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Roosevelt's America and an Alien World

AS ALLIED TROOPS spread out across Nazi Germany in 1945, revealing the horrors of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, the origins of the war seemed fairly simple. It still does to later generations. "In the end the war was Hitler's war," wrote British historian D. C. Watt in 1989. "Hitler willed, wanted, craved war and the destruction wrought by war." But, added Watt, "he did not want the war he got." It takes two sides to start a fight: remember that it was Britain and France who declared war on Germany in 1939, rather than the other way round. Moreover, their declarations began what we now call the Second World War. "Second" implies some connection with the issues that provoked the First World War of 1914-1918. "World" reminds us that 1939-1945 involved a global conflict. Italy and Japan became Germany's "Axis" partners in June 1940 and December 1941, respectively, while the Soviet Union and the United States entered the conflict in June and December 1941 as Britain's allies. Any account of the causes of this war must take a broad view, both in time and space.

Germany's immediate aim was dominance on the continent of Europe; Italy sought a new Roman empire around the Mediter-

anean; Japan envisaged a "New Order" in East and Southeast Asia. As the events of 1940-1945 showed, there was little connection between the German and Japanese wars, while the link between Berlin and Rome entailed a diversion from German objectives, forced on Hitler because the Italian war effort was so inept. The fusion of these three regional conflicts owed much to Hitler's victories in 1940 and 1941, which emboldened Italy and Japan to mount their own bids for power and drove Hitler on into Russia. But the fusion was also due, in part, to Franklin Roosevelt. His responses to these regional crises in 1940-1941 helped connect them in a global conflict. And, at the level of rhetoric, months before Pearl Harbor he established the idea that this was already "the second world war." So the Allies mattered as well as the Axis. Just as it took Britain and France to start a European war in 1939, it took the United States to make a world war in 1941.

For all their contrasts, however, these regional conflicts also had some common roots, which were apparent to contemporaries in the 1930s. In shorthand the salient issues were empire, ideology, and economics—the dynamics of great-power territorial rivalry and nationalist self-assertion; the challenges to political liberalism from national fascism and international communism; and the debate between economic liberalism and autarkic planning at a time when the global economy had collapsed. These issues preoccupied much of Europe and Asia. The United States lay on the periphery of world affairs for most of the thirties, absorbed by its debilitating depression. Yet its potential, fleetingly asserted in 1917-1918, was enormous. And, led by Roosevelt, it started to voice distinctive answers to the three big challenges of the decade. In 1937-1938 FDR began taking a greater initiative in foreign affairs, albeit cautiously and still from the sidelines.

EMPIRE, IDEOLOGY, AND ECONOMICS

In 1910 much of the world was structured around great empires. By 1960 it was largely a world of nation-states. The era of World War II was a turning point in that transformation. One fundamental issue in the 1930s was therefore empire—the rivalry between the major powers to create, defend, or enlarge empires, and the countervailing pressures on large, multinational empires from nationalist politics.

In the late nineteenth century the scramble for empire had been global in scope, with a carving up of Africa by the European powers and their comparable bid to partition China. Before, during, and after World War I, a similar struggle occurred as the Ottoman Turkish Empire was broken up to the benefit of new Balkan states and also by Britain and France in the Middle East. Germany, a belated nation-state created only in 1871, was a latecomer to empire. Its challenges to France's position in North Africa and Britain's supremacy at sea helped push these two imperial rivals into an unlikely alliance. Increasingly, however, German policy focused on Europe: fears of being squeezed on two sides by France and its main ally, Russia, encouraged Germany to risk war in August 1914. In March 1918, when Germany had knocked Russia out of the war, its forces were lodged deep in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, covering most of what is now Poland, the Ukraine, and the Caucasus. This massive German Empire was short-lived, lasting only until Germany collapsed in the autumn of 1918, but it prefigured Hitler's bids in 1939–1942 for *Lebensraum* (living space) in the East. Most Germans were never reconciled to their humiliating status after 1918—stripped of an empire and a fleet, denied an army, air force, and general staff. The reassertion of Germany as a major European power was a common aspiration. It helped, in particu-

lar, to reconcile the German officer corps to the demagogic Hitler after he became chancellor in 1933.

Italy was another new nation-state, established in 1861. Mussolini, who had seized power in 1922, trumpeted his goal of a modern Roman Empire, playing on popular demands for territory in the Adriatic and Africa. This placed him on a collision course with Britain and France, the predominant powers in northern Africa, especially after his 1935 invasion of Abyssinia. His grander aspirations for dominance in the Mediterranean challenged those of France, particularly when Mussolini came to the aid of the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. This posed for France the threat of war on two fronts.

In Asia, Japan constituted the third newcomer nation-state seeking an empire of its own. Through victories in 1895 and 1905 over the waning empires of Qing China and Romanov Russia, Japan secured Taiwan and most of Korea. By 1920 it had the third-largest navy in the world. At the height of the Russian civil war its troops controlled vast tracts of Siberia. In the 1930s Japanese empire-building in East Asia resumed with the occupation of Manchuria in 1931–1932 and eastern China in 1937–1938. In 1938–1939 Japan fought a large-scale border war against the Soviet Union. To the south lay the rich European empires of France in Indochina, Britain in Malaya and Burma, and the Dutch in the East Indies (present-day Indonesia). They controlled vast reserves of oil, rubber, tin, and other vital raw materials.

From this perspective, what we call World War II was the climax of a long struggle for empire among most of the world's leading powers. This pitted the "haves," notably Britain and France, against the "have-nots" (or "have much less"), particularly Germany and Italy in Europe, and Japan in Asia. Of course these various empires were not monochromatic. The British, for instance, had already conceded self-government to "white do-

minions" such as Canada and Australia; in the 1930s they were also engaged in a long and difficult process of establishing representative institutions in India, a vast subcontinent fractured by divisions of caste, religion, and princely power. That said, Britain's leaders had no intention of surrendering the essentials of global power. As Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield put it in 1934: "We are in the remarkable position of not wanting to quarrel with anybody because we have got most of the world already, or the best parts of it, and we only want to keep what we have got and prevent others from taking it away from us." What, from the perspective of London, was a philosophy of peace seemed in Tokyo, and other revisionist capitals, to be a policy of intransigent and sanctimonious imperialism. If Britain said, in effect, "What we have, we hold," then the revisionist cry was "What you hold, we will take."

The 1930s was therefore an age of imperialism. But a waning imperialism. For the other side of the coin was the challenge to large multinational empires from those seeking to establish separate national states. Again Europe epitomizes the process. In 1914 Germany shared a border with Russia; the two were also neighbors of Austria-Hungary. These three great dynastic empires—the Hohenzollerns, the Romanovs, and the Habsburgs—all collapsed in the endgame of war in 1917–1918. From the rubble of empires new states were constructed, the most fragile being Poland, created at the expense of Germany and Russia, which never accepted the loss of their territory. Most of the borders of the new Eastern Europe were contested. Moreover these new states were usually multinational states rather than the political embodiment of a single national group. Thus Poland was barely two-thirds Polish. In its southern neighbor, Czechoslovakia, only half of the population was Czech while 22 percent was German, 16 percent Slovak, 5 percent Hungarian, and 4 percent Ukrainian. The German question was particularly significant. After 1918 more than twelve million Germans lived outside the

new Germany—equivalent to one-fifth of the country's population. The creation of an inclusive German nation was one of Hitler's more plausible aims: in 1938 he used it to justify the annexation of Austria and then the Germans of Czechoslovakia (the *Sudetendeutsch*). The other contentious ethnic minority in Eastern Europe was the Jews—victims of pervasive anti-Semitism but also resented as the prosperous commercial class in many urban areas. In Hitler's Germany, where the "people" were defined in racial terms, the Jews were persecuted with increasing fervor as an alien, non-Aryan infection in the body politic.

Across the world, in China, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed another attempt to build a modern nation-state on the debris of empire, both domestic and foreign. The Qing (or Manchu) dynasty had been hollowed out by decades of outside commercial penetration as the Europeans powers, Russia, Japan, and the United States vied for trading privileges, military bases, and railroad concessions. The dynasty finally collapsed in 1911, and China was engulfed by civil war waged by regional warlords. In the late 1920s, General Chiang Kai-shek and his National People's party (*Guomindang*) established their military authority over much of the country. The new government sought to reform the administration, develop urban areas, and reduce foreign control over the Chinese economy. The Communist party, led by Mao Zedong, offered a rival vision of modernization, based on rural revolution, from enclaves in the interior. But neither the Nationalists nor the Communists could pursue their goals for China once the Japanese took control of much of the eastern portion of the country during the 1930s. National state-building took second place to a renewed struggle against foreign imperialism.

