what am I meant to achieve by this?

S3

10:15:34:12

Yes, I'm afraid, as you would surely agree, there's a great deal in Clausewitz that one can grab at, you know, for for of public statements. And Colin Powell also the other evening was quoting the decisive element in the clouds, a bit stressed the decisive battle which was rather alarming as a Bosnia. This is another story, I think, but decisive battle through airpower in such a situation is.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1 **10:15:59:00**

Well, another fascinating thing about Clausewitz is the way in which different generations. Exactly.

S3 **10:16:03:12**

We're going to ask.

S1 **10:16:05:11**

Yes. Yes. That the Germans at the beginning of the 19th century saw him as a great apostle of violence and of battle and willpower.

S3 **10:16:14:14**

Will arrive.

S1 **10:16:15:05**

Precisely which is within Clausewitz, became a rather hate figure for British liberal historians like our own mentor, Basil Little Heart already said My cousin was the Mardy of Mass.

S3 **10:16:26:17**

I'm afraid. Despite your work in Peter Parry and others, Clausewitz is one of those great figures who will always be quoted either out of context or quoted glibly by people who haven't really. At him at all. But. Is this something we have.

S1 **10:16:39:20**

To say so come to?

S3 **10:16:42:11**

Indeed. Yeah. So.

S1 **10:16:44:15**

Anyway.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:16:45:08

I've often thought of you as a clause of it's. And now, of course, that's a label. And no one likes to have a label attached to them. But I wonder if you would broadly go along with that.

S1

10:16:55:02

I don't know what it means. If it means that I believe in violence now, if it means that, if it means that I believe that violence, if it is used at all, should be used very, very carefully controlled by the political leaders. Yes. Um.

S3

10:17:12:11

Well, for me interrupt.

S1

10:17:13:11

I was thinking to.

S3

10:17:15:02

The view that international relations, inter-state relations are still very tenuous. They are still motivated by friction. War is a possibility. We know there are parts of the world where conventional war is very unlikely to occur, but that the world is still a harsh place. I think that I have in mind your inaugural, I think it was in London. We talked about the causes of war. And I thought this was a very Clausewitz in the view that the world is still a very harsh place where we should be aware of not letting our weapons rust.

S1

10:17:46:15

I think I would say I was a Hobbesian. Yes.

S3

10:17:49:13

It's even darker.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:17:51:22

I think we are still, I'm afraid, in a state of nature. Yes. If we're not very careful, life is nice and sword one has got to organize oneself in that in that awareness.

S3

10:18:03:22

Indeed. I think we should not have time to discuss all your books in detail. I think that would be a bit of a plod through a large list, but I know that several of them have either been commissioned for a particular purpose or have resulted from distinguished Lecture series, the Ford Lectures at Oxford and so on. And if we could leave aside for the moment the official history, which we might come on to in a moment, would you care to say which of the others you're most satisfied with or proud of, if that's the right term?

S1

10:18:36:02

Uh, the one which. Oh, heavens. The one I'm dissatisfied with was the continental commitment, which I should have devoted a great. They were my Ford Lectures. Yes. And most people who give four lectures very sensibly wait for 4 or 5 years and write them up and make them into much bigger books. I didn't I think that it would have been quite a good book if I had given myself the time thoroughly to research it as it was. It was too much of a quickie, but it has been useful. The same applies to the the Trevelyan lectures for the liberal conscience. Yes. Which was, I think, what I enjoyed doing most because that was marrying two of my great interests, one, one political thought, and the other the nature and conduct of war. And Trevelyan being a liberal, be a military history buff, because the the obvious focus for that now that again was a scamper through the attitudes towards war from Erasmus to AJP Taylor or to E.P. Thompson for I, which I found very enjoyable, which I think was quite useful. But again, I ought to have got my head down and done a lot more serious heavy work on it.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3 10:20:02:00

On the other hand, you could say that these very stimulating surveys have left scope for other well, they more dogged researchers. And I.

