

**STYLE AND SUBSTANCE:**  
**FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND U.S.-FRENCH RELATIONS,**  
**1938-1942**

A Thesis

by

CLAYTON R. BAIRD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2004

Major Subject: History

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## ABSTRACT

Style and Substance:

Franklin D. Roosevelt and U.S. – French Relations, 1938-1942.

(August 2004)

Clayton R. Baird, BA, University of Tennessee

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. H.W. Brands

Historians of American diplomatic history during the Roosevelt administration have long debated whether President Roosevelt tricked Americans into the Second World War. Historians have looked at the personalities of Roosevelt and his key advisors to see if a hidden agenda was followed. U.S.-French relations highlight this divide. Did Roosevelt conspire in the fall of France, as the conspiratorialists claim, or did he simply react?

With most historians focusing on Roosevelt himself, few have examined the systemic causes of America's failure to aid France. This study investigates how Roosevelt's style of governance and administration affected American foreign policy toward France. It concludes that the system of foreign-policy-making Roosevelt established made the outcome of American policy toward France—in particular the fall of France in 1940—nearly inevitable.

*For my Parents, Family, & Friends  
who gave me the moral, emotional, and financial support  
that allowed me to succeed in otherwise difficult circumstances.*

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION:

### THE CONTINUING DEBATE

#### *Introduction*

According to William L. Langer, the fall of France in 1940 was “one of the few catastrophic events in history.”<sup>1</sup> America’s entry into World War II has been the topic of continuous, contentious debate ever since. Yet few authors have delved into Washington’s relations with France, Instead, most scholars have concentrated on America’s policies toward Britain, Germany, and Japan. Nonetheless, American-French relations highlight the evolving interpretations of how the United States entered the conflict. As conspiratorialist historians point out, during this period, U.S. foreign policy appeared to falter, the foreign policy establishment collapsed, and FDR appeared to let France go to her doom.

Yet U.S.-French relations highlight the inner workings of Roosevelt’s foreign policy well. Being the largest continental democracy, historians studying this diplomatic relationship can see how FDR structured his agenda and who he chose to carry it out. While most historians have debated whether or not FDR knowing pushed America into war, few have looked at the structure of his administration.

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This thesis follows the style of the *Journal for Diplomatic History*.

<sup>1</sup> William Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (Hamden: Archon, 1947), 3-10.



*Historiography*

Straying from the historiography of American foreign policy in general, the schools of thought regarding American relations with France have evolved slowly and simultaneously. Works in this area have lacked the revisionism and counter-revisionism characteristic of the history of diplomacy as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The few works that have looked at the fall of France and America's role in it have evolved from a traditional interpretation to one that focused on Roosevelt's internationalism. Some writers went as far as to argue that FDR actively sought to engage America in the war and that the French case was indicative of FDR's conniving and deceiving in order to get America into the fight. However, other scholars have argued that Roosevelt was naïve, passive, or not in full control of his advisors. These scholars focused on the systemic flaws of the foreign policy establishment. In their view, FDR became the victim of bureaucratic problems and infighting. The most recent scholarship has contended that FDR's style of governance, while excellent in domestic politics, had a detrimental effect on foreign affairs and caused the problems the other schools have pointed to.

The schools of thought have swung like a pendulum between traditional and conspiratorial theories of why FDR took the actions he did. The first school of thought to appear after World War II was the traditional school. As is the case much of the time, the works represented in this school follow the consensus tradition and do not directly attack the administration. The traditional historical interpretation of America's relations

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<sup>2</sup> Mark A. Stoler, "A Half-Century of Conflict: Interpretations of World War II Diplomacy," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American foreign Relations Since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 166-168.

with France centered on Roosevelt's attempts to strengthen America and support the western democracies. Most histories in this school portrayed the administration as merely reacting to events in Europe.

William Langer's *Our Vichy Gamble (1947)* set the tone for future debate in this area. Langer argued just after the war that the fall of France took the Americans by surprise. According to Langer, criticisms of Roosevelt's policies came from ideological opponents on the right. Langer and Everett Gleason's *Challenge to Isolationism (1952)* and *The Undeclared War (1953)* continued the trend of this early work. William Langer and Gleason argued in their expansive *Challenge to Isolationism* that Roosevelt's efforts could have produced better results. They pointed to the fact that Roosevelt had to contend with public opinion that while supportive of the Allies after 1939, strongly desired to stay out of European affairs.<sup>3</sup> The authors went as far as to say that Roosevelt preferred to leave Europe alone and pursue strictly American interests. They felt that Roosevelt thus acted reluctantly toward Europe.

William Henry Chamberlain echoed Langer's view in *America's Second Crusade (1950)*. Chamberlain made it a point to illustrate the domestic forces Roosevelt contended with. A "peace bloc" existed in Congress that overreacted in Chamberlain's view.<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt wanted peace, yet believed that America had to balance the scales to secure it. While publicly voicing a policy that excluded open aid, Chamberlain contended that Roosevelt sought to coerce the Germans into line with implied threats.

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<sup>3</sup> William L. Langer & Everret Gleason, *Challenge to Isolationism: 1937-1940* (New York: Harper Brother, 1952), 36.

<sup>4</sup> William Henry Chamberlain, *America's Second Crusade* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), 100-104.

Over a decade later, Robert Divine echoed these assessments in *The Reluctant Belligerent* (1965). Divine's short but clear analysis of American relations with France stressed Roosevelt's desire to avoid American involvement in the war.<sup>5</sup> Divine's central thesis revolved around the argument that events pulled Roosevelt into a position of supporting war.

Cordell Hull's *Memoirs* (1948) supported the traditional interpretation of Roosevelt's character by painting Roosevelt as a reactionary leader. However, his analysis opened the door for critical review of the actions of the president's advisors. Hull's *Memoirs*, along with Admiral William Leahy's *I Was There* (1950), illustrated the detrimental effect of Roosevelt's advisors on American-French relations. As more information became available, such as Ambassador William Bullitt's personal letters to Roosevelt, works such as Julian Hurstfield's *America and the French Nation* (1986) solidified this new historical interpretation into one that viewed systemic factors as the cause of American inaction.

Like Hull's memoir, Leahy's autobiography helped opened up the study of the effect of Roosevelt's advisors. Later scholars such as Hurstfield synthesized Leahy's observations into the tenets of this new school. In Leahy's view, France was a far different place than he expected. Going to France, Leahy had instructions from Roosevelt to at least hold the Vichy government to the treaty obligations it had with the United States. After arriving, Leahy concluded the task to be impossible.<sup>6</sup> The Germans

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<sup>5</sup> Robert A Divine, *The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 3.

<sup>6</sup> William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1950), 59-66.

could seize the Fleet any time they wished. The Petain regime had no real power even within the unoccupied zone. Although Leahy's account is a dark description of the state of affairs in France, this description pointed out that previous American accounts had been factually false and misled Washington.

Whereas Leahy concentrated mainly on the post-armistice situation, Hurstfield's latter analysis took Leahy's observations and tied them to a breakdown in American diplomacy. For Hurstfield, this breakdown came in the person of Ambassador William Bullitt, Leahy's predecessor. Hurstfield was one of the first to argue a systemic cause for American diplomatic failures. Dedicating much of his book to Bullitt's influence, Hurstfield still did not connect how Bullitt's influence stemmed from his relationship with Roosevelt as his "man on the ground in France."<sup>7</sup>

Just as the traditionalists began to write that Roosevelt sincerely tried to avoid war, the pendulum swung the other direction. Conspiracy historians put forth a simple answer to the question of why the Roosevelt administration did nothing to stop France's defeat. FDR tried to get the United States involved in the war from the beginning. Charles C. Tansill's *Back Door to War* (1952) reflected the early thought of this historical interpretation. Tansill argued that in 1938, Roosevelt lied to Congress and the American people when FDR stated that isolation was "dangerous to American neutrality, American security, and American peace" According to Tansill, this line of argument was illogical and laughable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Julian G. Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation: 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986), 3-4; Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Macmillian, 1948), 637.

<sup>8</sup> Charles C. Tansill, *Back Door to War: The Roosevelt Foreign Policy; 1933-1941* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 562.

President Roosevelt becomes an outright villain for scholars in this school because he sold out the French. Tansill's book, along with Hamilton Fish's *FDR: The Other Side of the Coin* (1976) and *Tragic Deception* (1984), argued that Roosevelt had made promises to the French that he could not keep nor had any intentions of keeping. Fish argued that even before the war in Europe began, the Allies could have secured peace with Germans by not aggravating the situation. Roosevelt determined the fate of France with his stance on the question of Poland, especially Danzig, and how the Allies should have responded. Acquiring Danzig could have placated the Germans and robbed Hitler of an excuse for war. Fish contended in both books that both the President and Congress knew that the Allies needed time to rearm and prepare.<sup>9</sup> Fish claimed that Roosevelt, the master politician, tricked Congress and America into war. The President used the situation in France as leverage against his domestic opponents at home.

At the same time, Roosevelt used France as a proxy against Germany. According to Fish and Tansill, the gambit paid off. As France crumbled, Roosevelt used the shift in public sentiment to change America's stance over aid. Both authors pointed to Cash and Carry and Lend-Lease as examples of this victory.<sup>10</sup> Tansill put forth that Roosevelt hoped the fall of France would trigger American involvement in the war.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hamilton Fish, *FDR: The Other Side of the Coin* (New York: Vantage, 1976), 45-48. Hamilton Fish served as a ranking Republican from New York on the House Foreign Affairs and House Rules committees at this time. He ardently opposed both the New Deal domestic programs and FDR's foreign policy. He would later travel to Europe in 1940 on a private peace mission that was not sanctioned by the administration. He has authored two books calling FDR's policies into question and whether they have damaged the nation.

<sup>10</sup> Fish, *FDR*, 70; Tansill, *Back Door to War*, 603.

<sup>11</sup> Tansill, *Back Door to War*, 602-617.

Fish and others fought against such a move. Both Fish and Tansill went on to argue that Roosevelt maneuvered Japan into taking the first shot.<sup>12</sup> France's collapse had primed American public sentiment. The Japanese attack only broke down the last isolationist barrier.

Although some authors in this school of interpretation attack Roosevelt's war-like policies from the political left because the war shifted focus away from domestic programs to military spending, most subscribers of this school come from the political right. Tansill's *Back Door to War* shows the effect of anticommunism and suspicion of those around Roosevelt that became endemic in the post-war era. Breaking with the traditional interpretation that the Axis alone caused the Second World War, Tansill argued that Stalin played a large role. In the end, World War II allowed Stalin to conquer half of Europe. Recent books and articles, such as Patrick Buchanan's *A Republic, Not an Empire*, contained similar arguments that have drawn from this school. Conspiracy historians argued that the New Deal-socialist conspiracy lies at the heart of Roosevelt's dealings.<sup>13</sup>

Even with the apparent political biases, the conspiratorial school of thought made good points. They effectively destroyed the notion that Roosevelt merely responded to events in Europe. Roosevelt's interventionism in these books called into question the traditionalists' idea that Roosevelt sought peace and acted only to contain Axis aggression. Most importantly, this interpretation brought the question of what did

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<sup>12</sup> Hamilton Fish, *Tragic Deception: FDR & America's Involvement in World War II* (Greenwich: Devin-Adair, 1983), 13-21; Tansill, *Back Door to War*, 619-630.

<sup>13</sup> Tansill, *Back Door to War*, 525-557.