China's contest between Nationalists and Communists exemplifies a second major theme of the 1930s, namely the ideological controversy about how to run a modern state in an age of mass politics. Across Europe and Asia the collapse of dynastic empires usually resulted in the creation of democratic franchises, giving

all adults (or at least adult males) the vote. Even where there were no revolutions, democratic politics marked a major change. In Britain, for instance, the electorate in 1918, under a new democratic franchise, was three times that of 1910—21.4 million instead of 7.7 million, despite the loss of 750,000 men during the war. In this new era of mass voting, the business of politics and the task of effective government were far more complex. One response was to graft democracy onto older structures of nineteenth-century political liberalism. This was the pattern in Britain and France. They were classic “liberal” polities in which the populace enjoyed substantial civil rights guaranteed by law and parliamentary constitutions, and the executive was accountable to representative assemblies. Here the democratization of politics therefore meant enlarging the definition of “the people.” But Italy and Germany were new nation-states, with bitterly contested governments. In Germany, like imperial Japan, the liberal doctrines of individualism and equality ran up against deeper traditions of authoritarian rule. These three countries tried parliamentary government on democratic franchises after 1918, only to abandon it in a backlash against party corruption and governmental ineptitude. Instead Mussolini’s Italy pioneered what became known as the fascist model.

“Fascism” is a notoriously slippery concept. Historians even debate whether it can be applied to Germany as well as Italy. They note the ways in which, particularly in the economic order, both regimes fell short of fascist ideals. It is certainly doubtful that the term can be applied to Japan, where there was no single charismatic leader and where traditional elites in the military and bureaucracy remained in control. In many respects Japanese society throughout World War II remained less regimented than that of the Soviet Union and Guomindang China, which both fought on the side of “the democracies.”

But in the 1930s many onlookers were struck by similarities, not differences. Fascists preached the politics of national re-

newal, seeking to mobilize mass movements by an often mystical vision of national greatness rooted in historical myths and directed toward imperialist expansion. “Preached” is an apt word, for Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany were messianic politicians who propagated new civic religions of national devotion. Against the traditions of the Enlightenment, fascists also prized willpower, not reason. They argued that violence and war were the dynamos of history and the rejuvenators of national character. They appealed to those for whom political liberalism and aristocratic conservatism both seemed outdated and decadent philosophies, irrelevant to the modern age. A core constituency of the fascists was veterans bonded together by the horrific experience of total war and then, as they saw it, betrayed by civilian politicians. But the attacks by fascists on the corruption and ineptitude of established political parties won them far wider support among the middle classes and workers during the crisis of the Great Depression. In a loose sense, these features of nationalism, militarism, and imperial expansion could also be applied to the opponents of parliamentary government in Japan.

Hitler did not call himself fascist. And “Nazi” was a shorthand first used by opponents of his National Socialist German Workers party. Its full name reminds us of the other great ideological challenge in the age of mass politics, namely international communism led by the Soviet Union. Hitler appealed to the working masses, but he was trying to mobilize *German* workers in the name of *national* socialism. In both Italy and Germany, the danger of Communist revolution was one of the major rallying cries of the regimes. Hitler, for instance, used the burning of the parliament building (the Reichstag) in February 1933 to justify suspending civil liberties to save Germany from a supposed Communist takeover.

Soviet leaders, too, exploited the foreign ideological threat to consolidate support. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Russian Empire fell apart. It took four years of brutal civil war

before Lenin's government emerged victorious, albeit over domains much reduced from those of the tsars. The civil war also drew in various foreign forces, including Britain, France, Poland, the United States, and especially Japan—initially to maintain an eastern front against Germany but increasingly to topple a regime whose avowed goal was international revolution. Foreign intervention in the civil war was never forgotten by Soviet leaders. In the late 1920s Joseph Stalin, Lenin's successor, played up the danger of imperialist attack to justify the conversion of agriculture from peasant plots to collective farms and his drive to establish heavy industry, especially for armaments. "We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries," he warned industrial managers in 1931. "We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it or they crush us."

Although Stalin had committed himself to building up "socialism in one country," the project of international revolution was still advanced in the 1920s through the Comintern (the Communist International) in Moscow, which coordinated political and subversive activity abroad. In the mid-1930s, however, the party line shifted to a call for "popular fronts" with non-Communist political groups in the overarching struggle against fascism. Communist propaganda helped to create the image of fascism as a distinctive, unitary ideology, depicting it as the last gasp of financial capitalism. This helped strengthen the sense of general threat to the Soviet Union and distracted attention from the potentially embarrassing concept of National Socialism proclaimed by Hitler.

For politically active contemporaries, the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939 constituted a microcosm of Europe's ideological battlelines. The Republican government received support from the Soviet Union and many leftist groups. General Francisco Franco's Nationalist rebels were backed by Italy and Germany, as well as by rightist and Catholic opinion. Anxious to prevent the conflict from escalating, Britain and France tried to impose a

nonintervention policy on the other powers. Its transparent failure seemed to symbolize the democracies' loss of will. By contrast, entanglement in Spain drew Hitler and Mussolini closer together, heightening the sense of fascism on the march, while Soviet involvement strengthened the impression that communism was the only real competitor to fascism. In short, the Spanish Civil War was widely taken as testimony to the weakness of liberal parliamentary democracy in the 1930s. Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe, the new democracies established in the wake of World War I collapsed into military-backed authoritarian regimes in every country except Czechoslovakia.

Part of the appeal of both German Nazism and Soviet communism in the 1930s derived from their evident economic success. Here lies a third general theme of the decade, paralleling the travails of political liberalism, namely the failure of liberal capitalism in confronting the Great Depression. In this the United States was centrally implicated. After the boom of the 1920s, the Wall Street crash of October 1929 was followed by the collapse of the U.S. banking system and a severe contraction of investment at home and abroad. This undermined the big banks of Central Europe in 1931 and helped force Britain—the region's other big foreign lender—off the gold standard because its reserves were exhausted. Most major countries followed Britain over the next few years, including the United States. Their currencies were no longer fixed against a set amount of gold but fluctuated against those of other countries. As a protective measure, financial groupings began to emerge, in which smaller states pegged their currencies to that of a leading economy with which they already had close relations. Examples were the zones formed around the French franc, the German Reichsmark, the U.S. dollar (particularly in the Americas), and the "sterling area" covering parts of the British Empire but also Scandinavia. In Asia, Japan's reliance on imports made it less self-sufficient. But expansionists in Tokyo used terms such as

"Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere" as euphemisms to mask their own aspirations for a regional bloc.

This drift from global to regional trade was reinforced by protective tariffs. In the early 1930s tariff rates were raised substantially by major capitalist economies, led by the United States, to defend their domestic industries in an era of depression and also to benefit their trading partners. In 1930, for instance, 83 percent of Britain's imports entered the country duty-free; in 1932 the proportion was only 25 percent. But countries of the British Empire, such as Australia or South Africa, were allowed either lower or no tariffs on their goods. This "Empire Preference System" was extended by trade agreements during the 1930s to more than twenty other countries in Europe, Scandinavia, and Latin America. The British presented Imperial Preference as a reaction to U.S. tariffs and a way to start reflating world trade in conditions of economic depression and global dislocation.

There is no question that the credibility of liberal capitalism was severely damaged by the depression. Low investment and stagnant output, reduced trade and high unemployment—these were hardly good advertisements for the classical liberal doctrines of a free market of individual entrepreneurs operating under limited government regulation and trading freely across the world. During the 1930s more interventionist theories of capitalism were emerging. Most famously, John Maynard Keynes, the English economist, argued that governments could safely foster demand by increased spending if they abandoned the liberal shibboleths of low taxes and a balanced budget. But Keynesian ideas did not enter mainstream economics or government policy until the 1940s. For much of the depression decade capitalism seemed to be intellectually as well as financially bankrupt. By contrast, Hitler's heavy spending on public works and armaments helped pull Germany out of its depression. Unemployment fell from a peak of 30 percent in 1932 to 2 percent in 1938.

Nazi economic advisers developed ambitious plans for self-sufficiency within an economic bloc in Central and Southeast Europe. Autarky and government direction seemed more successful than economic liberalism.

More striking still was the success of Stalinism in industrializing a backward agrarian and craft economy through rigorous state planning. Three five-year plans, starting in 1928, built a modern industrial base in heavy industries such as iron, steel, and above all armaments—reflecting Stalin's conviction that the Soviet Union would soon have to fight for survival. Symbols of the "Great Leap Forward" such as Magnitogorsk (the Magic Mountain), a new metallurgical complex created in the wilderness beyond the Ural mountains, caught the imagination of many intellectuals and left-wingers in the West. In 1935 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the celebrated British socialists, published a massive book entitled *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* In later editions the question mark disappeared. Such enthusiasm for Soviet planning was vehemently contested on the right of the political spectrum, where critics pointed to the huge human losses from farm collectivization and the political purges. But no one could deny the dynamism of the Soviet experiment. In the 1930s it contrasted strikingly with the evident failures and stagnation of capitalism.