S1 10:20:09:17

Thought to.

S3 10:20:10:12

Chip away at I think it probably.

S1 10:20:11:24

Gets people who get some interesting which.

S3 10:20:15:00

Leaves some room for research students and so on.

S1 10:20:17:16

I think the thing which I'm probably proudest of, well, the thing that I saw is Franco-Prussian War, which I do enormously and which I reread with great pleasure. I think I got a genius I had then. I would never be able to do that again. But it's nice.

S3 10:20:29:23

To read something you've written a long time ago and think that's pretty good, or could I do that now? But the war in European history.

S1 10:20:38:02

Which still sells extremely well and it was a very, very difficult that was the most difficult.

S3 10:20:46:21

Yes. To compress such a great sweep into a very small span.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:20:51:01

But it has been translated into the most extraordinary languages. Yes. And and and still is, I think, read fairly widely.

S3

10:20:59:02

We hope there won't be an additional chapter necessary for that. Won't be by me. No. Well, I mean, the war would have priced itself out in Western Europe, if not in other parts of Western Europe.

S1

10:21:09:20

How far west, How quiet?

S3

10:21:11:20

If we could just go back for a moment to the book on the liberal conscience. I think you're particularly proud of that, and justifiably so. A colleague the other day, without being prompted, said he thought that was the most. Books is very, very interesting. You know, I met you. You really came from the sort of liberal, middle, upper middle class families around the late 1930, 20th century, very much espoused the views that really you examine there, the views that with the spread of trade and goodwill, better international cooperation with a moral injection of moral righteousness, international affairs could somehow be better. But then then the military historian in you and the man who's fought in the war would perhaps tell you that that it doesn't work out.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:22:00:16

The events of the world shows you that. No, you're quite right. I mean, my, my, my, my my father's family were of Quaker origin. And I had a lot of old Quaker aunts who were absolutely appalled by joining the Army. And from that side of the family, I did have this ironist called divide approach. Yeah, my mother's family were German Jewish immigrants who were born into this sort of wealthy international bourgeoisie who did believe that the world was getting better as that as, as as wealth increased. So international community was was growing. And that combination did make me a natural liberal with which I am still still a natural liberal. I mean, I have it, which is why I had such problems about dealing with the campaign for nuclear disarmament.

S3

10:22:48:07

Yes, we might come to that.

S1

10:22:49:10

Sympathies entirely on their side. I mean, my emotions on my side, I mean, my culture is by my side if won. But alas, as you say.

S3

10:23:01:09

This is where clause of it, I think comes in and Hobbs and and tells you the.

S1

10:23:05:21

Realist school of International relations.

S3

10:23:08:02

But it's remarkable how the liberal conscience has really continued to flourish since the First World War was a terrible knock to international cooperation. But then again in the 20s, the quest for disarmament, faith in the League of Nations. But even today, there's a sort of moral issues, I think, whether you said, but a moral itch to reform the world, which can have a noble in sentiment can lead to rather disastrous. Well, I was thinking of various trouble spots in the world. Yes, indeed, exactly.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1 **10:23:41:20**

But I think the itch to reform the world is highly desirable and necessary. And that I think that I'd say rather than Clausewitz and I'm a content that I'm believing in conflict as a layer somehow built into the system because of the the rotten wood, the warped timbers that were made of, but nonetheless believing that one is going on through these struggles to a sort of higher levels.

S3 **10:24:09:18**

It's useful if the desire to put the world straight is also allied to the capacity to do it rather than.

S1 **10:24:17:02**

Working of the limits.

S3 **10:24:19:24**

Absolutely important. I think we're moving on there to something I'm very interested to ask you, and that's the the broader attitudes and beliefs that permeate your work. I think to some extent you've just been talking about that, But I think it will strike the reader that you've kept clear of any party affiliation. You have no no party label. You occasionally appear to be tough minded, as I mentioned in your In Order in London about the causes of war, but I think never militaristic in the sense of saying that war was a good thing. The general tone of your work, I think, is analytical, judicious rather than prescriptive. Does that all seem fair?