Roosevelt know about France back to the forefront. Just as the traditional school caused the backlash just described, the backlash spawned a backlash of its own in turn. The new defenders of American policy, however, accepted many of the claims made by the conspiratorial school of thought. The most obvious concerned the amount of surprise Washington felt when France collapsed. T.R. Fehrenbach's *FDR's Undeclared War* (1967) and Robert Dallek's *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (1979) illustrated the shift from the original traditionalists' view.

Fehrenbach argued that the fall of France acted as a wake up call to Washington.<sup>14</sup> This historical interpretation did not see France's collapse as a Pearl Harbor that did not sway public opinion enough. Up until this time, American policy had tried to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Europe. The neo-traditionalists rebuked the idea that the Roosevelt administration tried to prod America into war. Dallek and others countered the claim by the conspiracy school that Roosevelt prepared for involvement by aiding the Allies with armaments such as aircraft in two ways. The neo-traditionalists added to the traditional argument that Roosevelt sought to balance the scales in Europe. Ambassador Bullitt did not lead the administration astray in this interpretation. Instead, Bullitt's assessment of the quality of the French air force led Roosevelt to ask Congress for approval to expand aircraft production at home and build factories in Canada to hide the fact that the planes were American.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> T.R. Fehrenbach, *FDR's Undeclared War: 1939-1941* (New York: David McKay, 1967), 96.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy: 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 172.

The new traditionalists stressed Roosevelt's idea of an arsenal for democracy. According to this school, the administration did not try to step in to stop the fall of France because America was "the arsenal, not the arbiter of democracy."<sup>16</sup> Neo-traditionalists attacked those in the "peace bloc," like Fish, who hampered Roosevelt's attempt to aid the Allies. For this school, isolationists overreacted. The new traditional school decried the efforts of isolationists because they impeded legitimate defense needs. Dallek pointed to the plans by the administration to use foreign arms orders to rev up American industry.<sup>17</sup> If industry had tooled up and already began to produce munitions, American needs could be met if the need arose.

Dallek also argues that Roosevelt acted as a shrewd politician by avoiding the pitfalls that Wilson encountered by making World War I a moral crusade. Instead, in Dallek's opinion, FDR tried to base his policies on practicality since Congress and public sentiment limited him.<sup>18</sup> In this manner, neo-traditionalist argued that Roosevelt followed a clearly defensive policy limited by his opponents by preparing America for defense, not war.

This school had some of the same failings as its historiographical forebears. While its practitioners do not totally defend the President, their claims of preemptive defense almost destroyed their argument. With their acceptance of Roosevelt's knowledge of French weakness and plans for aid, neo-traditionalists came within a hair's width of the conspiracy school's argument. The new traditional interpretation also did

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<sup>16</sup> Fehrenbach, *FDR's Undeclared War: 1939-1941*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 175-178.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Dallek, "Roosevelt as World Leader," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 5 (December 1961): 1503-1513.



not absolve the President of all his critics' charges. Fehrenbach echoed many contemporary critics of Johnson, by saying that Roosevelt's usurpation of power from Congress left enduring marks on American presidential politics. In the final analysis, the neo-traditionalists tried to save the traditional interpretation by co-opting tenets from the opposing side.

There appeared to be no consensus among the three basic schools of thought. This impasse had left historians asking the same questions. Did the Roosevelt administration try to prod America into war or prevent that involvement? Roosevelt's actions seemed contradictory. His knowledge of the situation in France remained a point of contention. Did his advisors shape his irregular diplomatic course? These questions remained as a holdover from a fifty-year debate.

### *Lingering Questions*

No matter where a historian rests politically, the answers to these questions rest at the feet of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. No President in American history has been as politically charged historically. Defenders of Roosevelt argue that he had to react to the crisis at hand, as Langer and Gleason contend. However, they fail to see that the need to react to the catastrophe stemmed from Roosevelt's actions before France's collapse. Churchill's close relationship could have given impetus to the drift toward war.<sup>19</sup> Yet, Roosevelt had a strong disposition and was not influenced easily. Although

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<sup>19</sup> Chamberlain, *America's Second Crusade*, 79.

many in his inner circle supported aggressive action against Germany, Roosevelt still controlled the direction of policy.

The historical debate has centered mainly on Roosevelt's intentions. On one end of the spectrum are those who hold he tried to defend democracy and freedom from tyranny. Others have argued that prewar policy centered on finding an excuse to enter the war. Roosevelt's policies appear erratic in hindsight and many times contradictory. FDR pleaded for peace while signaling unconditional support to France (and Britain).<sup>20</sup> Opponents argued that this maneuvering placed the United States inexorably on the path to war. Some conspiratorialists go as far as to question FDR's patriotism. Even those most likely to support FDR, such as Charles Beard, saw Roosevelt's policies as a de facto deception and a broken promise.<sup>21</sup>

However, the evidence at hand hardly backs up the claims made first by Hamilton Fish and later by a whole school of historians that Roosevelt tricked American's into war. Roosevelt left little in the form of records. He spoke to his aides and communicated his wishes during these meetings. Historians have had to rely on his speeches and comments to the press. Historians of all stripes have taken these sources and stressed those that support their case. The very fact that FDR stated his desire for peace, yet seemingly prepared for war, backs the conspiracy theorists. Yet speeches are for public consumption and, by necessity, give broad hopes and only general intentions. This leaves the historian to rely upon the record of what those close to FDR thought he

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<sup>20</sup> Fish, *Tragic Deception*, 90-92.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Beard, "Roosevelt Deceived the Public" in *The Roosevelt Diplomacy and World War II*, ed. Robert Dallek (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing, 1970), 12-14.

was planning. Nonetheless, many historians question the value of the memoirs of those around Roosevelt. As William Chamberlain acknowledges, “a note of self-justification almost inevitably intrudes in the recollections of active participants in such a momentous historical era.”<sup>22</sup>

This leaves historians of this era in a quandary. Did FDR conspire to enter the war, as conspiratorialists claim, and use the French as a sacrificial lamb to justify placing the country on a collision course with Germany? Are traditionalists right in arguing that Roosevelt reacted to an unfolding crisis. As with most conspiracies, FDR’s intentions cannot be proven. Yet historians have overlooked an explanation that does lie in the documentary evidence. Instead of trying to discern what was in Roosevelt’s mind, historians should look at the structure of FDR’s administration. How Roosevelt conducted foreign policy and whom he relied on mirrors how he pushed his New Deal policies through Congress. Roosevelt’s role in America’s largest foreign policy crisis before America’s entry into the Second World War had some of its roots in his style of governing. Hamilton Fish notes that FDR had a magnetic personality that he had cultivated for the sole purpose of disarming opponents and cultivating “friends.”<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt’s “friends” or allies consisted of those he thought he could use for advice, information, or would loyally carry out his agenda.

Historians trying to see who was pro-war and isolationist have studied the makeup of Roosevelt’s administration in-depth. The makeup of FDR’s administration had direct and discernible effects on foreign policy. FDR was both highly partisan and

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<sup>22</sup> Chamberlain, *America’s Second Crusade*, vii.

practical. This explains why a New Dealer such as Sumner Welles acted as Under Secretary of State to Republican Cordell Hull. The administration seemed filled with men of strong wills, egos, and separate agendas. The meddling of inexperienced New Dealers in the affairs of foreign policy professionals caused many problems for American foreign policy, as the two groups did not see eye to eye. While the New Dealers were incredibly loyal to the President, they chafed under the normal rules that governed foreign affairs. Political intrigue within the State Department and abroad hampered policy and interfused personal politics. The political battles within and between departments destroyed the traditional foreign policy establishment's abilities to analyze and "filter" information from overseas. The handicapped foreign policy establishment became the tool of those willing to exploit it.

Those outside Washington contributed their fair share, as well. Roosevelt's preference for men such as William Bullitt and Joseph Kennedy who were from the same social class as FDR and loyal New Dealers led to misperceptions within the administration about what was happening in Europe. These men circulated at the highest levels of French and British society. Their disdain for getting to know lower functionaries blinded them to some problems and heightened their sense to others. The poor picture that these men gave to FDR compounded the fact that the President relied solely on personal interaction in many cases.

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<sup>23</sup> Fish, *FDR*, 3-5.

*A New Perspective*

Historians should look at what their academic brethren have studied in political science. Instead of concentrating on personality, historians need to look at style. Alexander George and others have argued that how foreign policy is carried out affects the outcome as much as the policy and can affect what that policy actually is. George and Irving Janis argue that policy makers, especially those in crises situations, tend to limit their choices and rely on a small group of advisors.<sup>24</sup> Since he came in dealing with the Great Depression, Roosevelt operated in crisis mode from day one. Similarly, Jeral Rosati points out that decision makers in times of crisis tend to prefer ad hoc channels of communication over normal channels.<sup>25</sup> As both defenders and opponents of Roosevelt have noted, he was already predisposed to dealing with people in person.

Although previous authors never made the full connection between domestic politics and foreign affairs, FDR used his same modus operandi in dealing with his ambassadors, advisors and officials in the same manner that he used governing the New Deal agencies. Historians of this period need to look at Roosevelt's governing style. This could lead to a new consensus about why the administration acted as it did just as France fell before their eyes. As Hamilton Fish noted in *FDR: the Other Side of the Coin*, Roosevelt was the "master politician" who played a cat and mouse game with Congress over domestic policy.

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview, 1980), 80-91; Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign Policy Decisions and Fiascos* (New York, 1972), 9-11. Janis argues that policy makers fall victim to "groupthink" or a set of ideas that becomes isolated from what is really going on. Thus decisions are made without considering current events.

Supporters and opponents, alike, gave FDR's style of personal governance grudging respect. In this way, Roosevelt played both sides against the middle and guided his domestic policies through the political minefield. Similarly, FDR could control his strong-willed subordinates by pitting them against each other. All the while he was doing this, Roosevelt appeared to be above the fray. He attempted to replicate this in his conduct of foreign policy. However, this one-on-one interaction had dire consequences for American foreign policy on two levels.

First, FDR dealt directly with those in the midst of the events the administration was dealing with. Presidents before and since have done this, but not to the extent FDR did. Without going through the normal channels, FDR received facts in the raw. This may sound good, but this raw information included the aide's, advisor's, or ambassador's personal bias and limitations. Without the alternative sources, the allies' misperceptions of German and Allied needs and abilities became those of the United States. When war finally broke, the sheer panic and frustration of the allied governments was transmitted directly into American politics.

Second, since many within the administration had personal contact with FDR outside of normal channels, this accelerated the breakdown of the normal establishment. Roosevelt's desire to speak with people directly encouraged backbiting and political power struggles within the administration. One department or individual did not know what others were doing. Having access to the president made some officials overstep

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<sup>25</sup> Jewel A. Rosati, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 269-270.

their authority. Many opponents of FDR cite Ambassador to France, William Bullitt's assurances of aid to the French as proof of Roosevelt's machinations toward war.

However, these assurances are a perfect example of Bullitt thinking he was acting in the spirit of Roosevelt when he may not have been. Others, like Sumner Welles, used this personal contact to pursue an agenda of their own that conflicted with signals others were sending within the administration. Confusion was the obvious outcome. The administration appeared to have no concrete plan of action. Both ally and potential enemy alike could not tell what America's intentions truly were.