Thus the spread of regional trading blocs and the apparent success of planned economies cast doubt on the efficacy of liberal capitalism based on the minimal state. This development paralleled the defensiveness of political liberalism against the dynamism of fascism and communism. In general, European liberalism seemed to many a nineteenth-century ideal whose time had passed. And its exemplars were nineteenth-century empires who, by the 1930s, were struggling to hold their own against the revisionist powers. Such was the international crisis of the 1930s.

AMERICAN DISTINCTIVENESS

What in shorthand I have called the issues of empire, ideology, and economics were the source of enormous tension and conflict in Europe and parts of Asia during the 1930s. The United States itself was not completely immune. America's severe depression cast doubt on the efficacy of liberal capitalism. In 1933, 25 percent of the American workforce was unemployed; in 1938 the proportion was still 19 percent. Was liberal democracy also outmoded? In the dark days of 1934–1935 some commentators saw Huey Long, the demagogic governor of Louisiana, or Father Charles E. Coughlin, the “radio priest,” as possible candidates for the role of an “American Mussolini.”

The battle cries of imperialism and nationalism also had American echoes. The United States had its own, albeit small, colonial empire, mostly acquired in 1898–1900 during the war with Spain. Its Pacific outposts of Hawaii and the Philippines were to prove hostages to fortune in the face of Japanese ambitions. The country was also wracked by its own ethnic tensions. Agitation on the West Coast had resulted in total bans on immigrants from China and then Japan. In the East and Midwest, the largely British and Protestant politico-cultural elites were alarmed by the mass waves of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe in the years before World War I. After the Red Scare of 1919–1920, “Anglo-Saxon” American nationalists succeeded in imposing tight quotas on immigration from Europe.

Imperialism and nationalism had been central to the creation of the United States itself, for there was no necessary reason why this vast country should extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It had been established by war at the expense of the European powers such as Britain, France, and Spain, and also by seizing territory from Mexico and from the Native American Indians. In that sense the United States was a product of imperialism. It had

also defeated a major nationalist movement—the bid to establish the Confederate States of America in 1861–1865. This victory was achieved at the staggering cost of 620,000 lives, making the war to preserve the Union truly America's “Great War.”

But if one might see the United States as an empire, it was, in Thomas Jefferson's phrase, an “empire of liberty” (at least for whites). Unlike most of Europe, the country was not ruled by a monarchy that operated with little constitutional restraint. Nor did it have an entrenched national landed aristocracy or a wealthy state church that controlled education. And by the 1830s most states had given the vote to white adult males. In short, the United States was a democracy long before it industrialized, became a world power, or established the institutions of a strong central government. These were profound contrasts to Europe, where democracy usually had to be grafted onto vigorous governments that were already industrial powers and vast empires.

The survival of the United States as a country the size of a continent owed much to the system of federalism established by the Constitution of 1787. Although the balance between the states and the Union shifted significantly over the next century and a half, federalism remained the basic principle on which the empire of liberty rested. The Founding Fathers had pondered whether it was possible to operate republican government on such a vast scale—republics, based on a large measure of citizen participation, being traditionally confined to city-states. But the essence of American liberal democracy was local self-government. This worked because, in the historian Robert Wiebe's phrase, America was a “segmented society,” one in which power, wealth, and natural resources were geographically dispersed. Federalism was therefore the appropriate political expression. Even at the end of the 1930s Uncle Sam accounted for only 40 percent of total government taxation in the United States.

Equally unusual, compared with Europe, was the lack of ideo-

logical diversity. Because liberal democracy was securely established, because the ownership of land was widespread among white males, the United States did not experience the ferocious struggles between the old order and the new mass politics so familiar across the Atlantic. Whatever the fears about Long and Coughlin, no serious American fascist movement took shape. Even more significant, the United States strikingly lacked a substantial Communist or even Socialist party. The whole left-of-center half of the European political spectrum simply did not exist as mainstream politics in the United States. Nor was economic planning ever a serious prospect, even in the 1930s. Roosevelt's New Deal adopted halfhearted expedients such as business self-regulation rather than systematic economic planning.

At a deeper level still, the United States was distinct from most of Europe and Asia in its degree of security. This mattered because a sense of external threat was frequently the spur to the establishment of strong states, planned economies, and autocratic ideologies. By the early twentieth century, Americans lived on a continent in which no great power contested their predominance. And, in an era of sea power, vast oceans gave them a sense of security from turbulence elsewhere. Despite their spectacular economic development of the late nineteenth century, thanks to which the United States produced nearly one-third of world manufacturing output by 1913, less than 5 percent of gross domestic product derived from foreign trade. Growth depended mainly on the vast internal market, undivided by tariff barriers and increasingly integrated by the railroads.

American entry into the European war in 1917, therefore, did not stem from dire necessity. There was no threat to American security, and, though the boom of 1915-1916 was largely attributable to war orders, President Woodrow Wilson's refusal to limit trade, travel, and loans to belligerent countries owed as much to his sense of right as to narrow American self-interest.

Wilson believed that by affirming the freedoms of trade and travel he was standing up for the rights of all peace-loving nations against the tyranny of war. What Wilson, like many world leaders, failed to appreciate was that, because of the surprise stalemate that resulted on land after 1914, the conflict became an economic war of attrition. His refusal to limit market forces, given the close commercial links with Britain, meant that America's economic power was increasingly mobilized by the Allies, not by Germany and the Central Powers. By the fall of 1916, 40 percent of the money Britain needed to pay for the war was being raised in the United States, mostly by private loans. When the Germans unleashed their U-boats against American shipping in January 1917, in an attempt to cut Britain's economic artery, Wilson had little choice but to ask Congress to declare war.

Yet the president justified his decision in high moral terms. His stated goal was not freedom of shipping in the Atlantic, nor even the defeat of German militarism; it was nothing less than "to make the world safe for democracy." Entry into a European conflict was explained as a global crusade. With victory achieved, in 1919 Wilson devoted himself to establishing a League of Nations to ensure global peace and order. His principal Republican critic, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, wished to concentrate on the overriding problem of Europe by offering an American guarantee of French security against renewed German aggression. But Wilson believed that, in the era of modern technology, nothing less than world peace was needed to prevent another world war. Convinced that the president should exercise prime authority in foreign affairs, he hoped to force his plans through the Senate by appealing to public opinion. He embarked on an arduous national speaking tour, but this precipitated a major stroke in October 1919. Incapacitated yet intransigent, Wilson could not coerce the Senate, yet he would not compromise his ideals. The Covenant of the League of Nations, tied to the peace treaty, failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority in the Senate.

Not only did the United States renounce the League, Wilson's failure prompted a backlash against international entanglements and against his activist style of leadership. The backlash would have a profound effect on Franklin Roosevelt.

The United States never joined the League of Nations. In this sense the country remained true to the hallowed advice of George Washington in his Farewell Address of 1796, "to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world."* But this did not imply a posture of isolation, which, as many commentators observed, had never been the pattern of U.S. policy and was certainly not practical in the modern era. In particular, America's international economic relationships had been transformed by the conflict of 1914-1918, what was now being called "the World War." The Federal Reserve Act of 1913 had created a loose regional banking structure to provide some degree of coordination. This had been totally lacking since the demise of the Second Bank of the United States in the Jacksonian era. The act also made it easy for American banks to establish foreign branches: before, most U.S. traders had handled their foreign transactions through London. Then came the huge wartime Allied demand for loans, for which major Wall Street banks, notably J. P. Morgan, organized American consortia. By 1919 the United States was a net creditor nation in the amount of \$3.7 billion; in 1914 it had been a net international debtor on almost exactly the same scale.

In the 1920s the new American money power was used for diplomatic ends. Republican administrations encouraged private bankers to cooperate in the public interest to finance European financial stabilization, as in the 1924 Dawes plan and the 1929 Young plan. Foreign loans also helped lubricate U.S. trade. In 1929 the United States accounted for an eighth of world imports

*Less frequently quoted was Washington's rider that "we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies."

and nearly a sixth of world exports, displacing Britain as the world's leading exporter. By 1930 the United States had also replaced Britain as the largest foreign investor. The U.S. economy was now vital to the prosperity of the rest of the world, yet the domestic market remained far and away the major focus of American production and investment. The United States did not have the same stake in world trade as Britain, still the world's leading importer, for whom imports accounted for about 25 percent of national income (in the United States the figure was still about 5 percent). In short, America mattered to the world economy far more than the world economy mattered to the United States. This structural imbalance lay at the root of the worldwide depression that followed the American stock market crash of 1929.

The years 1922-1929 had seen one of the longest booms in American history to date. During that period, per capita gross domestic product rose by 24 percent and manufacturing output by nearly 30 percent. Yet growth was uneven, with much of the boom stemming from demand for new consumer goods such as automobiles and electrical equipment. Farm prices lagged behind, and older industries such as textiles were in trouble because of foreign competition. The stock market became particularly fevered, with share values in New York rising from a total of \$4 billion in 1923 to \$67 billion by the beginning of 1929. Another \$20 billion were added in the last nine months of that year, until prices collapsed in the crash of October. In 1928 and 1929 agricultural prices also fell sharply, and many farmers could not maintain payments on their debts.