S1 **10:25:01:15**

Description It sounds very, very kind. I think I characterize myself by saying that I have great respect and sympathy for the people irrespective of party who have responsibility for doing things. Yes. Yes. This, I think, is not always the view of the case with academics that I have admiration for, functional for civil servants, for diplomats or soldiers, for generals, for politicians who do bear these crushing responsibilities.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:25:37:03

Yeah.

S1

10:25:37:12

And if they do, on certain occasions I have been asked to help or advise over particular issues. Yes. Denis Healey, for example, invited me to help over military education and military education. I just related to that, the word occasions when, astonishingly, Mrs. Thatcher, as she then was invited, my advice known to be an admirer of your work, and I was absolutely happy and pleased to give it. Yes, whoever they were, if these are people with terrifying responsibilities and if I can help them, I'm only to to glad to do it now. I don't I don't think that that is a party affiliation, but I think it does mean that I respect people who have the burden.

S3

10:26:22:21

Yes. The more critical word you said I was kind, but more critical word would be that you're an establishment figure. You're not an iconoclast.

S1

10:26:29:20

I would not deny that. That I have always worked as were from within inside the establishment. Yes. And it's partly my my upbringing, the school I went to, the university. I went to the regiment. I went into everything. I am what I am. Yes. And I am not an outside iconoclast. Sort of like.

S3

10:26:50:10

Radical.

S1

10:26:51:12

Radical like like like E.P. Thompson genuinely was quite honorable, honest man. Yeah. And like, Alan Taylor tried to be and pretended that he was, although I think.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:27:02:16

Radical or radical conservative. You're more conservative with a small C, I think yes.

S1

10:27:07:23

I again, I don't like these part of these parties.

S3

10:27:11:01

Well, this is not a I mean, this is a conservative with a very small C of someone who on the whole sees how things have worked.

S1

10:27:18:01

And I think conscious of the limits to what can be done. Yes, indeed. The more one examines the state of the world and the way in which the world has always worked. Yes.

S3

10:27:28:24

You mentioned just now the work you did for military education. Yes. Howard, English inquiry, which fell on stony ground. I think we need to do that today particularly. But you did a survey of the structure of the Ministry of Defence, which did lead to more constructive and rather large scale changes. I think you did. You've been involved in other could call them public or official organisations. You were in at the start of the International Institute for Strategic Studies and found a member of that I think. And as we mentioned in passing, you've been involved in two official history volumes. One of the grand strategy volumes on 1942 43 and the volume of deception in the Intelligence series. We won't go into all the details of these unless you particularly want to. But what I wanted to ask you was clearly in some ways, these have been a distraction from writing more substantial works of history. But on the positive side, I imagine they've given you insights into the working of the official mind, the problems of telling the truth. Even in a democracy, the limits of what can be published and so on. So probably the pluses might be more than the minuses in the in the long run, do you think? Well, I think so.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:28:41:12

I mean, I very much doubt whether I would have written any more substantial works if.

S3

10:28:45:24

I.

S1

10:28:46:11

Hadn't done that. But yes, it showed me how government worked, which was the difficulty of getting.

S3

10:28:57:14

Things through the apparatus. You might have a good idea, but how do you get it?

S1

10:29:01:17

Implement the levels at which decisions get taken. The comparatively limited influence of apparently great men. Yes. One of the things which I did discover in writing the the official history of grand strategy was the extent to which Churchill, who was believed to actually formulated strategy with his out of his own head, did not that he was really quite often putting his chop on a strategy which had been worked out by his military advisers, quite often at a fairly low level. Yes. And ideas seeping upwards. Yes. And then Churchill occasionally coming forward with with with his own idiosyncratic concepts. And the conflict between his ideas. And the idea is coming up with almost always the ideas coming up was actually one.