Other nations received further confusing messages by American moral diplomacy. Roosevelt attempted to duplicate his domestic success with the fireside chats by taking his message of peace to the people of the world. He sent pleas to all of Europe's leaders, asked the Pope to plead his case, and through speeches attempted to bring his moral weight to bear. Yet neither domestic politics nor moral pressures bound Hitler and Mussolini. Roosevelt's pleas made America appear weak to the dictators of Europe and made France and Britain question the nation's fortitude.

The confusion ran both directions. The Roosevelt administration received, what in hindsight, appears a confusing picture of the European situation. The documentary evidence shows that FDR felt the French to be the senior partner in the Allied relationship. Britain appeared weak with the possibility of folding under the stress. This view helps explain why France became the center of American planning. Yet the weaknesses of France would be highlighted by the test of war. Even as France fell, the Roosevelt administration continued to misperceive the situation until it was too late. A

reshuffling of American personnel after the fall would allow the administration and future historians to see the error in administration's judgment.

As Stephen G. Bunch points out, Roosevelt tried to fight the war with minimum political and material effort. According to Bunch, "FDR was clearly attracted to the idea of such a war of limited means."<sup>26</sup> Roosevelt knew he could not ask America to risk a repeat of the First World War. Thus FDR centered his policy first on trying to prevent war without compromising too much with the Nazis. When this failed, American policy shifted to trying to achieve a desirable outcome while limiting the scope of the conflict.<sup>27</sup>

To this end, Roosevelt approached foreign policy in the same manner he crafted New Deal policy. He relied on sending out "trial balloons" intending to measure the scope of his political latitude. In domestic politics, Roosevelt would make grand pronouncements, but compromised with his political opponents in the end.<sup>28</sup> In this way, FDR always kept his options open. Roosevelt, as a smart politician kept these maneuvers secret. When he risked exposure, the President would deny involvement. An example of Roosevelt's secrecy is well illustrated in a note sent to Attorney General Adolph Berle. In the note, Roosevelt decries Berle's tendency to put "highly indiscrete" information in his letters that may contain policy moves.<sup>29</sup> Most of FDR's letters to key

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen G. Bunch "FDR and Limited War in Europe: A Plausible Middle Course?" in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Formation of the Modern World* ed. Thomas C. Howard & William D. Pederson (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 61-62.

<sup>27</sup> Mark M. Lowenthal, "Roosevelt and the Coming of the War: The Search for United States Policy; 1937-42," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no. 3 (July 1981): 414.

<sup>28</sup> R.G. Tugwell, "The Compromising Roosevelt," *The Western Political Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1953): 320-341.

<sup>29</sup> "FDR to Adolph Berle, Feb 11, 1937," President's Safe File (PSF)-Berle, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.



officials asked only that they talk to him in person on certain matters. Thus, Roosevelt kept a tight lid on what he was doing.

Nonetheless, this produced contradictory messages coming from the White House. Thomas Fleming, a conspiratorialist, backed up his analysis in *The New Dealers' War* (2001) when he argued that the administration had a split personality at times.<sup>30</sup> This ability to hide his true intentions came from years of political maneuvering. By looking at Roosevelt's style of governing, one can understand why the schools of thought disagree. In a way, all of the schools have correct observations. Roosevelt had a personal, engaged style.

The President would often choose men to champion his different policy initiatives. Roosevelt liked men from a similar background to his own, with strong wills and egos. Many firmly believed in what they advocated in the President's name. Thus the contradictory nature of Roosevelt's foreign policy pitted diplomat against diplomat. In cases such as those of William Bullitt and Sumner Welles, this competition would have dire consequences for American foreign policy.

As Hamilton Fish noted, however, Roosevelt was not well-read and relied on advice on those around him.<sup>31</sup> This explains how someone like Bullitt or Welles had such an impact on Roosevelt's views of Europe and France. He abhorred normal channels and communicated with them directly without the normal filtering process of the foreign policy establishment. Thus the President received raw information that could

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas J. Fleming, *The New Dealers' War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War within World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 34-48.

<sup>31</sup> Fish, *FDR*, 2.

have been erroneous. The President also pulled Hull and other administrators close to him and away from their respective departments. The State Department thus became susceptible to factions and infighting. This destroyed alternate sources of information and exacerbated the problem.

Both Tansill and Fish noted the dual nature of Roosevelt's policies. Both authors took the contradictory nature of the president's policies and speeches to suggest that a hidden agenda existed. If taken in context to how Roosevelt maneuvered, however, his dual personality makes perfect sense. Fleming pointed out that the President often made statements that did not reflect his true motives.<sup>32</sup> While this fact may have strengthened the conspiracy school, it could be taken as a way to keep political opponents off balance. In foreign affairs, Roosevelt acted in the same manner that he had in the domestic sphere. Yet while this type of politics served Roosevelt well pushing through the New Deal, it only sent confusing signals as Cordell Hull noted.

The President believed he could prop up the Allies with minimum political capital, both goad and coerce the Germans, and come out on top. He failed to understand that Hitler, Churchill, and Reynaud had different constituencies. Roosevelt's personal style also engendered suspicion. Politicians and political opponents alike understood Roosevelt's style. Although he did not criticize Roosevelt directly for his style, Hamilton Fish's description of FDR shows both the contempt and respect that opponents held for the President. This wariness helped fuel the isolationist sentiment

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<sup>32</sup> Fleming, *The New Dealers' War*, 3-5.

that traditionalists and neo-traditionalist condemned in their books. In a manner, Roosevelt created his own opposition.

Yet Roosevelt's domestic opposition still operated in the same system that he did. In trying to persuade the Fascists to accept a peaceful solution, FDR forgot that he dealt with authoritarians. In doing so, Roosevelt's moral diplomacy only added to the confusion and made America look weak.

### *Method of Argument*

The interpretation that stresses Roosevelt's governing style appears to answer more questions than it raises, unlike the previous schools. In this approach, U.S.-French relations are a case to be studied to highlight FDR's overall method of conducting foreign policy. An added benefit comes from the systemic approach being less politically charged as those schools that stress looking at personalities and policies. Although it condemns Roosevelt's mode, the governing style argument does not necessarily pass judgment on the President's motives. In short, it cannot answer whether Roosevelt acted or reacted. The evidence in existence can show how Roosevelt operated, but is lacking when it comes to whether he had a secret motive to push America into war. One could still side with either traditionalists or conspiracy authors. The problem arises from there being no "smoking gun" evidence either way.

The governing style school can explain why Roosevelt voiced both interventionist sentiment and isolationist sentiment simultaneously, but cannot establish which was his true motivation. This approach uses much of the same evidence as

previous works. However, by looking at whom Roosevelt tasked with what role and what methods American policymakers used while dealing with France between the Munich agreement and the fall of France, the systemic flaws in Roosevelt's policies should become apparent. By also looking at the aftereffects and how American policymakers had to adjust, the approach will allow a different perception and thus new analysis.

While many historians may feel that a structural analysis should be best left to political scientists, historians are obligated to explore all possible explanations to why America was not prepared for France's fall before Germany. This approach cannot explain whether Roosevelt broke promises to Americans as Beard claims or planned for war from the start. The evidence just is not there to know fully what FDR's plans were. Again, a structural approach can clear the air. By explaining how the politically gifted Roosevelt made policies on the assumption that foreign politics were tantamount to domestic politics with a larger audience, historians can clear a way so that future historians can delve deeper into Roosevelt's intentions.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GREAT WAR, MUNICH, AND THE APPROACH OF WAR, SEPTEMBER 1938-JULY 1939

In order to understand U.S.-French relations before World War II, one must understand the Munich agreement and the lasting effects of the previous world war. Many historians have noted that the Munich agreement came from European hopes to avoid another war. While not playing a role in Munich directly, American policy makers hoped the agreement would help avoid war and maintain order in Europe. While interested in the affairs of Europe, most Americans saw no reason to reenter European politics. With most Americans against involvement, Congress effectively stripped President Roosevelt of most of his means to conduct foreign policy, by passing the Neutrality Act of 1937.<sup>1</sup> With this public attitude, the Roosevelt Administration continued to hope it could help maintain peace in a time war seemed certain.

#### *Anxiety and Lost Hopes of Munich*

America's diplomatic "phony war" with Germany began with the Munich Agreement of 1938. In the fall of 1938, Europe braced for war as what seemed the last in a series of crises gripped the continent. Germany's Hitler demanded that Czechoslovakia give Germany the Sudetenland, a section of territory containing a

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<sup>1</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 221.

sizable population of ethnic Germans. For most of mid-1938, the leaders of Europe's democracies tried to balance defending their own interests in the face of German's perceived power with the need to find a peaceful agreement due to their perceived weakness. The perceived vulnerability of French and British territory to German air attack illustrates the perceived power imbalance. Communiqués coming into Washington from Europe stressed that Germany was out-producing the combined efforts of Britain and France in fighters and bombers.<sup>2</sup> American policymakers also became alarmed at Germany's ability to move troops into key areas before the French and British could react. Ambassador Kennedy noted that the French have "exaggerated" the level of coordination between themselves and the British.<sup>3</sup> Kennedy hints that the future allies would be unable to coordinate a defense against the Germans.

As Cordell Hull stated in his memoirs, Munich settled nothing.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, the agreement caused so much anxiety in the soon-to-be Allied camp that neither Britain nor France could determine the next move of Germany's Fuhrer, Adolph Hitler. American diplomatic circles were no less affected by the rumors and intrigue that afflicted European governments.<sup>5</sup> The Roosevelt administration received conflicting reports from Europe. On the one hand, some stated that Hitler and other European powers truly sought peace. On the other, dispatches stressed the weakness of America's

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<sup>2</sup> "The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy) to the Secretary of State, May 5, 1938," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938 Volume 1 (General)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 50-53.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 586-590.

<sup>5</sup> William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 54.

friendly buffer that France and Great Britain acted as. Without being able to affect the situation, Munich highlighted America's weakness since Washington had stressed the need for such a conference but took no part. This set the stage for the coming crisis.

Yet unlike a year later, the Czech Crisis ended peacefully. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was not the only official hoping that the western democracies had achieved "peace in our time." Howard Bucknell, American Consul in Geneva, Switzerland, cabled Washington with a message mixed with hope and caution. While recognizing that appeasement was the Allies only recourse, Bucknell stated that it appeared that the Munich agreement represented "the forerunner of an attempt on the part of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany progressively to settle all of the major causes of friction in Europe and that from now on a new era, permeated with the 'spirit of Munich,' is about to dawn."<sup>6</sup> Likewise, many within the American diplomatic community believed that Hitler was willing to risk war to achieve his goals but would rather gain them peacefully. Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles reported that in his conversation with French Ambassador René Marquis de St. Quentin that both Britain and France felt Germany unable to undertake any major military operation for more than a year. Welles noted that the French believed "there was an increasing apathy on the part of the German public towards the Nazi party" and that a harvest that was "decidedly less" than previous years would hamper any aggressive moves by Hitler.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Consul at Geneva (Bucknell) to Secretary of State, October 12, 1938," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1938 Vol. 1 (General)* (Government Printing Office, 1955), 88.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), August 2, 1938," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1938 Vol. 1 (General)* (Government Printing Office, 1955), 62.