Some kind of cyclical downturn was inevitable. What helped turn recession into depression was the inadequacy of American financial institutions to deal with a modern industrial economy. The Federal Reserve System was a far cry from a national central bank. In so far as it did intervene in the economy, its anti-inflationary policies served to exacerbate the depression. More-

over, America's local banks were atomistic. In the 1920s there were some thirty thousand separate, unitary banks, most entirely reliant on their own resources. When local farmers defaulted on their mortgage payments as incomes fell, many banks collapsed—four thousand of them in 1933 alone. (There was a marked contrast here with Britain, where a central national bank and an integrated local banking system run by five major nationwide companies prevented the “slump” from becoming an American-style financial collapse.) The stock market also suffered from inadequate regulation. Although stock trading involved only a fraction of the population, the indices had become a benchmark of confidence for both businessmen and consumers. The crisis coincided with a period of major structural change in the U.S. and global economies, in which old staple industries such as textiles and footwear were being displaced by new technologies such as motor vehicles and electrical goods, and in which services were becoming as important as manufactures. Profound problems of readjustment complicated the task of recovery.

And so the crash became the depression. In 1933 investment stood at less than 10 percent of the 1929 figure; the surge in consumer goods had dried up. Automobile sales in 1932 were a quarter of the 1929 figure of 4.5 million. With new industries starved of demand, old ones still in decline, and labor markets largely rigid, unemployment soared from 3 percent of the workforce in 1929 to 25 percent in 1933. Millions lost their jobs and their savings. After dreaming of wealth in the 1920s, Americans woke up to a nation of poverty. Research in 1930 suggested that more than half of farm families lived on \$1,000 a year, or half the notional poverty line. The depression was also long-lasting: after a renewed recession in 1937, unemployment in 1938 was still 19 percent, and investment languished at 40 percent of 1929 levels. The collapse was psychological as much as economic. “What we have lost,” said the literary critic Edmund Wilson in 1931, was

“not merely our way in the economic labyrinth but our conviction of the value of what we are doing.”

President Roosevelt focused on this psychological malaise in his inaugural address of March 1933, insisting that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” He also recognized that nineteenth-century institutions had to be adapted to twentieth-century conditions. Structural reforms of the banking system and the stock market were major priorities when he took office. But FDR's New Deal did not end the depression. Rearmament, European war orders, and the draft in 1940–1941 constituted the real turning points. As the historian Anthony Badger has put it, the New Deal acted as “a holding operation for American society: a series of measures that enabled the people to survive until World War II opened up new opportunities.”

Appreciating the gravity of the depression is essential if we wish to understand the conduct of U.S. diplomacy in the 1930s. This was a country that had turned in on itself—preoccupied with its great economic and social crisis, unsure that past values offered signposts to the future. Not a society in revolutionary upheaval—unlike Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia—but one that had lost its nerve.

This can be seen starkly in the changed attitude to foreign economic policy. With Wall Street and big business already scapegoats for the depression, attention turned in 1934 to their roles in foreign policy. Best-sellers such as *The Merchants of Death* and the 1934–1936 Senate inquiry into the munitions industry encouraged the belief that bankers and arms manufacturers had inveigled America into the World War for their own financial gain. Lobbied intensively by various peace groups, Congress in August 1935 passed a Neutrality Act. This radically changed America's historic policy of freely trading with belligerent countries in time of war—the policy that Wilson had gone to war to preserve. Instead, in the event of a war, the president would be obliged to impose an embargo on the sale of munitions to all bel-

ligerents. A new act in February 1936 added a mandatory ban on the provision of loans, and a third Neutrality Act, in May 1937, included prohibitions against U.S. citizens traveling on belligerent passenger vessels and against American vessels carrying arms to belligerents. As critics remarked, the neutrality legislation was like a belated attempt to avoid American entry into the war of 1914-1918. The commercial and financial wealth that in the mid-1920s had seemed a mark of international power was now viewed as a source of vulnerability. The Neutrality Acts were emblematic of a nation that had lost confidence in itself.

Yet the neutrality legislation was a hybrid. While the 1937 act included mandatory bans on arms, loans, travel, and shipping, it also gave the president discretionary power to place all non-arms trade with belligerents on a "cash-and-carry" basis if he believed this necessary for American peace and security. "Cash and carry" was a phrase popularized by Bernard Baruch, the former chairman of Wilson's War Industries Board, in an influential article in 1936. "We will sell to any belligerent anything except lethal weapons, but the terms are '*cash on the barrel-head and come and get it.*'" Baruch offered an ingenious way to preserve the profits of neutral commerce while minimizing the danger of economic or emotional entanglements in a future war through vested interests or loss of American life. And, as the State Department recognized, cash and carry in a future war would benefit Britain, with financial reserves and a large merchant fleet, and operate against Germany and Japan. A recipe for biased neutrality, it accorded with the instincts of Roosevelt himself.

ROOSEVELT: "PINPRICKS AND RIGHTEOUS PROTESTS"

Even to his closest associates, Roosevelt remained an enigma. "You are one of the most difficult men to work with that I have ever known," Interior Secretary Harold Ickes once told him. "You keep your cards close up against your belly. You never

put them on the table." This was a deliberate policy. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, who, like Ickes, served for the entire Roosevelt presidency, recorded these words from the president in 1942: "You know I am a juggler, and I never let my right hand know what my left hand does." Historian Warren F. Kimball took this as the epigraph for his 1991 study of FDR's foreign policy, *The Juggler*. General Douglas MacArthur, another wartime associate but no friend, put it more bluntly. In 1945 he referred to FDR as "a man who would never tell the truth when a lie would serve him just as well."

Roosevelt's secretive handling of foreign policy has been a fertile source of conspiracy theories, particularly about Pearl Harbor. Less melodramatically, it poses acute problems for the historian, since the president put so little on paper. The secrecy was ingrained: the only son of a wealthy Hudson Valley landowner, Franklin was by nature a loner, especially close to his mother. But self-reliance was also learned the hard way. In his youth FDR was athletic and gregarious—a natural politician who relished his years as Wilson's assistant secretary of the navy. Then in 1921, aged thirty-nine, he was struck down with polio, which left him paralyzed from the waist down. For years, with the help of family and friends, he fought to regain his mobility. Although he returned to politics in 1929 as governor of New York and then president in 1933, he would never again walk unaided. Henceforth life was lived in a wheelchair. If he wished to stand, ten pounds of metal braces locked his useless legs in place. Every night he had to be undressed by a valet and heaved into bed.

Few Americans knew the extent of their president's infirmity. Observing an unwritten code, the media virtually never used photographs or film that showed him in a wheelchair or being lifted out of his automobile. But Roosevelt's handicap cannot be ignored if we wish to understand his foreign policy. For one thing, it probably strengthened his secretive nature. After this

"trial by fire," as his wife Eleanor called it, he became even more self-reliant. On the other hand, in foreign affairs he became more dependent. Lacking his own legs, he used close associates such as Sumner Welles and Harry Hopkins as his eyes and ears. More than was true of other leaders, he drew heavily on the formative experiences of his twenties and thirties—on the intellectual legacies of his kinsman Theodore Roosevelt and his former boss Woodrow Wilson.

The Roosevelts of Hyde Park were traditionally Democrats, and FDR did not change that allegiance. But in his youth he was much influenced by Teddy Roosevelt, a distant relative, and cast his first vote in a presidential election for "Cousin Theodore." When he married TR's niece, Eleanor, in 1905, the president gave away the bride. FDR's progressive politics owed a lasting debt to Teddy Roosevelt's "New Nationalism"—the belief in strong governmental regulatory powers. Although serving in the Wilson administration and supporting the League of Nations project loyally, FDR later parted company with Wilson in three crucial respects.

First, he believed that Wilson had adopted too autocratic a foreign policy, failing to build a domestic consensus behind the League. As he observed to an aide in 1937: "It's a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead—and to find no one there." Wilson had led from the front and got too far ahead of political opinion. FDR learned from those mistakes: as speechwriter Robert Sherwood wrote in 1948, "the tragedy of Wilson was always somewhere within the rim of his consciousness." Second, FDR came to believe that Wilson's League was the wrong approach to peacekeeping. Like TR, he placed more emphasis on the role of power in international affairs. With regard to the Neutrality Acts, Roosevelt sought greater presidential discretion to apply the legislation in a way that discriminated against aggressor states. Discriminatory neutrality implied, third, that the great powers would take a leading role in peace-

keeping rather than leaving it to the League of Nations. Roosevelt therefore placed great stock on cooperation with Britain. He shared with TR the turn-of-the-century conceptions of an "Anglo-Saxon race" with distinct responsibilities for ordering and civilizing the world. In this task a big fleet and Anglo-American naval cooperation were deemed especially important: both Roosevelts were disciples of Admiral Alfred T. Mahan's theories of sea power. They also considered German militarism as a grave and persistent threat to peace.