S3

10:29:53:13

Yes. This is where there tends to be a gap between the serious scholar who was really looked into the archives and how decisions are made or into the workings of them first hand. And the more popular writer who tends to just label all the decisions, good or ill and usually ill of Churchillian. Well, we get the I mean.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:30:12:14

This is where documentary research really is absolutely essential. Yes.

S3

10:30:15:24

And the knowledge that you acquired through working in the Cabinet office and seeing how you were actually. I think it's quite a small step from that question to the fact that you've been a regular commentator on on current international affairs, particularly with the strategic element. But not only that, and of course you've lived through the Cold War on that subject. I think you're always skeptical of the utility of nuclear weapons. Indeed, you engage in a public debate with someone who seemed to argue that nuclear war, if it came, could actually be won. You strongly disagreed with that, but you've been equally skeptical and wary of the goal, which some idealists have said of complete disarmament and a very strong expose of the perils of a disarmed world. I think you've urged restraint on both extreme views. Is fighting a nuclear war or aiming for complete disarmament? And I think if I had to draw a moral from your writings, lectures and so on about the nuclear era, which I hope is behind us, hope is that a nuclear war was not inevitable, so many, Jeremiah said, and that things might improve as on this level at least they have done, I think, in the last few years. And I wonder, I think it may be a fairly obvious question, but whether being historian and a commentator on current affairs seemed to mesh together quite well in the sense of history, enable you to take perhaps a more informed but also a more detached view of crises as they occur.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:31:54:00

Well, I was able to turn from one to the other without any real sense of changing gears. Almost the moment that I was appointed to the lectureship in military in military studies in 1953, the first nuclear weapon, first thermonuclear weapons were exploded. And I then found myself being asked from people in Fleet Street just down the road from King's. They did they they discovered that there was a new lecturer in military history. He must know about nuclear weapons. And they rang me up, asked me I didn't know any more than they did, but I had to find out. And I thus found myself one of the first people. One of the first were gurus, yes, on this matter and rapidly made contact with the American specialists in the field. And and all my thinking and talking with them did evolve. I suppose a certain attitude, as you have described it, certainly never, never, never thinking of nuclear war as being inevitable. Inevitability is not a historic concept. One shouldn't use the word at all and shouldn't use it at all.

S3

10:33:01:15

We don't know because it's happened.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:33:03:04

But I think two things affected my view. One was that I did believe that we were dealing in the Soviet Union with a fairly ruthless power, which did not have any kind of inhibitions about the utility of any kind of power to protect its interests and to advance them, possibly no worse than anybody had been in the past us in the 18th century, if you like. Not very much better. But one could not pretend they were not there and got to be dealt with. That. Secondly, the the clouds of its and Murphy's Law and the appalling danger of things going wrong. And what used to worry me very much, talking to people who really did know about the planning for the use of nuclear weapons was their total ignorance. Yes. Of their of this factor of the contingent, the contingent factor of excellent. And this, again, is something that a historian has always been conscious of the partridge accident and foresees. Yes. And and the failure to include in their plans any kind of provision. Yeah. And I was always very conscious of the danger of. Against. I won't say accidental war because wars aren't accidental, but the things going wrong once war did begin, the uncontrollable.

S3

10:34:27:22

I suspect or sense that there was a moral interest in all this too. It wasn't just the detached historian that you felt concern about the threat of nuclear war. I wonder if your involvement in this was to some extent motivated by religious faith, or was that something quite, quite separate?

S1

10:34:47:18

Well, I suppose it might be. I am a committed Christian, yes. And a member of Body for Christian approaches for arms control and have had to try to reconcile rarely ever since how to listen to Christianity with with the conduct of war, whether you care or any other. It is a dimension which is there which I cannot totally exclude. And I've always been a little impatient with other Christians like Bruce Kent, where possible. He said, Oh no, I am a Christian because I believe that nuclear war is bad.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:35:25:11

Christians must be always bad.