Yet while many Americans hoped that Munich would represent the high point of British and French appeasement, American policymakers understood that the United States lost standing on the world stage. While Secretary of State Hull refused to commit the United States to the agreement immediately because he found it undesirable, European leaders remembered that Roosevelt had stressed the need for just such a conference to resolve the tensions in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Its apparently passive acceptance of the less-than-desirable Munich Agreement underscored the weak position the Roosevelt administration operated from as noted later by Winston Churchill.<sup>9</sup>

While some in Washington would later lament Munich, the documents from the period show that the Roosevelt administration realized that America could do little else. Hull and others pressed Roosevelt to take a stronger stance on Hitler's demands, but Hull noted that Roosevelt feared domestic political repercussions.<sup>10</sup> The isolationists in Congress and the press "leaped" at any hint of participation in Europe's affairs.<sup>11</sup> Dispatches from across the Atlantic asked Roosevelt and his deputies if the United States would send arms to support Britain and France if they chose to confront the German despot. Officials including Ambassadors William C. Bullitt in France and Joseph P. Kennedy in Britain stressed the fact that neither nation could keep up with German

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<sup>8</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 595; Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 251-255.

<sup>9</sup> Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 251-255.

<sup>10</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 590.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 589.



military preparations without American help.<sup>12</sup> All that Roosevelt could do was send pleas for peace to both Hitler and Italian Duce Benito Mussolini. Roosevelt attempted to remind Hitler that World War I had “failed to bring tranquility” to Europe and that its end was “sterile” for victor and vanquished.<sup>13</sup> It was Roosevelt’s conviction to play to Hitler’s rationality and emotions at the same time.

William L. Shirer notes that Roosevelt tried to leave open the possibility of American action by noting that Roosevelt warned in a public address that “no one could predict whether or not the United States would be drawn in” if war broke out.<sup>14</sup> Yet Roosevelt had to backpedal shortly afterwards by distancing the United States from the Franco-British alliance.<sup>15</sup> Shirer’s correct analysis of these contradictory statements shows that Roosevelt could do little to shore up French and British resolve. FDR’s incoherent policies instead undercut it and did nothing to bolster the Allie’s resolve. In later months, questions of the resolve of both France and Britain would plague American policymakers all the way up to the fall of France.

While America’s weak stand at Munich opened the door to Allied questions of Roosevelt’s sincerity, the United States’ ability to influence German policy had already been harmed by political infighting within the administration. *Hindenburg* should

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<sup>12</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the office of Arms and Munitions Control (Green), January 18, 1938,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1930, Volume 2 (British Commonwealth, Europe, and Near East Africa)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 297-300; “The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, September 19, 1939,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1938 Vol. 1 (General)* (Government Printing Office, 1955), 615-618.

<sup>13</sup> Basil Rauch, ed., *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Selected Speeches, Messages, Press Conferences and Letters* (Norwalk: Easton Press, 1989), 203-204.

<sup>14</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), 356.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 356; William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 400.

resonate among diplomatic historians as it does with aviation historians for it had a major effect on U.S.-German relations. In 1938 after the *Hindenburg* disaster, Germany asked to buy helium from the United States in order to avoid a similar occurrence. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes initially approved the sale, yet the loyal New Dealer and anti-Nazi that Attorney General Francis Biddle called as fanatic as a “belligerent Donald Duck” stalled and later denied the sale.<sup>16</sup> Ickes justified his actions by stating that Washington had no way of verifying that the helium would not be used for military purposes.<sup>17</sup> Yet in his diaries, Ickes hints at another motivation. Ickes hated how Hull wanted to “handle these European dictators with gloved hands” and “rattle the saber when it comes to Japan.”<sup>18</sup> Ickes used his personal relationship with FDR to bypass Hull. Ickes move illustrates how many in Roosevelt’s administration would use their personal influence with the President to affect foreign affairs outside their domain in order to combat Fascism.

Hull, however, appropriately feared that overt American condemnation would hurt the United States’s ability to deal with Germany and Italy. Yet having Roosevelt’s ear as a fellow New Dealer and better press skills, Ickes received support from Roosevelt and shifted the blame for the denial onto the State Department for a time until the controversy passed. Hull notes that Roosevelt believed Ickes until Hull showed him Ickes’s request for Hull to permit the helium sale to which FDR “was much surprised.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 597-598; Francis B. Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 178.

<sup>17</sup> Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Inside Struggle; 1936-1939* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 324, 344, 348.

<sup>18</sup> Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Inside Struggle; 1936-1939*, 348.

<sup>19</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 598.

As America's official face in the world, the State Department came out of the controversy looking to be anti-German. Ickes's move help poison relations between Washington and Berlin; relations that could have helped the Allied cause. America already appeared to be Germany's enemy by early 1938 and could not claim to be a neutral third party at Munich or afterwards.

Ickes's move also weakened the State Department internally. Cordell Hull told Roosevelt that he would not act as administrator of his department. Hull saw his role as advisor to the president.<sup>20</sup> Losing the battle to Ickes weakened Hull's standing in the eyes of his subordinates. Solicitor General Francis Biddle wrote in his memoirs that Hull was the "old man" in Washington who slowing lost power to younger, more motivated individuals.<sup>21</sup> One individual, Sumner Welles, would rise to challenge Hull directly because of this apparent weakness. With Roosevelt's advisors at each other's throats, American foreign policy suffered due to infighting and separate agendas.

### *The Beginnings of FDR's Moral Diplomacy*

Munich represented the beginnings of Roosevelt's "moral diplomacy" in Europe. Roosevelt had used similar tactics to undercut and isolate his political opponents on domestic matters. His fireside chats bypassed Congress and took Roosevelt's arguments directly to the American people. Now in foreign policy, Roosevelt appears to have hoped that public statements would cut through diplomatic protocol and attack the problem at its source.

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<sup>20</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 186-190.

As early as 1933, Washington tried to use moral condemnation of Japanese atrocities in China in order to bring international pressure on Tokyo. Roosevelt hoped that a “moral embargo” in which the United States strongly opposed the sale of aircraft and parts to countries using these against civilian targets would help deny the “material encouragement” for the aggressors.<sup>22</sup> These embargos had little official power and were informal in nature. By 1938, nonetheless, the Roosevelt administration used these condemnations regularly. The lack of enforcement power did not necessarily mean that these tactics did not work. Sumner Welles reported to Roosevelt that while the United Aircraft Corporation continued to sell aircraft components to Japan at the end of 1938, most other manufacturers willingly cooperated. Welles’s response to United’s obstinacy was to release its name and details of its sales to the American press.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Roosevelt hoped to use his position as a world leader to pressure aggressors with threats of making them international pariahs. On October 5, 1937, FDR stated that all peace-loving nations should “quarantine” those states involved in “terror and international lawlessness.”<sup>24</sup> The quarantine would amount to economic and political sanctions. Again, Roosevelt appears to have tried to give Germany, Italy, and Japan an incentive to act in accordance with international law and tradition.

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<sup>21</sup> Biddle, *In Brief Authority*, 179-181.

<sup>22</sup> *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy; 1931-1941* in *Foreign Relations of the United States Series* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 89.

<sup>23</sup> “Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, to Roosevelt, December 13, 1938,” in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: December 1938-February 1939, Volume 8*, ed. Donald B. Schewe (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1476

Under neutrality legislation, aircraft suppliers had to report the buyer and nature of the sale they were making. Since aircraft were seen as both having peaceful and military applications, the government could not ban sales outright.

<sup>24</sup> *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy; 1931-1941*, 49

Nevertheless, Congress had the sole ability to levy sanctions. Roosevelt, thus, tried to bluff those he saw as aggressors. The French, on the other hand, took the President at his word. As John Haight has pointed out, France paid special attention to Roosevelt's quarantine speech and other moral pronouncements. Haight notes that then-Premier Camille Chautemps considered FDR the world's spokesman for democracy and law because of the quarantine speech. This view would transform later into the view of Roosevelt as moral enforcer.<sup>25</sup>

Besides trying to use his position as an international moral guide, Roosevelt acted as preacher to the masses. Two days before Germany, France, and Britain signed the final draft of the Munich agreement, Roosevelt sent a personal plea to Hitler and Mussolini. In it, Roosevelt repeated his wish to maintain order in the international realm. He justified his stance, however, by trying to tap the two dictators sense of public responsibility as if Hitler and Mussolini were accountable to their respective populace in the same manner as an obstinate congressman was. In the letter, Roosevelt said that if world leaders did not look for all avenues to peace, "the souls of every man, woman, and child whose lives will be lost will hold [them] accountable."<sup>26</sup>

*The Aftereffects of the First World War.*

As 1939 dawned, an earlier war still affected how America dealt with the impending crisis. Even before the dust of German armored convoys moving into

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<sup>25</sup> John McVickar Haight, Jr., "France and the Aftermath of Roosevelt's 'Quarantine' Speech," *World Politics* 14, no. 2 (January 1962): 283-288.

<sup>26</sup> *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy; 1931-1941*, 429.

Czechoslovakia had settled, the French asked the United States about the possibility of buying war supplies. Aircraft topped the French list from the very beginning.<sup>27</sup> The *New York Times* reported that French aviation experts came to the United States to study American aircraft production techniques and methods.<sup>28</sup> The French wanted more than advice, however. They needed America's industrial base to produce war material for them.

Yet the French could not buy the requested supplies nor gain credit for doing so because of the Johnson Act passed after World War I. The act represented the same sentiment behind the Nye commission's findings that war profiteers had pushed America into the Great War by tying the United States to the French and British economically.<sup>29</sup> The Johnson Act stated that countries owing the United States an outstanding debt would be limited in the amount of military supplies and credit it could purchase even with approval from Washington. Combined with the revised Neutrality Act, which forced countries to seek approval from the U.S. government before buying armaments, this limitation extended to rather ordinary items that could be considered war supplies.

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<sup>27</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, Feb 1, 1939," President's Safe File (PSF)-France-Bullitt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

<sup>28</sup> "Paris to send Group to Study our Planes," *New York Times*, June 8, 1939: 5.

<sup>29</sup> "Report of the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry (The Nye Report)," U.S. Congress, Senate, 74<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session., February 24, 1936, [http://oll.temple.edu/hist249/course/Documents/nye\\_commission\\_report.htm](http://oll.temple.edu/hist249/course/Documents/nye_commission_report.htm) (accessed 5/18/2004). In February of 1936, the Nye commission released a finding that U.S. arms manufacturers had "that almost without exception, at times resorted to such unusual approaches, questionable favors and commissions, and methods of "doing the needful" as to constitute, in effect, a form of bribery of foreign governmental officials or of their close friends in order to secure business." In effect, the commission's findings laid the blame for America's entry into the First World War at the feet of U.S. munitions suppliers. The "unethical" manner in which they conducted business led to an unstable world, not only in Europe, but in Asia and South America. The commission's report led to the Nye Amendment, which like the Johnson Act, limited arms transfers from the United States to other governments.

Cotton, for example, fell under these restrictions as tension grew in 1939 as the Neutrality Laws began to take effect. Despite this, French officials continued to ask for aid and concerned themselves especially with aircraft.

Dispatches between the capitals illustrate how Roosevelt's friend, Ambassador Bullitt, worked with Daladier and Reynaud to find a way to settle France's debt and give the French access to American-produced aircraft.<sup>30</sup> Bullitt suggested that private banks could extend credit, even while technically forbidden by the Johnson Act, because the act had never passed judicial review. Bullitt recognized, nonetheless, the need to pay off the debt. He stressed to the French that Congress would not accept a "token payment." With France owing 87 billion francs, French Minister of Finance Paul Reynaud suggested to Bullitt that France could pay 10 billion plus trade the United States French possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific to relieve France of the Johnson Act restrictions.<sup>31</sup> Daladier rejected this and stressed the need for French exports. Bullitt also relayed a request that Roosevelt seek tariff reductions. The French found it hard to pay debts to the United States when American tariffs made French products too expensive for average Americans to buy.<sup>32</sup>

Tensions in the Pacific added to those in Europe. Bullitt reported that the French feared that any action in Europe would divert attention away from French Indochina. With France not able to come to their colony's aid, the weakness of the French could

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<sup>30</sup> "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to Secretary of State, February 13, 1939," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1939 Volume 2 (General, British Commonwealth, and Europe)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 501-505

<sup>31</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, Feb 22, 1939," PSF-France-Bullitt, FDR Library.