In all these respects Franklin owed much to Cousin Theodore. Yet in the 1930s he continued to insist on his loyalty to essential Wilsonian ideals. In 1932, for instance, he told a critic of his apostasy on the League that he was looking for "the best modern vehicle" to reach these ideals, more suited to contemporary realities. And his attitude to Britain reflected Wilson's own deep ambivalence. Although often referring privately to the British as "cousins," he had no intention, as he said in 1937, of tying U.S. policy "as a tail to the British kite." He was scathing about the British upper class, ascribing many failings in British policy to "too much Eton and Oxford." Like many New Dealers he suspected that a pernicious Wall Street–City of London axis lay at the root of many of America's economic problems. Above all, he was a relentless critic of the British Empire—proud of his family's Revolutionary heritage, confirmed by his reading of Jefferson in the 1920s as to the jaded and corrupt nature of the Old World. Roosevelt's conviction that the United States was a non-colonial and indeed anti-colonial great power—with, in consequence, a special virtue and responsibility—was fundamental to his thinking. Like Wilson, FDR's worldview reflected many of the values of mid-nineteenth-century English liberals and radicals about the iniquities of empire, the danger of large armaments, and the desirability of free trade. Even more than Wilson, he was passionately convinced that democratic America was the supreme exemplar of such values. Roosevelt's "Americanism"

constituted a fundamental, if still inchoate, reassertion of democracy and liberal capitalism against the belligerent imperialism, political authoritarianism, and economic nationalism that were so much in the ascendancy in Europe and Asia.

During his first term and much of his second, Franklin Roosevelt took few foreign policy initiatives. In large part this is explained by the gravity of the depression at home and the intense political battles over New Deal programs. The latter reached a peak of intensity in 1937 over the president's plans to reform the Supreme Court. Many critics cited this as proof of FDR's dictatorial tendencies—a charge that he had no desire to strengthen by activist diplomacy. This remained a lasting concern. Yet the passivity of his foreign policy was born of conviction as well as circumstance. U.S. interests were not significantly touched by events in Europe or Asia. More important was Latin America, where Roosevelt sought to advance his country's economic and political goals in forms that did not smack of overt colonialism. The administration portrayed its "Good Neighbor" policy in the Western Hemisphere as an example to great powers in other parts of the world.

The leading foreign policy theme of the administration for its first few years was Secretary of State Cordell Hull's drive for Reciprocal Trade Agreements (RTA). The RTA Act of 1934 gave the president authority to reduce U.S. tariffs by up to 50 percent where others would do the same—these cuts then being extended to all other nations with which the United States had signed agreements. The act was largely a response to the depression. It wrested the initiative in tariff policy from Congress to the president in an effort to find outlets for the South's agricultural surplus (Hull was formerly a Tennessee congressman). But the secretary of state made this an issue of principle as well—animated, in the historian Arthur Schlesinger's phrase, by "a peculiar combination of evangelism and vindictiveness." Hull was an unreconstructed exponent of the ideals of one of Wilson's heroes,

the nineteenth-century British radical Richard Cobden. Like Cobden, he saw prosperity as the key to peace, trade barriers as the cause of war. With Germany largely outside the U.S. trading orbit, Hull concentrated on securing a deal with Britain, both as an example to the rest of the world and as a wedge into the British and Canadian markets.

FDR gave Hull his head in the mid-1930s, partly because the president sympathized with the basic approach but mainly because he had few other policies to offer. From 1936 FDR also toyed with various proposals by Hull's undersecretary and bitter rival, Sumner Welles, for America to convene a new international conference. This would establish basic Wilsonian principles of freer trade and international disarmament. Like Wilson, the Roosevelt administration was offering global answers to regional problems. On the other hand, drawing on his intellectual heritage from TR, the president mused repeatedly about ways to control aggression through trade embargoes and naval blockades. Hence his concern for the right kind of neutrality act, including cash-and-carry clauses and presidential discretionary powers.

Controlling aggression seemed more urgent in 1937 with the escalating conflict in Spain (the Basque town of Guernica was obliterated by German bombers in April) and Japan's renewed attack on China in July (which led to a brutal battle for Shanghai). Having initially connived at nonintervention in Spain and the accommodation of Japan in China, FDR concluded that both wars were embryonic regional conflicts. In October 1937 he spoke publicly in Chicago about the need to "quarantine the aggressors," likening international lawlessness to a global epidemic of a contagious disease. As he told reporters afterward, he was expressing "an attitude" and did not have "a program" to implement it. But when a U.S. gunboat was sunk by the Japanese in China's Yangtse River in December 1937, he told his cabinet and the British ambassador privately that he hoped to control Japan

by means short of formal war, such as an Anglo-American naval blockade and economic sanctions. He added, "We don't call them economic sanctions; we call them quarantines. We want to develop a technique which will not lead to war." These ideas for the "containment" of Japan, to use cold war parlance, were to guide his policy in the Pacific right through 1941. In 1937, however, they were simply Rooseveltian musings—what the British ambassador called the president "in his worst 'inspirational' mood."

In January 1938 FDR lurched back into Wilsonian mode, picking up Welles's idea of a series of steps toward an international peace conference but trying the idea first on the British. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was just about to embark on bilateral talks with Italy and Germany; his approach was therefore fundamentally at odds with FDR's internationalism. Explaining this, he asked the president to postpone his initiative "for a short while." A week later, persuaded by the Foreign Office that this might seem to rebuff Roosevelt, he invited the president to go ahead, perhaps by presenting his proposals as a complementary effort to establish general international principles while the British addressed specific problems. Thereafter the ball was in FDR's court, but he let it drop. Some historians have judged that the president was upset by Chamberlain's response. More likely, as with quarantine, he had no real program and, once informed of British plans, he was ready to let them go ahead.

Roosevelt was wary of Chamberlain: "We must recognize that fundamentally he thoroughly dislikes Americans," FDR remarked in 1936. (Chamberlain's maxim was that "it is always best and safest to count on *nothing* from the Americans except words.") The president stayed on the sidelines in 1938 as the British intensified their efforts to reach agreements with Mussolini over his conquest of Ethiopia and with Hitler over his demands to incorporate the Germans of Czechoslovakia (the

Sudetendeutsch) in the Reich. The British line was essentially that, given the arbitrariness of European and African borders in an era when old empires were collapsing and new states were being formed, great-power agreements were better than another international war, even at the expense of some local resentment and suffering. The administration's instinct, on the other hand, was to assert the basic Wilsonian principle of national self-determination. FDR wrote of Chamberlain in March 1938 (using characteristic language about international policing): "As someone remarked to me—'If a Chief of Police makes a deal with the leading gangsters and the deal results in no more hold-ups, that Chief of Police will be called a great man—but if the gangsters do not live up to their word the Chief of Police will go to jail.' Some people are, I think, taking very long chances." As to whether Chamberlain would succeed, FDR told his ambassador in Spain, it was "impossible to guess. But fundamentally you and I hate compromise with principle."

Chamberlain's efforts to resolve the Sudeten crisis came to a head in September 1938. He had hoped to arrange an orderly cession of people and territory to Germany. But by September 27 Hitler's demands for an immediate transfer without international supervision brought Britain and France to the point of war. At that point Hitler blinked first, warned by his commanders that the army was unready for a major war and sobered by mobilization of the Royal Navy and other signs of British resolve. Mussolini also made clear that he would not enter a war and urged Hitler to keep talking. Briefly losing his nerve, the German leader proposed a further meeting in Munich on September 29. There Chamberlain gave him almost all he wanted on a slightly longer timetable, but coupled with an Anglo-German agreement, signed by the two leaders, pledging to resolve their differences by peaceful means. Chamberlain placed great stock on this pledge, talking of "peace with honor." He returned home to a hero's welcome.

Throughout the crisis the Roosevelt administration insisted publicly that the United States was in no way involved, even as an intermediary. The State Department dignified this as a "policy of non-action." Privately FDR continued to question the sacrifice of principle, even talking in mid-September of Britain and France washing "the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands." But when news came that Chamberlain was flying to Munich, the president sent what he later called the shortest telegram of his life. It contained just two words: "Good Man."

The ambiguities of Roosevelt's policy are most evident in a September 19 meeting he had with the British ambassador, Sir Ronald Lindsay. This was shrouded in secrecy: the president told the ambassador that if his remarks leaked out he would probably be impeached. According to Lindsay, FDR said that "if the policy now embarked on [by Chamberlain] proved successful he would be the first to cheer." There might be scope for an international conference to resolve problematic frontiers on rational lines. But if peace could not be preserved, as then seemed likely, Roosevelt urged the Allies to fight a defensive war, based on naval blockade. He hoped to find ways to amend or manipulate the Neutrality Act so that the United States could assist the blockading powers.