S1

10:35:28:21

I mean, the one thing that the history of Christianity does show is that it is possible to be a Christian and hold all kinds of appalling.

S3

10:35:38:02

Yes.

S1

10:35:38:18

Appalling. Yeah. Of liberals and so many of beliefs which now are thought to be Christian are in fact simply liberal beliefs.

S3

10:35:47:14

Yes. Yes.

S1

10:35:48:15

Which would have been spurned by Christians in the Middle Ages.

S3

10:35:51:24

No names, no drill, as they say. But but some deeply religious people thereby appear to have a self-righteous view that because they have deep faith, they somehow have insight which historians or other plodding professionals lack, and that you jolly well ought to listen to to what they have to say. That's right.

S1

10:36:10:03

But other.

S3

10:36:10:21

Other.

S1

10:36:11:07

Other people are always self righteous. One is never self righteous one, sir.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:36:14:13

Well, I think standing outside all this can point the finger, but without mentioning names, I'd like to move towards the conclusion of this interview by asking you probably three questions about your your valedictory lecture at Oxford, which was titled Structure and Process in History. But I can assure our viewers that it's much more interesting than the abstract terms of structure and process might lead. One to think you argue strongly that historians should have a sense of process and development in the work that they're doing, even if not a progress, which now is a slightly less convincing word than it was to our to our grandfathers. But I wonder if this view is compatible or if it sits rather uneasily with what I think you might agree has been the broad trend in professional writing of history, which as I become more historian, more universities, more competition for.

S4

10:37:13:21

He posts and scholarships and so on.

S3

10:37:16:05

The tendency has been to greater specialization. If you do carve out their own field and make a name. And obviously there are a few exceptions yourself, Paul Kennedy and some others who are willing to tackle the big issue. I have thought the general trend was away from looking at these these large issues, but to keep one's head down and look at rather more specialized.

S1

10:37:39:06

Well, I think that I think that that is so largely because of the fact that we were talking about a little earlier, that now people, in order to get a meal ticket to teach at all, have got to do a thorough piece of research. Yes. In going really deeply into some aspect of the past. And sometimes they dig themselves into a hole so deep that they never really get out of it. They just go on deeply. I did have, as indeed you did have the first job I had to do was not research. It was lecturing world history.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S3

10:38:12:19

In my case. Yes. Yes.

S1

10:38:15:04

And in doing that, one, inevitably, I think, form some kind of concept about the process. Yes. Process of history, how things have led to one another, how we have got to where we are now. Yes. And I have always felt that a historians have a certain obligation to explain to the laity how it is that we have got to where we all know. Yes. How the past, without the Whig idea that the past has led inevitably to the present and the present is the only way it could have gone. Nonetheless, the past did lead to the present. The present has evolved out of the past, and and most people who are not professional, scholarly historians are inevitably, and I think rightly going to look to the past for some kind of explanation about why the world is in the state that it is today. Yes.

S3

10:39:05:22

Rather than lessons, I think explanation is.

S1

10:39:08:00

Probably I think explanations are worth about. Yes. Yes.

S3

10:39:12:03

Yes. I think many historians are so intimidated but so aware of peer pressure when they're making their names that they stick to what they think they know about. I think you've been unusual in taking this broad approach from a very early stage and your early remarks about your work on the Franco-Prussian War, I think were indicative that this opened up to you not just a specific subject, but a very wide view of what history was about and where where we come from and where where we were going.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:39:42:13

Well, I was very fortunate to be in on the ground floor of a venue of a new discipline, which I could help to shape in the way in which I want it. And without there being very many in the way of peers to criticize, yes, indeed. It was extraordinarily important indeed.