<sup>32</sup> "Memorandum from Advisor on International Economic Affairs, June 29, 1939," file 851.5041/1868, RG 59, National Archives.

give the Japanese incentive to take the area by force. Bullitt informed Roosevelt that the French planned to buy aircraft through the Emperor of Annam in order to circumvent the Congressional barrier. In a memo dated February 23, 1939, Bullitt gave tacit endorsement to this course of action.<sup>33</sup>

Dispatches and documents clearly show that Roosevelt knew and facilitated these cloak and dagger methods. While Roosevelt used the bully pulpit to keep American companies from selling to America's possible enemies, he skirted the law trying to provide the same to the French and British. Roosevelt asked Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. to allow Canada to request loans from the United States. The Canadians would use these loans to build aircraft factories. In turn, the plants would produce aircraft destined for the French air force.<sup>34</sup>

The head of the Anglo-French Coordinating Committee (see footnote), Jean Monnet relates an episode that while meeting with the President, Roosevelt drew a map for Monnet showing where he want to place these factories on the North-East frontier as to have access to American-made components.<sup>35</sup> In addition to building plants in Canada, the French proposed through Ambassador Bullitt that the French create the Amiot Company and locate it in the United States. Being a company in which the French government held stock yet within the United States, the firm would be exempt from

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<sup>33</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, February 23, 1939." PSF-France Bullitt, FDR Library.

<sup>34</sup> John Morton Blum, *From the Morgenthau Diaries: Years of Urgency; 1938-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 65-67.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1978), 116-131.

The Anglo-French Coordinating Committee was created for the sole purpose of streamlining supplies from the U.S. to the Allies. At the time of its inception, there were numerous missions to American manufacturers that needed some form of organization. Monnet admits that the Committee never fully organized logistics for the Allies.



many of the Neutrality Act's restrictions. Thus, the company could build military aircraft for the French.<sup>36</sup>

While Roosevelt skirted Congressional oversight, he justified his support for direct sales to the American public. During press conferences, Roosevelt stressed the domestic benefits of helping France. French orders would stimulate economic growth and employ American workers. According to FDR, "most of the aircraft factories in this country are, today, idle" and that the French orders would prepare the production base for forthcoming American orders.<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt argued that the Great Depression had created a bottleneck in critical industries essential for both domestic and defense needs. The French orders were relatively small and would not alter the balance of power. They would provide France with the means to defend itself and allow factories to turn out American aircraft more efficiently once Roosevelt's defense appropriations bill cleared Congress and American orders had to be filled.<sup>38</sup>

Yet those in Washington realized that the Neutrality Acts represented a major hurdle. Bullitt reported from Paris that the Daladier government put its bets up front and hoped that the law would be amended. Daladier was "absolutely determined" to get as many airplanes and components from the United States as he could.<sup>39</sup> This even meant making orders that clearly violated the Neutrality Act hoping Congress would change it

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<sup>36</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Controls (Green), April, 20, 1939," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1939 Volume 2 (General, British Commonwealth, and Europe)*, 515-517.

<sup>37</sup> "Press Conference #521, January 27, 1939," in *The Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 13:90-91.

<sup>38</sup> "Press Conference # 517, January 13, 1939," in *The Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. 13:53-56.

before war came. The question of war supplies, especially aircraft, would continue to haunt the Roosevelt administration in the months to follow and reveal how misinformed the government was about what was going on in Europe until France collapsed. If Washington had been better informed, policymakers would see that France's weakness lay with its government, not just its military.

### *Who Wants War?*

At the beginning of 1939, it appeared that Austria and Czechoslovakia had satisfied Hitler's call for lebensraum. French minister Bonnet believed that consolidating his recent victories occupied Hitler, but that Italy had not benefited from Germany's demands. Bullitt reported to Washington that German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop assured him that, while Hitler wanted peace, he feared that Mussolini would pull Germany into conflict with Britain and France.<sup>40</sup> Bullitt relayed French fears that Italy's "bad boy" would make unacceptable demands on France after Spain's Francisco Franco finished shoring up his position on the Iberian Peninsula. According to Bullitt's contacts, Germany could not avoid coming to Italy's aid and that the crisis demanded action on the part of the United States.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to Secretary of State, December 21, 1939," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1939 Volume 2 (General, British Commonwealth, and Europe)*, 518, 524-525

<sup>40</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, January 30, 1939," file 740.00/561, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Orville H. Bullitt, ed., *For the President Personal and Secret* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 306-308.

Yet later historians have shown that Hitler had the ball and not Italy. Hitler could have stopped his smaller partner at any time. As Langer and Gleason point out, Hitler used Mussolini's advice when it suited him and allowed Italy to act only when it benefited Germany.<sup>42</sup> In this manner, Italy's aggressive action took attention away from what Hitler had planned next. Using Italy as a proxy also allowed Germany to drive a wedge between its rivals. According to the French, Chamberlain gave the Italians the wrong impression during a visit to Rome in January of 1939. American Ambassador William Phillips said that Chamberlain possibly gave the impression of weakness and "that the Italians, always quick on the trigger, may decide to take advantage in their relations with France."<sup>43</sup>

The tensions with Italy greatly affected Anglo-French relations. Bullitt reported that the French feared that Chamberlain would sell the French out in order to protect British interests in the Middle East.<sup>44</sup> French Prime Minister Edward Daladier commented to Bullitt that Chamberlain was "a desiccated stick; the king a moron; and the queen an excessively ambitious woman who would sacrifice every other country in the world in order to remain Queen Elizabeth of England."<sup>45</sup> Even before war broke out, the Allies began to come apart.

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<sup>42</sup> Langer & Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940*, 197-200.

<sup>43</sup> "Memorandum by William Phillips, Ambassador to Italy, January 32, 1939," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: December 1939-February 1939, Volume 8*, ed. Donald B. Schewe (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1505

<sup>44</sup> "Memorandum by William Phillips, Ambassador to Italy, January 32, 1939," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: December 1939-February 1939, Volume 8*, ed. Donald B. Schewe (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1505

<sup>45</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, Feb 6 1939," file 740.00/565, RG 59, National Archives.

American officials, likewise, questioned British resolve. Bullitt pointed out that German officials, such as German Air Marshal Hermann Goering, joked that Britain was a “rouged old maid trying to pretend that she was still young and vigorous and capable of being a partner to anyone.”<sup>46</sup> Clearly, Goering hoped to draw France under German influence. Winston Churchill recognized the fact that Germany tried to divide the allies before the war broke out.<sup>47</sup> Yet Goering’s statement did not represent a minority opinion. In turn, while Churchill condemned France for its acceptance of Czechoslovakia’s fate and stated that he knew the British people were willing to fight, many in Roosevelt’s inner circle worried more about Britain’s ability to act as partner to France.<sup>48</sup> Ambassador to Britain Joseph Kennedy cabled Roosevelt complaining about Chamberlain’s government to inability to make a stand.

While those, like Biddle, considered Kennedy a naive appeaser, Kennedy’s assessment reflected the general mood between Bullitt and others.<sup>49</sup> Daladier considered Britain a “weak reed on which to lean.”<sup>50</sup> This common perception explains why France looked toward the United States for support materially and morally instead of its ally. Similarly, Roosevelt and his advisors conceived France as the dominant partner of the alliance from the start. American policy increasingly centered on France as America’s shield. Due to this, Ambassador Bullitt became the leading authority on European matters and was looked to, by Roosevelt, almost exclusively.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, Feb 6 1939,” file 740.00/565, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 334-336.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 354-355.

<sup>49</sup> Harold Ickes *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Struggle inside*, 370, 377.

<sup>50</sup> Bullitt, *For the President Personal and Secret*, 309.

While Britain worried about the Italian Navy, French relations with Italy centered on the Spanish civil war and its aftermath. Just prior to the Munich conference, France intended to help the remnants of the Republican forces. American officials thought this to be a lost cause and France had waited too long for its aid to matter. No material aid could help the Spanish. Only the introduction of French troops could alter the situation. The final defeat of Republican forces also worried those in Washington that Spain could serve as a base for fascist inroads into South America. Republican General Jose Miaja also told Harold Ickes that he felt that Franco's success in Spain in spite of French aid would signal weakness of French resolve and spur the Germans to attack west rather than east.<sup>52</sup>

The Spanish situation had an additional effect on French politics as well. French Socialists began pushing the Daladier government to "reinvigorate" a Franco-Soviet alliance. Rightist elements joined this push and stressed the importance of a Polish alliance in hemming in the fascist countries.<sup>53</sup> It seems ironic that in just over a year, American officials would be involved in a similar debate.

### *Bullitt*

Langer and Gleason argue that Franklin Roosevelt waited too long in recognizing the dangers posed by Germany and Italy to Europe. For these historians, men such as

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<sup>51</sup> Biddle, *In Brief Authority*, 128-130; Harold Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Lowering Clouds; 1939-1941* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 123-124.

<sup>52</sup> Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Struggle inside*, 592-594.

<sup>53</sup> "Memorandum by Anthony J. Biddle, Ambassador to Poland, January 18, 1939," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: December 1939-February 1939, Volume 8*, ed. Donald B. Schewe (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1539a

William C. Bullitt charted the course for the country.<sup>54</sup> Yet these and later historians forget that Bullitt was a product and follower of Roosevelt. At first glance, William C. Bullitt appears the perfect choice for Ambassador to France at this period. Bullitt had the background of a New Dealer and a close relationship with President Roosevelt. Roosevelt appointed Bullitt to his post in Paris in 1936 after Bullitt left his post as the first American ambassador to the Soviet Union.

Being the picture of a 1930's socialite, Bullitt quickly made contacts within the upper circles of the French government. In Paris, Bullitt's talents made him appear to be the best diplomat in Europe. George Kennan called Bullitt "debonair, financially independent, and lacking any ties other than duty."<sup>55</sup> Assistant Ambassador Robert Murphy noted that Bullitt's abilities allowed him to get closer to French politics or its leadership than any other American diplomat before him.<sup>56</sup> In her biography of Bullitt, Beatrice Farnsworth called Bullitt the "diplomat without a portfolio" indicating he needed no credentials in Paris. He was a close friend of Daladier and held many informal lunches with top French officials. The contents of these gossip sessions reached Roosevelt during his almost nightly phone conversations with Bullitt. Because of his contacts in Paris and Washington, Bullitt became the channel and filter through which Roosevelt received much of his information.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Langer & Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940*, 83-85.

<sup>55</sup> Bullitt, *For the President: Personal and Secret*, vi-vii.

<sup>56</sup> Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, 32-48.