The meeting had no effect on British policy or on the crisis itself. But it shows again FDR's mix of Rooseveltian and Wilsonian ideas, and the tensions between them. Its secrecy also reflects his fears of domestic opinion. In 1937-1938, as his biographer James MacGregor Burns observed, "the President was still confined to a policy of pinpricks and righteous protests." Yet the pinpricks mapped out patterns for the future, and the protests laid down distinctive moral markers. The world was still a long way from global war, the United States a far cry from belligerency. But, as international circumstances changed in 1939, 1940, and 1941, so Roosevelt's foreign policy would evolve from an attitude toward a program.

3

Revising Neutrality and Ideology (October 1938 to November 1939)

THE MUNICH AGREEMENTS had averted war. Neville Chamberlain hoped that they would permit a new bid for a European settlement. But other world leaders saw Munich as a turning point. Hitler, cheated of a military triumph by his own loss of nerve and by Chamberlain's diplomacy, was now bent on subjugating the rest of Czechoslovakia and destroying Poland. The way the Sudeten crisis had been resolved convinced him that the British and French—those "little worms"—would not stand in his path. Stalin drew similar lessons. Hitler's annexation of the Czech lands, and with this the neutralization of one of the strongest armies in Eastern Europe, threatened Soviet security. Clearly Britain and France would not intervene to stop German expansion eastward. Stalin judged that a deal with Hitler was the wisest course, at least for the short term. These policy shifts by Hitler and Stalin would result in the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939, to divide Poland between them.

For Roosevelt, too, Munich was a turning point. On October 5, 1938, he cabled Chamberlain: "I fully share your hope and belief that there exists today the greatest opportunity in years for the establishment of a new order based on justice and law." Privately, however, he too was reflecting on the recent crisis. One re-

sult was his attempt to revise the Neutrality Act, to help Britain and France resist Germany. Because of congressional opposition, this strategy could not be realized in the summer of 1939. Nevertheless, the events of 1938–1939, interpreted by FDR, helped reshape public perceptions about international affairs. Especially after the Nazi-Soviet Pact, most Americans discerned a stark moral divide between democracy and “totalitarianism.” Fascism and communism were both subsumed under the totalitarian umbrella.

The pact had other international consequences. It forced Japan to end its border conflict with the Soviet Union, thereby reducing American concern about Asia for the moment. It also facilitated the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and that triggered declarations of war by Britain and France two days later. The start of a European war, and the diminution of the Asian conflict, enabled Roosevelt to secure revision of the Neutrality Act on his own terms in November 1939.

TOWARD ARMED UNNEUTRALITY

During October 1938 Roosevelt spent time mulling over the lessons of the Czech crisis. His ambassadors in Europe sent their appraisals; one of them, William C. Bullitt, came back from Paris to brief the president in person on October 13. Bullitt conveyed the drama of Munich, drawing on the French leaders' accounts of Hitler's ranting monologues to offer a much sharper impression than FDR formerly had of the secretive German leader. Roosevelt seems to have concluded that meaningful negotiation with Hitler was totally impossible. (That was not his view, then or later, about talking to the other “dictators,” Mussolini and Stalin, or to the military regime in Tokyo.) In January 1939 he told senators that some people said this “wild man” was motivated by “paranoia,” others that he had a “Joan of Arc” complex. One tirade, the president added, showed that Hitler be-

lieved himself “to be a reincarnation of Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ.” The only word for such a personality, said Roosevelt, was a “nut.”

Bullitt also helped the president understand the fear of massive airborne destruction that had gripped Paris and London during the crisis. Today, in the atomic age, it is hard to evoke the 1930s terror of the bomber. Yet Harold Macmillan, a British politician who was prime minister during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, wrote in his memoirs in 1966 that “we thought of air warfare in 1938 rather as people think of nuclear warfare today.” The reports from Bullitt and from Joseph Kennedy, U.S. ambassador in London, persuaded Roosevelt that Hitler had achieved a real psychological dominance over the French and British. In Roosevelt's view, only the German supremacy in the air could explain the extent of Hitler's victory against Europe's premier powers. Helping them redress the air balance, in the long-term interests of American security, became his preoccupation during the winter of 1938–1939.

In Roosevelt's mind, the air age called into question the concept of a separate Western Hemisphere. The administration was already concerned about signs of German penetration of Latin America. Although the United States remained the region's largest trading partner, during the 1930s Germany's share of Latin America's imports came to exceed Britain's. German political influence seemed to be on the increase, particularly in Argentina and Brazil. In private, Roosevelt spoke excitedly in January 1939 of a possible insurgency by the 1.5 million Germans in southern Brazil, which might then create a base for Nazi forces. Since 1919 the main U.S. fleet had been based on the West Coast, at San Diego, against a possible Pacific challenge from Japan, with only an antiquated training force in the Atlantic. But in the autumn of 1938 Roosevelt created an operational Atlantic squadron, and the annual fleet maneuvers the following February took place for the first time off the East Coast. The practice

exercise was designed to stop a German fleet from aiding a fascist-led revolt in Brazil. But that did not address the air threat. In April 1939 FDR told newspaper editors that the Axis had fifteen hundred planes capable of crossing the Atlantic to Brazil in a day (refueling in, say, the Cape Verde Islands). From bases in countries like Brazil or Mexico they could threaten New Orleans in a couple of hours. Said Roosevelt: "It is a very small world."

There were, of course, some big "ifs" in Roosevelt's analysis. Axis long-range air capability was nothing like what he claimed. His fears about Latin American stability were exaggerated. But the air age did have significant implications for America's *sense of security*. And the administration's concern about Latin America reflects the pervasive 1930s belief that fascism was on the march and democracy was in danger. Behind both anxieties was the growing post-Munich fear that Britain and France were in retreat. "What the British need today," wrote Roosevelt in February 1939, "is a good stiff grog, inducing not only the desire to save civilization but the continued belief that they can do it. In such an event they will have a lot more support from their American cousins." During the spring of 1939 FDR spoke of British chances in a war against Germany as only fifty-fifty. If they were defeated, he feared the seizure or neutralization of the British fleet, thereby opening up the Atlantic to Nazi expansion, followed by increased economic and political penetration of Latin America. "At the end of a very short time," he told adviser Adolf A. Berle, "we should find ourselves surrounded by hostile states in this hemisphere." FDR admitted that this was currently only a possibility, but it was one, he said, that no farsighted statesman could afford to permit.

The president therefore argued that, in the air age, defense of the Western Hemisphere against a possible Nazi threat required bolstering the airpower of Britain and France. A month of meetings culminated in a major conference with the military and senior administration officials in the White House on the after-

noon of November 14, 1938. On this occasion the president was unusually forthright. According to his best information, FDR said, France had fewer than 600 planes it could put in the air, Britain had 1,500 to 2,200 such planes, and Germany 5,500 to 6,500 first-line planes and about 2,000 second-line planes. This gave Germany, on the most conservative estimate, at least a two-to-one air superiority.* Roosevelt went on to argue that

the recrudescence of German power at Munich had completely reoriented our own international relations; that for the first time since the Holy Alliance in 1818 [the coalition of European monarchies that prompted the Monroe Doctrine] the United States now faced the possibility of an attack on the Atlantic side in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. He said that this demanded our providing immediately a huge air force so that we do not need to have a huge army to follow that air force. He considered that sending a large army abroad was undesirable and politically out of the question.

Roosevelt then made two points about the urgency of rearmament. First, that in 1917 it took the United States thirteen months after declaring war to put the first plane on the battlefield in Europe. This time such a delay would be disastrous. His second reason was diplomatic:

I am not sure now that I am proud of what I wrote to Hitler in urging that he sit down around the table and make peace. That may have saved many, many lives now, but that may ultimately result in the loss of many times that number of lives later. When I write to foreign countries I must have something to back up my words. Had we had this summer 5,000

*It should be noted that FDR, along with the British and French governments, swallowed Nazi propaganda and seriously overestimated German air strength. In fact Britain and France had more first-line aircraft than Germany and considerably larger reserves. The serviceable first-line strength of Britain alone was equal to that of Germany.

planes with the capacity immediately to produce 10,000 per year, even though I might have had to ask Congress for authority to sell or lend them to the countries in Europe, Hitler would not have dared to take the stand he did.

Roosevelt therefore wanted authorization from Congress to build ten thousand planes immediately, plus a capacity to produce twenty thousand a year. Since the output of America's large airplane plants was only twelve hundred planes a year, he wanted seven government-owned plants built, mostly on War Department property. Although the estimated cost would be about \$70 million, the work could be done by the Works Progress Administration—the New Deal relief agency run by his close aide, Harry Hopkins. Roosevelt claimed that "Hopkins could build these plants without cost to the Treasury because it would be work relief which otherwise would have to be provided in any case."

