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Collateral Damage; Britain, America and Europe in the Age of Trump, by Kim Darroch, London, UK, 2020, £20 (hardback), 978-0-00-841157-2

Political memoirs can be very tricky to read. They can offer incredible insights into the political establishment, but they can be tedious and excessively detailed. Even worse, they can be a justification for action taken, or a form of revenge on those perceived to have wronged the author. If Kim Darroch's book had been a form of revenge, very few would have blamed him. Darroch was forced to resign as UK Ambassador to Washington in 2019 when comments made to the National Security Council regarding the Trump administration were leaked to the press. Trump, never one to take criticism well, made Darroch's position impossible by refusing to work with him and Boris Johnson finished the job when he refused, during a televised Conservative Party Leadership debate against Jeremy Hunt, to pledge his support for Darroch.

However, this book is not a vehicle for revenge. It is one of the most engaging, engrossing books I have read in quite some time. It has all the magical elements of a great memoir. The backdrop to Darroch's time in Washington was the last year of Obama's administration, the 2016 Presidential election and the first years of Trump's time in office. To add in even more complexity, in the very distant background is an FCO mired in Brexit. The details of Darroch's position make the book fascinating to read, as he offers vignettes of key individuals he meets – from his robotic photo with Obama upon becoming Ambassador to his opinion on the Trump hierarch from Trump and Kushner through to Michael Flynn and Roger Stone. What is clear throughout the entire book is that Kim Darroch is a *nice* person, and a man with considerable knowledge of films which he uses to pepper his stories. He is also unfailingly throughout a civil servant whose only focus is the interests of the United Kingdom. Darroch offers personal views on Trump and Brexit, but these are presented as largely unimportant in relation to his duty. Like any good (or great) civil servant, he worked with whomever he needed to in order to further British interests overseas.

Interestingly, the leak of Darroch's report is the beginning of the book but is then not returned to until almost the end. It features very little in his memoir, and if he is annoyed about the situation (which the book suggests he might be) then he is careful to keep a lid on it. Perhaps his only veiled criticism is in relation to Boris Johnson, who calls him repeatedly after his resignation. 'There was a certain tension in the atmosphere but our parting words were amicable' (p.261). I am sure that many individuals would offer far more withering reviews

of Johnson. In the final chapters, Darroch turns his attention to the 2020 Presidential election campaign (which occurred after the book had been completed), the Brexit negotiations and COVID. His skill and ability is clear to see as he forensically examines these issues highlighting the solutions and the mis-steps along the way. Darroch must have left a very big hole when he left the civil service.

From the moment I started reading this book, I could not put it down. It was filled with those delightful details of negotiations and discussions that are so often edited out of academic studies or entirely overlooked to begin with. Darroch's account of Trump holding May's hand in her trip to Washington ('What was I supposed to do?' p.147) is one of a myriad of small tales which add colour to the analysis of the UK government and its relationship with the US administration. Darroch was also keen to explore the US when resident in Washington, and the book is filled with details of trips he took across the US and the views of individuals he met, from taxi drivers to those attending the rallies for Trump and Clinton. While the leaked documents may have been presented in the press to highlight Darroch's criticism of Trump, his overall opinion was that Trump was a dangerous candidate for Clinton. Darroch argues that Trump had the ability to win in 2020, and that Biden was perhaps the only Democratic candidate who could stop him. As it turned out, he was right, about that, and quite a lot of other things alongside.

For those interested in US or UK politics, this book is a must read. For those interested in diplomacy and the practical background to negotiations and discussions, this book adds a huge amount of nuance to what is already known. I cannot recommend this book highly enough and have waxed lyrical to anyone I can about it. It really is an excellent memoir.

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