S3

10:40:02:16

If I may just interrupt. I think the person I've been acquainted with and studied a little hard in a sense, was both fortunate and unfortunate in this respect, too, and that if you don't have people constantly niggling at what you're doing, it gives you more sense of freedom to expand. On the other hand, if you don't have critics who really can tell you when you're talking nonsense or writing it, you can become a little get carried away, I think. Yes.

S1

10:40:25:03

Well, I did have the advantage of working within a university environment.

S3

10:40:28:24

And of course, regular seminars with bright young.

S1

10:40:31:01

Students like yourself around who even if you were my pupil, nonetheless capable of extremely shrewd comments.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN
S3 10:40:39:01

But I think looking at the other side of the coin, if coin it is, you certainly wouldn't want to be dogmatic or in any way critical of or not very critical of historians who do find their niche. You find some specialized field and devote most of their career to it because it is through such work that that the subject can be developed through specialized study. I mean, if everyone were writing very broad global history, then the details of particular wars or trade conflicts wouldn't wouldn't occur. And the image that many people use is that these these scholars are producing building blocks in a great edifice. But I know from your writing, from talking to you, that you prefer the idea of chain mail of links in a process.

S1 10:41:24:01

I admire them enormously. And these are, of course, most of our colleagues are like that. There are craftsmen who are doing superlative work quite often on a fairly miniature scale. But then when you look at it, you realize that miniatures, it may be it is of enormous significance. Yes. And that it is only because they are doing the work that they do that you can have something like a credible, larger picture to put together. Right.

S3 10:41:51:13

The third question I have arising from your valedictory, and I think it's a bit of a googly to bowl you towards the end, but I'm sure you can deal with it. The penultimate sentence in your valedictory is the historical process through the very challenges it poses and the responses it evokes itself creates the morality of mankind and. I find that a bit puzzling in that maybe it suggests that historians have an inbuilt sense of shared moral values, or if not, that they may acquire them through the process of study and writing. And I wonder what this the nature of this morality is. It can be so. I was of.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:42:32:19

Course, I was way out of my depth getting into the field of moral philosophy. But it does come down to the question by what criteria do historians judge what has happened in the past? Can one legitimately condemn slavery, for example? Yes. From outside, when it was something that was entirely accepted over millennia as being something entirely natural. And now we have evolved to a different degree of moral sensibility. Yes. Standing apart from that, how justified are we? I mean, we're justified in judging one another and saying that torture is abominable and the Holocaust was abominable. But was king is abominable. Was the burning of heretics abominable? Was the slave trade carried on? And I would say by white people, By colored people as well. Was it abominable? If so, why did people go or go go on doing it? Yes. And this I think historians cannot entirely dodge this this dilemma about what are the criteria by which you do judge should one judge at all. And what I was trying to say in very digested form is that mankind, in fact, does through, as I say, the challenges, the problems which faces are gradually devise or evolve new ways of looking at the world, new kinds of moral sensibilities, which I think I can say are better than those of the past.

S3

10:44:19:24

I think you were obviously addressing these remarks to a sort of liberal, democratic Western society where by and large there is freedom to research and publish and an open market for the discussion of ideas, whereas in quite large parts of the world, history is still really shackled to the prevailing government or religious or other point of view.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:44:46:03

Well, I was writing out of this oral history society, which I am a part and which I do feel is good, that that one does confront a sort of fundamental moral, moral issue, moral dilemma of. Competitive moral values in the world better than the Western values which are espoused by many parts of the world, seen as being evil or counterproductive. The product of a great. Yes. But as I said, I think in my inaugural lecture, the historian cannot simply dissociate. He's a part of a society where molded by that society. And if we feel the values of that society are good, we should express them and we should. And we should. If the worst comes, the worst offend with physical force, the society in which it is possible for those values to grow.