Several points should be made about Roosevelt's statement. First, it shows his new anxieties about the effects of airpower on U.S. security and about Hitler's supposed superiority. Although exaggerated, these anxieties were to be a feature of the next few years. FDR also made clear his aversion to the idea of sending another American Expeditionary Force to Europe. Instead he insisted that a large air force would be a real alternative in war as well as adding weight to his diplomatic leverage in peacetime. Then there was the pregnant phrase about asking Congress for authority "to sell or lend" planes to the Europeans. Here was the embryo of what would become lend-lease in 1941. Yet the comments about government-owned plants did not prove a signpost for the future. The military-industrial complex of World War II would be based largely on cooperation with private industry.

That last point excepted, the president's secret statement of November 14, 1938, provides a clear insight into his goals for unneutral rearmament, short of war. Yet his plans came to very lit-

tle in the next few months, for several reasons. The international situation remained ambiguous, Washington politics were unpropitious, and Roosevelt and his congressional backers mismanaged business on Capitol Hill.

The president set out his broad objectives in major speeches to Congress at the beginning of 1939. He asked for \$500 million in appropriations for rearmament and urged revision of the neutrality laws because, in their present form, they "may actually give aid to the aggressor and deny it to the victim." Particularly in his mind was their effect on the civil war in Spain. In 1937 FDR had encouraged the extension of the arms embargo to cover civil wars, but this had served to help the fascist-backed forces of General Francisco Franco against the Republican government. By 1939 Roosevelt regretted his action. But on both fronts—rearmament and legislation—FDR had to trim his sails in the face of unfavorable political winds. The War Department strenuously opposed his plans for air rearmament: it wanted a balanced program to build up the army and navy as well as the army air corps, and FDR's grandiose figures of November 14 were soon trimmed back to around three thousand new planes. A French purchasing mission arrived in December with authority to buy one thousand planes in the United States, but the army air corps was reluctant to reveal any of its newest prototypes, especially the Douglas DB-7 bomber, until commanded to do so by an angry president. When one of the planes crashed in California on January 23, with a French official on board, news of the mission became public and prompted an outcry from congressional critics.

To limit the damage, FDR privately briefed the Senate Military Affairs Committee on January 31 with what he called "unusual candor and forthrightness." To the senators, as to his advisers in November, he set out his assessment of the Nazi threat to the Western Hemisphere, the new challenge of airpower, and the need to recognize that "the first line of defense in

the United States" was "the continued independent existence" of key nations in Europe, particularly Britain and France. He warned that, if it came to a European war in the present circumstances, there was "a fifty-fifty bet" that Hitler and Mussolini would win. He was frank about his determination to build planes and to get them to Britain and France, cash "on the barrelhead," while denying munitions to Germany, Italy, or Japan. He admitted that this policy might be called unneutral but insisted that it was a matter of "self-protection" and that it would reduce, not increase, the chances of U.S. entry into another European war. This was not, however, the impression that senators derived from the meeting. Many found Roosevelt's candor alarming. When leaks appeared in the press that he had said America's frontiers were on the Rhine (not his precise words but a reasonable paraphrase), the president made matters worse by denouncing the leak in a press conference as a "deliberate lie" by "some boob" in the Senate.

It is clear that, in the weeks after Munich, Roosevelt embarked on a major bureaucratic and political effort to establish a policy of unneutral rearmament. In doing so he took considerable political risks and was, for such a cautious leader, unusually forthright. But it is also clear that the domestic situation was very difficult. The midterm elections in November 1938 saw the return of a significant bloc of Republicans to the House for the first time since 1932. The Seventy-sixth Congress, which convened in January 1939, had 261 Democrats and 164 Republicans. When the latter combined with the substantial number of conservative Democrats who were disaffected with the New Deal and suspicious of FDR's "dictatorial" tendencies, the result was legislative deadlock. For this reason the president did not give a strong lead on neutrality revision, leaving it to Democratic managers on Capitol Hill, who held back after the furor about the French military mission. Not until March 15, 1939, when Hitler broke the

Munich agreement and took over the rest of Czechoslovakia, did the logjam begin to break. As FDR told the press, Hitler could no longer say that he was simply bringing neighboring Germans into the Reich. And the British and French decision finally to draw a line and to guarantee the political independence and territorial integrity of Poland increased the likelihood of European war and therefore of applying the existing neutrality legislation. Moreover, the cash-and-carry provisions of the 1937 act expired May 1. For all these reasons, something had to be done.

On March 20, Key Pittman of Nevada, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced his carefully named "Peace Bill" into the Senate. Pittman's neutrality legislation reflected the administration line—repeal the arms embargo and put all trade with belligerents on a cash-and-carry basis while retaining the 1937 bans on loans and travel to prevent economic and emotional entanglements from drawing America into another war. Subsequent hearings revealed strong opposition to these reforms, but also a lack of clear administration leadership. This was partly the fault of Pittman, a congenital alcoholic who was now seriously ill, but also of the president, who judged that a strong lead from the White House would be counterproductive. He left Hull and the State Department to resolve the mess that Pittman's indecisive management had created. Although an amended bill squeezed through the House at the end of June, it was tied to a limited arms embargo. In the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Pittman's opponents demanded a postponement until the 1940 session. Even a personal conference with the president at the White House on July 18 proved unavailing. Senator William E. Borah, the veteran isolationist from Idaho, rejected FDR's assertion that a European war was imminent. When invited to look at the incoming State Department cables, Borah claimed that his own sources of information were more reliable. Unable to persuade a majority of the committee, Roo-

sevelt had to acknowledge defeat. "You haven't got the votes," Vice President John Nance Garner told him bluntly, "and that's all there is to it."

For a president determined to send a clear message to Hitler, this was a humiliating rebuff. Lack of White House leadership was partly to blame, but it was clear that the anti-Roosevelt backlash on the Hill in 1938–1939 meant that any legislation giving the president greater powers would be viewed with suspicion. Congressmen were unsure of their constituents and waited for a clear lead before deciding how to jump.* The Gallup polls showed the volatility of American public opinion. On July 8, for instance, 60 percent favored the sale of arms to Britain and France in a European war. A month later 51 percent of those questioned said they thought Congress was right to retain the arms embargo, while 37 percent disagreed and 12 percent expressed no opinion. This ambivalence was a lasting feature of American opinion about a European war. Consistently Americans opposed renewed belligerency by the United States. Yet their sympathies were clearly on the side of Britain and France. The solidification of those ideological sympathies was, in part, the result of events in the winter of 1938–1939.

DEMOCRACY AND TOTALITARIANISM

Five weeks after Munich, on the night of November 9, 1938, a wave of Nazi-inspired violence against Jews and Jewish property swept across Germany. Nearly one hundred Jews died, some thirty thousand were arrested, and thousands of homes and

*Secretary of State Hull told the story of a math teacher who asked one of her class: "Tommy, if there are sixteen sheep in a pen and one jumps the fence, how many are left?" "None," said Tommy. "Well," said the teacher, "you don't know anything about arithmetic." Tommy replied, "You don't know anything about sheep."

hundreds of synagogues were destroyed. Pictures of storm troopers, armed with axes and crowbars, smashing shops and looting property were featured on the front pages of newspapers around the world. In retrospect, the night of broken glass (*Kristallnacht*) seems part of a remorseless and inevitable persecution of Jews by a dictator bent on their destruction. But while Hitler wanted a "final solution" (*Endlösung*) of the "Jewish problem," he had not come to power with a clear blueprint. After initial violence against Jews and political opponents in 1933, the Nazis concentrated on pressuring Jews to emigrate. But party radicals led by Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister, wanted tougher measures. In early November 1938 a German diplomat in Paris was shot dead by a Polish Jew. Goebbels seized on this pretext, and his speech on November 9 unleashed the *Kristallnacht*. Even the party was surprised at the extent of the destruction. Many Germans were genuinely shocked, and Hitler ensured—until late 1941—that there would be no more public attacks against Jews. But the international reaction was even more important. Despite deep anti-Semitism across Europe and the United States, the German pogroms evoked international outrage. Nazi race policy had now been clearly and publicly defined.

Roosevelt said he could "scarcely believe that such things could happen in a twentieth-century civilization." He summoned home the U.S. ambassador to Berlin for consultation. A Gallup poll showed nearly three-quarters of respondents in favor of "temporary withdrawal" of the ambassador "as a protest." ("Temporary" became indefinite after the German entry into Prague in March 1939.) Roosevelt's efforts to amend the 1924 Immigration Act to permit the entry of German refugee children into the United States proved unavailing because of nativist pressure groups. So were his efforts, through intermediaries, to bribe Hitler to allow 150,000 Jews to emigrate through a massive international loan. But *Kristallnacht* sharpened the moral divide between Nazi Germany and American values.