<sup>57</sup> Beatrice Farnsworth, *William C. Bullitt & the Soviet Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 154-156

The perception of close contacts led most in Washington to use Bullitt's assessment as a base point when talking about European matters. Bullitt, like Sumner Welles, came from the same background as Roosevelt and had what Stephen Weatherford calls a perfect basis for an "interpersonal network" with the President.<sup>58</sup> In the memoirs of both Harold Ickes and Adolph Bearle, the views of other ambassadors, such as Joseph Kennedy, had to pass a "bullitt" test. As illustrated in these sources, Bullitt is quoted more often than many ambassadors combined. Bullitt's omnipresence comes from both his position as ambassador and his social standing. State Department dispatches illustrate Bullitt's almost nightly reports that had a propensity for length and stepping into the arena of policy making.<sup>59</sup> He advised the president on what courses of action seemed most beneficial in light of his understanding of events.

Roosevelt recognized Bullitt's ability to glean information from top French officials. Roosevelt trusted Bullitt, loyal to Roosevelt and faithful New Dealer, and he communicated directly with the ambassador to the exclusion of normal State Department channels. Joseph Kennedy and Sumner Welles enjoyed similar close relations with the President. Cordell Hull noted that this direct and informal network often left him and his

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<sup>58</sup> M. Stephen Weatherford, "Interpersonal Networks and Political Behavior," *American Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 1 (February 1982): 117-143.

Weatherford argues that an advisor's background and social similarities can make their advice seem more credible to a decision maker since each has a foundation for understanding. They speak the same language and have similar experiences.

<sup>59</sup> Many of these conversations were never transcribed. They are alluded to in many state department dispatches and personal letters between Bullitt and Roosevelt. In many of the dispatches, now held at the FDR Presidential Library, Roosevelt asks other advisors to speak with him on the subject of the dispatch. These conversations will never be known.

department guessing what was going on.<sup>60</sup> This would help contribute to the break down of America's foreign policy establishment as the European crisis developed.

Despite Bullitt's talents, he had the tendency to become too personally involved in the politics of his host country. George Kennan remarked in his memoirs that Bullitt took every slight and frustration as a personal insult. He was quick to send information back to Washington, and even before arriving in Paris, showed a clear lack of analytical ability. This quickness to reach a conclusion on superficial level would handicap American policy towards France in the war to come.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Where Is America?*

While Washington tried to gather as much information as to the emerging crisis, many in France began asking this question. Concern in Paris shifted from Italy to Germany in the late spring of 1939. After stressing his desire for peace, Hitler marched his German armies into the rest of Czechoslovakia. Hitler justified his move by claiming that Germany needed the raw materials that "Jews, democracies, and the 'international powers'" had historically denied Germany.<sup>62</sup> What alarmed American leaders was Hitler's overall plan. After crushing Poland, Germany would "settle accounts with her hereditary enemy: France" and "obliterate [it] from the map of Europe." Finally, Germany would use the possessions of her vanquished foes to attack the Dollarjuden

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<sup>60</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 671.

<sup>61</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1967), 58, 79-81; Julian G. Hurstfeld, *America and the French Nation: 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 12.

<sup>62</sup> "Transcript of Speech made by Adolph Hitler, March 12, 1939," PSF-Bullitt, FDR Library.



(Jews of the dollar) in the United States.<sup>63</sup> While not becoming a pertinent issue yet, the assets of the Allies would jump onto Washington's front burner as things began to go badly for the Allies.

This saber rattling did not go unnoticed in Paris. With what appeared as Hitler openly planning to attack the United States, some in Paris felt that Washington wanted to use French and British troops as cannon fodder to buy time in order to make a deal with Germany. A movement for appeasement, led by former French Prime Minister Pierre-Etienne Flandin, began to build momentum. In a June 24 issue of *SOIR*, Flandin voiced what many would begin to think as war broke. While Roosevelt's moral preachings had a positive effect inside the United States, the lack of American action made the United States appear hypocritical. Flandin criticized Roosevelt's admonishments "to be energetic, to be firm in the face of violent enterprise" while America sat on its hands.<sup>64</sup>

Instead of Daladier's belief of America coming to Europe's aid, Flandin argued that the United States would remain indifferent while "war risks steeping Europe in blood." In Germany, Hitler compared Roosevelt to Wilson as a warmonger that wants to be seen as a peacemaker.<sup>65</sup> Bullitt voiced American concerns that America would become a scapegoat for a second Munich. Rumors of a deal at the expense of Eastern Europe filtered back to Washington. Yet there appears no evidence that Bullitt or Roosevelt understood that some in Europe questioned American resolve. But with the

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<sup>63</sup> "Transcript of Speech made by Adolph Hitler, March 12, 1939," PSF-Bullitt, FDR Library.

<sup>64</sup> "Gray to Secretary of State, June 27, 1939," file 740.00/1808, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>65</sup> "Geist to Secretary of State, April 16, 1939," file 740.00/839 RG 59, National Archives.

United States not stepping in as guarantor of Europe's freedom, France and Britain looked to the other side of the continent for support. As an Allied-Soviet alliance became a possibility, American policymakers made the mistake that America could remain both aloof and part of the unfolding crisis.<sup>66</sup> Roosevelt appears to have felt that the key to containing Germany lay in keeping the smaller states of Europe free of German influence being backed up morally by a larger power.<sup>67</sup> Yet American politics would not allow the United States to fill this role fully.

#### *Russia Rather than the United States*

The foreign policy of the United States can best be described in early 1939 as awaiting the outcome on the sidelines, but openly showing support for France and Britain with the hopes of using American diplomacy to bring Russia to the same decision.<sup>68</sup> During the tumultuous months of the summer of 1939, Soviet assistance in bottling up the German threat became an important issue in American European policy. Beginning in March, the Anglo-French alliance began negotiations with the Soviets. Yet the cables clearly show that the Russians made too many demands. How each side of the Anglo-French alliance handled these demands created further cleavages within this alliance, which was never strong to begin with. Due to this, Roosevelt's advisors tried to act as mediators between the two. Daladier complained to Ambassador Bullitt that the

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<sup>66</sup> "Gray to Secretary of State, June 27, 1939," file 740.00/1808, RG 59, National Archives; "Bullitt to Secretary of State, June 28, 1939," file 740.00/1822, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Struggle inside*, 571.

<sup>68</sup> Adolf A. Berle, *Navigating the Rapids: From the Papers of Adolf A. Berle*, eds. B. B. Berle & T. B. Jacobs (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 206.

British “were falling over themselves to accede to the Russian demands” that France could not accept.<sup>69</sup>

The British, nonetheless, viewed the situation differently. Kennedy reported that after speaking with Lord Halifax on the matter, that he felt that the time had passed for getting the Soviets to agree to any sort of alliance even when others in Roosevelt’s inner circle believed British resolve was stiffening.<sup>70</sup> Adolf Berle shared Kennedy’s beliefs and wrote in his diary that by summer, any hope for Russia picking up the lion’s share of containing Germany had passed.<sup>71</sup>

Yet the French still held out hope. Ambassador Bullitt shared this belief but advocated that Washington continue to act on French behalf to lessen Soviet influence on France. He reiterated, however, the need for American aid to the French. After serving as ambassador to the Soviet Union, Bullitt did not trust Stalin. He believed that the Soviets had broken their word by not paying Russia’s debt from World War I and stressed that America could not trust any Russian promises.<sup>72</sup> He had left his post in Moscow under duress, being criticized by the Soviet press and used in as a straw man in Soviet propaganda.

As in Paris, Bullitt took diplomacy as a personal matter. When the Soviets reneged on promises, he took this as a personal insult and outwardly showed it.<sup>73</sup> While not mentioned in the State Department documents, Farnsworth argues that Bullitt’s

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<sup>69</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, June 28, 1939,” file 740.00/1822, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>70</sup> Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Struggle inside*, 611.

<sup>71</sup> Berle, *Navigating the Rapids*, 210-212

<sup>72</sup> Will Brownell & Richard N. Billings, *So Close to Greatness: A Biography of William C. Bullitt* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 161-169

<sup>73</sup> Farnsworth, *William C. Bullitt & the Soviet Union*, 144-154.

history with the Soviets may have poisoned any chances at a Franco-Soviet understanding. Bullitt opposed any military alliance and actively worked against loans and aid from France to the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup> While Bullitt agreed with Daladier that Soviet animosity was needed to contain Hitler, he wanted France to have no part of a formal alliance with Russia.

However, American domestic politics prohibited any more direct involvement. The United States had to help sway the Soviet giant. In doing so, Soviet intrigue would hurt American foreign policy and add to the confusing signals sent by Washington to the French. America, again, would send mixed signals as the Roosevelt administration tried to rally the Soviets but keep them separated from the Allies.

As the summer of 1939 ended, the French could neither depend on America for help nor go it alone. The, with the British, would look towards the Soviets for help, but continue to ask Washington for aid. How Roosevelt and his advisors reacted would only confound the Allies more and make American foreign policy efforts that much harder.

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<sup>74</sup> William E. Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary: 1933-1938*, eds. W.E. Dodd & M. Dodd (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941), 309; "Bullitt to Hull, February 11, 1937," file 751.6111/185, RG 59, National Archives.

**CHAPTER III**  
**AMERICA'S PHONEY WAR,**  
**JULY 1939-FEBRUARY 1940**

As summer rolled into fall, Roosevelt placed America as a supporting cast member behind the French before the curtain rose on the final crisis of the 1930's. Nonetheless, many in France continued to question how far America would go in helping the Allies. Would Roosevelt send aid in large quantities from across the Atlantic? Would American troops come to the aid of France if the Germans overpowered them? While the answers to these questions remained unclear, France appeared to those in Washington as able to bear the initial brunt of war. Their perception was wrong. Roosevelt and those around him based it on information from the advisors Roosevelt had placed in key positions and this forced his administration to rely upon them.

For Roosevelt, the coming months would be a delicate balance of carrot and stick. Before the sitzkreig ended, Roosevelt appears to have hoped that Germany might have sought an honorable, negotiated peace if America acted as aloof mediator. To this end, Sumner Welles would travel to Europe with Roosevelt's plan for peace. The Welles mission would represent yet another example of mixed signals, as Welles's statements promoting peace abroad did not coincide with statements by other American diplomats. These mixed signals confused both friend and foe alike and reinforced the doubts of American resolve. France and Britain cannot be blamed for questioning

American policy since America seemed unprepared to enter European politics and back up its rhetoric with firm action or troops.

On the other hand, Washington continued to browbeat Germany with moral diplomacy and send signals that America backed France fully. Ambassador Bullitt continued to try to stiffen the French resolve. Nonetheless, Roosevelt's administration was divided. Bullitt, Cordell Hull, and Welles continued to operate with seemingly divergent goals. Bullitt sought to aid France at all costs, while Welles sought peace at all costs. Hull tried to walk the fine line between maintaining order abroad and preparing for the chaos of war. Hull's health would complicate matters as the Secretary abdicated his role to his deputy, Sumner Welles. The rise of Welles to international status would, in hindsight, trigger a battle for control of the State Department and American foreign policy.

American leaders hoped that they could entice Russia to shoulder the increasing load. During this period, prospects for a Franco-Soviet settlement seemed good to some, a wasted effort for others. Both the Americans and the French knew that the possibility of a two-front war would deter Hitler far more than increased military budgets and tough talk. Solidarity and unity of action on the part of the Allies and Russia would save Europe from German aggression. Nevertheless, American policymakers pursued this with an inconsistent, incoherent foreign policy.