S3

10:45:41:08

Yes, I hope you'd agree that that is perhaps a fault of academic writing, that we tend to be very reluctant to come out and say that so-and-so is wrong or to express a very clear view. I know you wrote a very emotional, I think, article about the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. And I think perhaps this is the sort of thing where we ought to really to be a little more well, that it's there.

S1

10:46:03:11

That was a broadcast which I gave you published.

S3

10:46:07:10

It 48.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:46:08:02

Hours after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. And I did express the moral outrage which everybody else felt. But I think we read it. You will see that I said that, look, Soviet Union had its reasons for doing this, that it has got its own defensive hangups about the West. It does see itself as being under threat in the West. Its intervention in Czechoslovakia has got to be put side by side with the British intervention in in Suez or the American intervention in Vietnam. It's not a one off piece of moral obligation, if you look at it in the framework of the way in which great powers to behave, there's nothing all that unusual about it. But nonetheless, it was a bad, stupid, unwise thing to do which deserves condemnation, as indeed I, I condemn the British intervention at Seward's. Right.

S3

10:47:09:19

I think that leads naturally to my final question. It's partly a reflection myself, but I think there is a question in it. You spent your professional life studying war, conflict. The exercise of power many people think would is a fairly sober. Undertaking. And in this discussion, we've looked at part of your interest in the liberal conscience and your origins, your family background in in the media from which that derived. And we've looked at the other side really, I think it's the other side of Clausewitz and the rather tough word interstate relations. And I find there's some dark hints in. I don't think on the whole you're writing is either pessimistic or optimistic, but there are some dark hints in some of your essays. And for example, in your conclusion of your survey of the war in European history that there is at least one lesson from history which Western liberals and Democrats use those terms fairly broadly have not really learned. And that is where we public opinion were too apt to will good ends and things of appeasement in the 30s and Bosnia now. But Boko really hesitate over the means. And my final question is really, are we still living essentially in the Clausewitz in a world where the more ruthless enemy may lop off our arms if we're not prepared to defend our values?

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:48:37:23

We're still living in a very rough world, as one as one sees. And I see no prospect that we will ever live in a different kind of world. Because as I indicated in my valedictory, each solution that one finds creates new problems. Which one of which one has got to solve. The solution of the Cold War has produced two totally unforeseen kinds of problems. The solution of those is going to throw up still further problems.

S3

10:49:09:14

There is no.

S1

10:49:10:16

There is utopia.

S3

10:49:11:13

There is no.

S1

10:49:12:10

There is no end to history. There's no moment when we can lie back and say, we have got it made. We've got to go on struggling.

S3

10:49:20:13

And things won't necessarily get better.

Clip: HOWARD MICHAEL MICHAEL HOWARD WITH BRIAN

S1

10:49:22:09

They will not necessarily get better. And once they get better, they will then create further problems which have got to be overcome. So I think it depends what you mean by things. I mean many things have got incomparably better. Yes. Not only with you over the last 3 or 400 years, but during my own lifetime. Yes. If one looks at things like life expectancy, personal comfort reduction and disease improvement in all those fields is staggering. But in other respects. But in other respects, things have not got better. In other respects, they get worse. And I see no reason to expect for a situation which everything goes on getting better, and they will only not get worse if one goes on working very hard, for they don't go on working you.

S3

10:50:10:14

I'm sure you're going to be very active, but your teaching career has come to an end. You've retired. The century itself is coming to an end and I sense you approach it with a very open mind. You don't see this as a return to the Dark Ages, but nor do you see it as. If you test it.

S1

10:50:27:11

And then one of the things which I learned from my from my colleagues and his historians was the dark ages were not all dark, dark.

S3

10:50:35:19

There may be more of them in the future. Michael, I shall refrain from asking you what you plan to do in your retirement and simply urge you not to lay down your pen. Enjoy your very well-earned leisure, but let someone else cultivate your garden.

S1

10:50:51:18

Thank you, Brian. Project. So I indicated my letter could be very useful if one.