Roosevelt sought to make that divide explicit. His State of the Union Address on January 4, 1939, not only developed his security themes about the need for rearmament and the impossibility of hemisphere isolation. It also highlighted the ideological issues: "Storms from abroad directly challenge three institutions indispensable to Americans. The first is religion. It is the source of the other two—democracy and international good faith." Religion, said FDR, imbued a sense of personal dignity and mutual respect. "Democracy, the practice of self-government, is a covenant among free men to respect the rights and liberties of their fellows," while international good faith was the transposition of that mutual respect to the level of relations between nations. "Where freedom of religion has been attacked, the attack has come from sources opposed to democracy." And "where religion and democracy have vanished, good faith and reason in international affairs have given way to strident ambition and brute force." No names were mentioned. But to an American audience mindful of the Sudetenland and Kristallnacht, FDR's meaning was clear. Just as he was arguing that American security was not divisible from that of the world, so he insisted that American values could not flourish in an alien ideological environment. "We have learned that God-fearing democracies of the world which observe the sanctity of treaties and good faith in their dealings with other nations cannot safely be indifferent to international lawlessness anywhere. They cannot forever let pass, without effective protest, acts of aggression against sister nations—acts which automatically undermine all of us."*

On January 30 Hitler also spoke out about religion. On the sixth anniversary of his becoming chancellor, he gave a two-hour

*Compare the language of the Truman Doctrine speech of March 1947: "Totalitarian regimes imposed upon free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States."

speech to the Reichstag about the Nazi party "saga." At the end he warned: "Europe cannot find peace until the Jewish question has been solved." He suggested that agreement could still be reached on emigration. But he also made a lurid "prophecy" that "if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!" As yet, Hitler had no clear conception of how that annihilation would take place. But the devastating effect of the pogroms on the Jews encouraged the Nazi regime into more violent measures. And Roosevelt's private and public intervention in the Jewish question may well have strengthened Hitler's paranoid linkage of the United States and Jewish money power. In retrospect, his "prophecy" takes on sinister significance. "World War" (*Weltkrieg*) was the term used by Germans to distinguish the 1914–1918 conflict with Britain and America from earlier "European" wars. Nazi plans for a "final solution" of the Jewish question would take shape at the end of 1941 as British defiance, Soviet resistance, and American intervention made another "world war" a reality.

Roosevelt already saw the issue in global terms. The day after Hitler's Reichstag speech, on January 31, he gave his ill-fated briefing to senators about the international situation. He told them that "about three years ago we got the pretty definite information that there was in the making a policy of world domination between Germany, Italy and Japan. That was when the first anti-Comintern pact was signed." Since then, he went on, "that pact has been strengthened almost every month," and "there exists today, without any question whatsoever—if I were asked to prove it I could not prove it, of course—what amounts to an offensive and defensive alliance." Roosevelt added: "What Hitler said yesterday would come as a shock to a good many people." But really "there isn't anything new in what he said that we

haven't known for a year or two." The president did not necessarily believe that the Axis pact would hold. He told the senators: "We always felt that if Mussolini found his bread was not buttered on the Hitler side, he would throw him over." (Hence the scope for negotiation with Italy and, by extension, Japan.) But FDR's assumption that Hitler's "ultimate objective" was "world domination" did not change. And his fears of a tight "offensive and defensive alliance" among Germany, Italy, and Japan were to intensify over the next two years.

In the early months of 1939, Roosevelt continued his efforts to "educate" American opinion. In an address on April 14, after the Germans had taken over Czechoslovakia and the Italians had invaded Albania, he asked why nations could "find no better methods of realizing their destinies than those which were used by the Huns and the Vandals fifteen hundred years ago?" Next day he invited Hitler and Mussolini to guarantee the integrity of thirty-one specified countries in Europe and the Middle East for at least ten years. These messages, broadcast worldwide, were mocked in Germany and Italy,* but FDR had rated the chances of a positive response at no more than one in five. As he told the Canadian prime minister: "If we are turned down the issue becomes clearer and public opinion in your country and mine will be helped." Another publicity ploy was the visit in June by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to the United States—the first by a reigning British monarch. Roosevelt saw the visit as a safe but effective way to dramatize Anglo-American amity, and as a chance to show off the British monarchy, past symbol of transatlantic differences, in a favorable light. To this end he minimized official functions in Washington and made much of the royal couple's informal visit to his family home at Hyde Park, complete with an outdoor lunch of hot dogs and beer. He was sure "the simplicity and naturalness of such a visit would produce a

*"A result of infantile paralysis," sneered Mussolini.

most excellent effect," enhancing "the essential democracy" of the British king.

The most significant of these ideological benchmarks was the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. The United States had been the last great power to acknowledge officially the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Formal diplomatic recognition was extended by the new Roosevelt administration only in November 1933. Relations soon soured over Soviet repudiation of the tsarist government's war debts, but in 1936 Roosevelt made a big effort to improve the atmosphere by sending Joseph E. Davies as ambassador. Davies was a wealthy lawyer, with no diplomatic experience. FDR hoped to bypass the skepticism of Soviet specialists in the State Department toward the chances of significant cooperation with Stalin.

But Moscow was playing a watching game. Berlin and Tokyo had signed an anti-Communist pact in November 1936, and it was in Stalin's interests to open links with their opponents. He therefore acquiesced in the efforts of Maxim Litvinov, his foreign minister, to develop a network of "collective security" with the Western democracies. Then Munich exposed the hollowness of that policy as a protection for Soviet security. In early 1939 Stalin put out feelers to Berlin, and in May he replaced Litvinov with Vyacheslav Molotov, a loyal henchman. During the summer Stalin played with Germany and with Britain and France, seeking to discern what each side had to offer. He became convinced that Britain and France had no intention of fighting for Poland, and that Hitler was ready to gobble it up. In that case, the Soviet Union would become the front line. On August 23 Molotov and his German counterpart, Joachim Ribbentrop, signed a treaty of nonaggression and a secret protocol dividing up Eastern Europe.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact was a stunning turnaround. For most of the 1930s the fundamental ideological battle line in Europe had been Nazism versus bolshevism. When the Soviet authorities had to decorate Moscow airport for Ribbentrop's arrival, the only

swastika flags they could find came from a film studio that was making anti-Nazi propaganda movies. Then suddenly Stalin was toasting Hitler. The secret protocol to the pact divided Poland between the two powers. Of the other spoils, Stalin would get Latvia and Estonia; Lithuania was added in a separate agreement in September. Hitler was now free to invade Poland, and he did so after a trumped-up incident on September 1.

To his surprise, however, Britain and France honored their guarantees: the Munich "worms" had turned. Persuaded now that Hitler's aims threatened the whole European balance of power, on September 3 they reluctantly declared war. But they were neither ready nor willing to intervene in Eastern Europe. Within weeks, German and Soviet troops had carved up Poland. On September 28 the two powers signed a treaty of friendship, under which vast quantities of Soviet food and raw materials would flow to Germany. Over the next two weeks Moscow concluded "mutual assistance" pacts with the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This permitted the Soviet Union to station troops on their soil and to establish naval and air bases. When similar negotiations with the Finns broke down, the Red Army invaded Finland on November 30, beginning what became known as the "Winter War."

Once again the United States stood on the sidelines. In early August Roosevelt sent a message to Stalin that "if his Government joined up with Hitler, it was as certain as night followed day that as soon as Hitler had conquered France, he would turn on Russia." But Roosevelt kept well clear of the British and French negotiations. The main significance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact for the United States was ideological. It consolidated the American image of "totalitarianism."

The word originated in fascist Italy in 1923, initially as a pejorative term, to denote the "totalitarian spirit" that sought to take control of all areas of politics, religion, and morals. The idea of a

"total state" was applied to Germany in the early 1930s by critics of Nazism. The term was then popularized in the United States from the mid-1930s to German emigrés, particularly Herbert Marcuse and others of the "Frankfurt School." On May 7, 1939, the cover story in the *New York Times Magazine* featured the "titanic struggle" of totalitarianism versus religion and democracy. Two vast figures were poised for battle above the caption: "The totalitarian church-state, presenting a species of man-god, presumes to offer a substitute for both religion and democracy." Although FDR did not make much explicit use of the term "totalitarian," the reference to religion and democracy perhaps owed something to his State of the Union Address.

Some American commentators, such as William Henry Chamberlin and John Dewey, wanted to apply the term "totalitarianism" to the Soviet Union as well. In the mid-1930s this was a matter of intense debate, especially during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 when Hitler and Stalin were pitted against each other in a proxy war. But the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the partition of Eastern Europe ended all discussion, except for a minority on the extreme left. Stalin's Soviet Union—the country of atheistic communism and brutal purges, of the leadership cult and the one-party state—had revealed itself as the true partner of the Nazi führer, persecutor of the Jews and conqueror of Czechoslovakia and Poland. To most commentators the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany now seemed indistinguishable in methods and character. References to Hitler's "Brown Bolshevism" and Stalin's "Red Fascism" became commonplace in the U.S. press. Over the next couple of years, countless editorials and articles, seminars and lectures, established "totalitarianism" as a staple concept of American political thought.