*U.S.-Russian Policy*

If Roosevelt's support for France gained only marginal sympathy in the United States, diplomacy with Russia amounted to the impossible. By June of 1939, signs of Russian espionage and other subversive work were common knowledge to Roosevelt's inner circle. In the early 1930's, Russia attempted to counterfeit American currency in order to fund the Soviet economy and disrupt the capitalist states. Two underground "centers" operated in the United States. One involved infiltrating American labor unions while the other acted as a military intelligence branch.<sup>1</sup> With Soviet intrigue already at work within the United States, Washington had little incentive to work with the USSR.<sup>2</sup>

Yet with Ambassador Bullitt stressing the French need to have a stronger ally than Britain (namely the United States), American policymakers hoped that they could broker a deal. This became all more important with news that the Soviets had commenced economic negotiations with the Germans which they had denied just weeks before. The race was on to see who received Soviet support. The French told Bullitt that they felt that the German negotiations were a way Stalin could pressure the West to concede to his demands in the Balkans, the Baltic States, and in the East.<sup>3</sup> Stalin would

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<sup>1</sup> Adolf A. Berle, *Navigating the Rapids: From the Papers of Adolf A. Berle*, eds. B. B. Berle & T. B. Jacobs (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 229.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 231.

By 1943, communist assassins murdered Russian defector, General Walter Krivitzky in Washington D.C. who had warned American leaders not to deal too closely with the Soviets. This event only highlighted the increasing tension between the USSR and America. Adolf Berle wrote in his diary "This is an OGPU job. It means that the murder squad which operated so handily in Paris and in Berlin is now operating in New York and Washington. This is not a good idea."

<sup>3</sup> "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, June 30, 1939," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 279; "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, July 5, 1939," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)*, 283-284; "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, August 5, 1939," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)*, 281-282.

never side with a country whose sole ideology rested on the elimination of communists and Jews. However, Daladier remained pessimistic about preserving peace.

While joking that he was psychic in a memo to Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, Roosevelt stated that he believed that war was inevitable by September 10 if French-British-Soviet negotiations did not pan out.<sup>4</sup> To this end, Roosevelt ordered Sumner Welles (who was Acting Secretary of State) to order Ambassador Lawrence Steinhardt to express that it was in both the interests of the United States and the Soviet Union that peace remain intact in Europe. Welles instructed Steinhardt to stress the economic and political benefits of a French-British-Soviet alliance as this could help bring the Soviet Union into the brotherhood of nations.<sup>5</sup> Although the negotiations between the Soviets and the West bogged down in late spring, Ambassador to Belgium Joseph E. Davies cabled Hull and Roosevelt in Washington that he believed that he “could be helpful either in turning the scales in Russia’s decision or aiding to strengthen it, and consequently implement in a small way your great effort for world peace.”<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, Bullitt’s fears appeared justified as Steinhardt reported that he believed Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov bargained for time as they had

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<sup>4</sup> Berle. *Navigating the Rapids*, 232-235.

<sup>5</sup> William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 160-162.

<sup>6</sup> “The Ambassador in Belgium (Davies) to Secretary of State, April 18, 1939” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 756-757.

Ambassador Davies replaced Bullitt in Moscow for a short time. He would later try and broker peace between the Communist and Nationalist Chinese.



informed neither the French nor the British of their talks with Germany.<sup>7</sup> At the time, those in Washington did not know if the Soviets hoped to garner more concessions from the Allies (especially the French) or used this as a stick in the just discovered German-Soviet economic negotiations.

By August 1939, it became clear that the Soviets were stalling for time. Yet as Bullitt reported, the French could not envision a Russo-German pact. What worried the Daladier government was the fear that an economic agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union would destroy the incentives for a pact between the French and the Soviets. In a 1948 *Life* magazine article, Bullitt claimed that the United States government

was so fully informed with regard to relations between Stalin and Hitler [that] without the expenditure of one cent for spies and agents, American diplomatic representatives had been able to inform President Roosevelt as early as the autumn of 1934 that the Soviet dictator

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<sup>7</sup> “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhardt) to the Under Secretary of State (Welles), August 16, 1939,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 296-298; “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhardt) to the Secretary of State, August 16, 1939,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)*, 334-335; “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhardt) to the Secretary of State, August 21, 1939,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)*, 335-336; “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhardt) to the Secretary of State, August 22, 1939,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1939, Volume 1 (General)*, 337-338; Hull, *Memoirs*, 656.

wanted an agreement with the Nazi dictator and that Hitler could have a pact with Stalin whenever he might wish to have one.<sup>8</sup>

Bullitt goes on to claim that

both the French and British governments were warned by us that Stalin was using his negotiations with them for a pact against Hitler merely as a screen behind which to prepare a pact with Hitler. They found our warning too difficult to believe.....but President Roosevelt knew the pact was coming and that it would produce war.<sup>9</sup>

Bullitt's actions, however, do not support Bullitt's latter claims. The American government tried to act on the French behalf with the Soviets while Ambassador Bullitt tried to stop it, not because he knew of a Soviet-German pact, but because he feared a Soviet-French pact would put French interests in peril and draw France closer to a totalitarian state he despised.

To this end, Bullitt kept Washington informed of developments late in the summer. While trying to delay a Franco-Soviet pact, Bullitt acted on the behalf of the Polish ambassador to France dealing with Poland's problems with Russia. One of the

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<sup>8</sup> William C. Bullitt "How We Won the War and Lost the Peace, Part 1" *Life*, 6 September, 1948, 87.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 88-90; William C. Bullitt, *The Great Globe Itself: A Preface to World Affairs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 172-217.

Bullitt would later argue in *The Great Globe Itself* that World War II aided Stalin in his quest to dominate Europe. The talks between France and Russia before the war amounted to nothing but trickery.

Soviet demands was access to Germany through Poland in the case of war. Bullitt believed that the Soviets would use any excuse to send troops into Polish territory.<sup>10</sup> The fact that Moscow demanded the right to enter any Baltic state whose government changed in favor of an aggressor (Germany) worried Bullitt and those in Washington.<sup>11</sup> Stalin could use any excuse to invade Poland, yet the Soviet dictator placed this right as a top priority in the Franco-Soviet negotiations.

Nonetheless, a Soviet alliance with the Allies appeared to have benefits. As late as July 27, Bullitt reported that Turkey might join the Allied cause. According to the ambassador, they would not have done this unless they had received signals from Moscow that Stalin would sign a Soviet-French pact.<sup>12</sup> Despite the contradictory messages sent by both Roosevelt's pro-Soviet policy and Bullitt's seemingly staunch stance against such a policy, both French and British governments believed an agreement highly possible by August. Daladier gave the likelihood of success a "eighty times out of one hundred" chance and hoped such a pact would cool Hitler's enthusiasm for a next move.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Polish and Danzig Questions*

The French and British appear to have believed that American diplomacy on their behalf would lead to boxing Hitler in and providing a way to support Poland. In mid July, British Chamberlain's acceptance for supporting for Poland signaled a

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<sup>10</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, June 30, 1939" file 740.00/1840, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>11</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, July 7 1939," file 740.00/1887, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>12</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, July 26 1939," file 740.00/1955, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>13</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, June 30, 1939," file 740.00/1840, RG 59, National Archives.

stiffening of British resolve. A negotiated peace remained possible, but the Allies felt that Poland could now be openly supported as a deterrent to Hitler's ambitions.<sup>14</sup> War seemed imminent anyway since reports flowed into Paris indicating that Hitler was preparing to act against the Poles over the question of Danzig. While the French and British tried to negotiate with Stalin, Hitler raised the question of a disunited German people as he did over Czechoslovakia.

The free port of Danzig lay between Germany and East Prussia. Hitler argued that this left Germanic peoples under the control of Poles and that these Germans were being discriminated against. Hitler began organizing SA and SS units around Danzig in German controlled areas while ostensibly opening talks to resolve the issue. While the French applauded the restraint of the Poles when dealing with small attacks by Germans, they grew weary of Polish delay at the bargaining table and feared that Russia would betray the Allies.<sup>15</sup> American officials could not decide whether Hitler truly intended to use "extreme means" or if the crisis developing over Danzig was a Germany "deliberately inspiring apprehension in France and in England hoping once again to win its way through a final test of nerves." In some ways, the constant stream of crises in the late 30's had left many in Roosevelt's inner circle calloused and thus blind to the fact that war loomed large on the horizon.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Gray to Secretary of State, July 11, 1939," file 740.00/1900, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>15</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, July 27, 1939," file 740.00/1955, RG 59, National Archives; "Gray to Secretary of State, July 11, 1929," file 740.00/1900, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>16</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, July 27, 1939," file 740.00/1955, RG 59, National Archives; "Bullitt to Secretary of State, August 5, 1939," file 740.00/2013, RG 59, National Archives.

*The August Crisis*

Information Ambassador Bullitt acquired indicated that the heretofore unsuccessful Soviet negotiations acted as a basis for Hitler's demands against Poland over Danzig. The German dictator railed against encirclement at England's hands.<sup>17</sup> The Polish Ambassador to the United States told Sumner Welles that Polish leaders did not expect Hitler to go to war over Danzig and thanked the French, British, and American governments for their efforts on Poland's behalf.<sup>18</sup> However, Hitler continued to demand the right to annex the Polish Corridor and by mid-August appeared ready to "break loose" in an attempt to gain it.<sup>19</sup> After the war, Congressman Hamilton Fish who as an outspoken critic of Roosevelt argued that Britain should not have assured Poland's independence and thus precipitated war in the West. Fish pointed out that Bullitt's urging of the French not to negotiate hardened both sides.<sup>20</sup> With this attitude already in mind, Congressman Fish traveled to Europe as president of the congressional group to the Interparliamentary Union at the Oslo Conference. Fish's vocal dissent caused an uproar in the Paris newspapers as editorials asked where America stood on the Danzig question. Many Parisians wondered if American congressional leaders had been "hooked" like a fish by German propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Moffat to Welles, August 1, 1939," file 740.00/2070, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>18</sup> "Memorandum by Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, August 9, 1939," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: June 1939-August 1939, Volume 10*, ed. Donald B. Schewe (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1976.

<sup>19</sup> "Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, to Roosevelt aboard the USS Tuscaloosa, August 16, 1939," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: June 1939-August 1939, Volume 10*, 1979; "Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, to Roosevelt aboard the USS Tuscaloosa, August 21, 1939," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: June 1939-August 1939, Volume 10*, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton Fish, *FDR: The Other Side of the Coin; How We Were Tricked into World War II* (New York: Vantage Press, 1962), 74-77.

<sup>21</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, Aug 17, 1939," file 740.00/2077, RG 59, National Archives.

Nonetheless, Fish's Oslo proposal of a thirty-day truce to settle the question over Danzig represents a failure on Roosevelt's part to consult congressional leaders and, in the least, keep American policy consistent. Fish's proposal opposed the administration's stated goals of containing Germany within a wall of friendly nations. Fish might have been right that Roosevelt let his ego get in the way and thus underrated the role and power of Congress.<sup>22</sup> During Fish's tour of Europe, Roosevelt demanded that he be under the constant eye of his favorite proxies. In one memo, FDR jokingly asks how the administration could "legally get rid of Mr. Fish."<sup>23</sup> Whatever the reason, the contradictory messages sent by the president on the one hand and Congress on the other only left those in the Daladier government asking who truly spoke for the United States.

As historian William Henry Chamberlain observed, the announcement of the Soviet-German Non-aggression Pact on August 22, sounded like a "crack of doom" for the chances for Poland's survival.<sup>24</sup> Yet this crack of doom heralded the beginning of the end of both the Third Republic and the Roosevelt's foreign policy of peace. American foreign policy had been based on France as buffer against Germany aggression. As Count Ciano of Italy observed:

Can France and Britain, who have based all other anti-Axis policy on an alliance with the Soviets, count upon the unconditional support of the

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<sup>22</sup> Fish, *FDR: The Other Side of the Coin*, 77-79.

<sup>23</sup> "Memorandum for Secretary of State from the President (Roosevelt), August 29, 1939," PSF-Department File-State:Hull, FDR Library.

<sup>24</sup> William Henry Chamberlain, *America's Second Crusade* (Chicago: Henry Regney Company, 1950), 68

extremist masses? And will the system of encirclement by means of small states continue to prevail now that the Moscow balance has collapsed?<sup>25</sup>

For the Roosevelt administration, it meant that foreign policy could no longer be done on the cheap. Up until this point, Roosevelt had discouraged American companies from dealing in hotspots around the globe hoping to maintain the semblance of neutrality in order to pacify Congress. Roosevelt placed his hopes in the strength of the French and British to protect the territories within or near their colonies. When Roosevelt received word that the small African nation of Liberia faced Nazi-supported subversion, he postponed any direct help. The Colt Firearms Company told the State Department that it had rifles, pistols, and machineguns ready to ship with the necessary spare parts and ammunition, yet the Roosevelt denied the sale. The basis of Roosevelt's denial rested on his belief that the British Navy and French North Africa would prevent any real problems by keeping Germany out of Liberia.<sup>26</sup> This particular example illustrates Roosevelt's overall belief that France could act as America's buffer since French North Africa lay between Germany and Liberia.

With the Nazi-Soviet Pact, France's confidence in its ability to protect its own possessions upset this belief. Bullitt relayed from Paris that Daladier's mood reflected the decline in France's abilities to protect territories abroad as the French planned to take

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<sup>25</sup> Count Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries: 1939-1943; The Complete, Unabridged Diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano Italian Minister for Foreign Relations, 1936-1943*, ed. Hugh Gibson (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1946), 126.

the brunt of the attack at home.<sup>27</sup> Gone were the steadfast assurances of French morale and an impregnable defense that Daladier originally promised Bullitt.<sup>28</sup> With the pact, war on French soil again became all but a certainty. Poland seemed lost, yet the French leader refused to entertain the idea that France should forsake Poland. France had made a commitment. It was Daladier's firm belief that letting Poland fall without support would be worse for France than fighting an unwinnable war.<sup>29</sup> Yet the pact also made Italian action in the Mediterranean region seem certain as well. Now France had to worry about a two-front war.

### *More Moral Diplomacy*

President Roosevelt continued to try to tap into the spirit of humanity of world leaders, especially the aggressors like Germany and Italy. In the middle of August 1939, Roosevelt sent letters to Coronal Beck of Poland, Hitler, Mussolini, and King Victor Emmanuel of Italy. Roosevelt offered his services as "impartial arbiter" for "in the name of peace-loving men and women everywhere, to agree to a solution of the

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<sup>26</sup> "State Department Memorandum concerning 'Defense of Liberia Against Aggression from Within, July 28, 1939,'" in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: June 1939-August 1939, Volume 10*, 1962.

<sup>27</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, August 22, 1939," file 740.00/2106, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>28</sup> In hindsight, French moral was never high. As will be covered in Chapter 4, Bullitt had a distorted view of French military ability and social stability. The next Chapter will show how Bullitt's relationship with Roosevelt, thus affect American policy for the worse. His replacement, Admiral William Leahy would paint a far different picture of France after the Armistice.

<sup>29</sup> "Bullitt to Secretary of State, August 22, 1939," file 740.00/2106, RG 59, National Archives.



controversies.”<sup>30</sup> Roosevelt also sent a separate letter to Hitler asking in the name of the German people not to go to war.<sup>31</sup>

Later in December of that year, Roosevelt hoped to shape politics with religious morality. In a letter to Pope Pius XII, Roosevelt asked the Pontiff to use his moral authority to quell the tensions in Europe. Roosevelt hoped to bypass the belligerents’ leaders and take his case directly to the people via the Pope.<sup>32</sup> In this manner, Roosevelt wanted to duplicate the effect his fireside chats had on domestic politics. The major problem Roosevelt forgot was that he was dealing with totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. There, public opinion had little effect on foreign policy in the same way public opinion helped the New Deal succeed. The pleas for peace only emboldened the aggressors and confused America’s allies.

### *Bullitt in Wartime France*

The initial success of the Germans in Poland alarmed those in Washington. Ambassador Bullitt was the first to alert the President and his other advisors by telephone that war had officially been declared.<sup>33</sup> In the discussions of how to respond, Bullitt played a key role. One issue that Bullitt cleared with Hull was the issuance of a

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<sup>30</sup> *Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy: 1933-1941; Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Unedited Speeches and Messages* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1942), 179.

<sup>31</sup> *Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy: 1933-1941*, 182.

<sup>32</sup> *Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy*, 210.

In his first letter to Pope Pius XII, Roosevelt thanks the Pope for acting as moral leader. He, however, stresses the need for further action that no other religious leader can take for the “reestablishment of world peace on a surer foundation.”

<sup>33</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, September 3, 1939,” PSF-Confidential File-Disp. File: 9/1/39-4/24/40. FDR Library.

plea against bombing civilian targets.<sup>34</sup> This type of action fit with Roosevelt's moral diplomacy of trying to make Germany and Italy look as bad as possible internationally. However, this would conflict with later actions to try to deal with all sides taken on the part of the administration.

A second action undertaken was the evacuation of American nationals from the war zone. The panic officials felt was illustrated by the fact that all American nationals had already been sent to channel ports ready to leave the continent by September 8.<sup>35</sup> After Poland's quick defeat, the question of supplies also became tantamount in the communiqués between Washington and Paris. Bullitt wrote Roosevelt "if the Neutrality Act remains in its present form, France and England will be defeated rapidly"<sup>36</sup>

By this time, Roosevelt had already begun pressuring Congress to revise the Neutrality Acts. On September 5, Roosevelt issued two neutrality statements. One concerned international law while the other stated America's obligations under the Neutrality Acts. While the two appeared different statements, the former purposely stated that, under international law, the United States had no obligation to embargo the sales of munitions. This rested with the Neutrality Act. In this manner, Roosevelt shifted blame over to Congress and put the spotlight on their upcoming actions to revise this law.<sup>37</sup> By the end of September, Roosevelt directly asked Congress to repeal the arms embargo.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 671-673.

<sup>35</sup> Orville H. Bullitt, ed., *For the President Personal and Secret*, 369.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, 369-371.

<sup>37</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 628-630.

<sup>38</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President Personal and Secret*, 376.

For the remainder of 1939, the quiet on the Western Front allayed fears of a quick German victory. Nonetheless, Bullitt continued to reinforce the need for planes and other supplies by the French. According to Bullitt, the Germans produced more planes per month than the two Allied nations combined.<sup>39</sup> Stressing this, Bullitt hoped to spur American efforts to send more aircraft and munitions. Yet Bullitt asked the impossible. Jean Monnet, who headed the combined Allied purchasing committee, observed that American industry in 1939 would have difficulty quickly supplying both Roosevelt's rearmament program and early French orders let alone any further French orders.<sup>40</sup> Yet Roosevelt instructed Bullitt to tell Daladier "the government here will give every facility to the export of all types of American products."<sup>41</sup>

Along with the perceived need for aircraft, Bullitt relayed the revived French fears that the British would refuse to fight. "The British have almost nothing in the way of pursuit planes in France," reported Bullitt. Chamberlain, and later Churchill, claimed that the possible invasion of the Low Countries would threaten lower Britain and saw no need to shift forces to France. Yet this gave the appearance of subterfuge and strengthened fears that Britain could still seek a separate peace with Germany.<sup>42</sup>

Even with French capabilities in question, Bullitt assured the president and the public that France could win the war with American aid. Bullitt continued to stress the

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<sup>39</sup> "The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Kennedy) to the Secretary of State, May 5, 1938," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938 Volume 1 (General)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 50-53.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1978), 131-149.

<sup>41</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President Personal and Secret*, 387.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 382-385.

French resolve to hold out against anything the Germans could launch against them.<sup>43</sup> According to Bullitt, the morale of the French was “absolutely magnificent.”<sup>44</sup> The reports flowing from France even indicated that the French had shaken off the initial shock and were willing to widen the war. Beyond their own war, Daladier suggested that it was France’s responsibility to help the Finns against the Soviets in the Russo-Finnish War.<sup>45</sup> Later events would show this was out of the question.

Yet while many saw Bullitt’s contradictory nature as a man unable to analyze the events taking place around him, Bullitt’s flamboyant and social jet-setting set him in good stead with Roosevelt. FDR became a victim of Bullitt’s social success. Treasury Secretary Morgenthau noted that Bullitt might send a dispatch in the morning reporting, “everything is lovely” while then send a cable in the afternoon stating that everything in France was “going to hell.”<sup>46</sup> The confusing nature of the information coming in to Washington must have had an impact on the contradictory statements issued from Washington. With the truth unclear, France would fight for its very existence in just a few short months. Before this happened, Roosevelt placed his hopes in one last chance for peace, a risky chance that only further confused the Allies and helped wreck the American foreign policy establishment.

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<sup>43</sup> Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Lowering Clouds; 1939-1941* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 133-134.

<sup>44</sup> “Ambassador Bullitt Flies the Atlantic Ocean,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1939, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President Personal and Secret*, 395.

<sup>46</sup> “Diary entry for Henry Morgenthau, Oct 14, 1939,” in *The Presidential Diaries of Henry Morgenthau, Jr.: 1938-1945* (microfilm) (Fredrick: University Publications of America, 1981)

*The Welles Mission*

In January 1940, President Roosevelt decided to send Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles on a mission to Europe in a last ditch effort at peace. This was ostensibly a “step which [Roosevelt] could take to avert the dangers that would so clearly confront the people of this country, as well as of the civilized world.”<sup>47</sup> While Welles argued that Roosevelt chose him because he was the most available and capable person inside Washington to handle the job, Cordell Hull stated that Welles had requested to go on such a mission since the beginning of the August Crisis.<sup>48</sup> Welles wanted his chance to broker peace since he believed he was best qualified. Roosevelt asked Hull for a rubberstamp since the President had already made up his mind. Hull made his objections clear, according to his memoirs. Hull believed it was too late for peace missions and any attempt would lead to further confusion at home and abroad.<sup>49</sup>

Differences of opinion between Hull and Welles were to be expected. Both believed that wars began due to trade imbalance and economics, yet Hull accused Welles of not having a backbone.<sup>50</sup> Welles believed he should be Secretary of State instead of a broken-down old man. In truth, due to Hull’s age and failing health, Welles did in fact serve as acting Secretary for most of the latter part of 1939. In social matters, Welles played the role of chief diplomat since Hull disliked these functions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 73.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 74; Hull, *Memoirs*, 737.

<sup>49</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 738-740.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 546-547, 738-739.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 179-183.

As many of the communiqués and dispatches from the FDR Presidential Library show, Welles directed much of U.S. foreign policy in the latter half of 1939. Hull’s health forced him to give many of his duties to Welles. Francis Biddle argues that Welles took advantage of this.

Welles had risen to his post through bureaucratic infighting and a personal relationship with the president. Like Bullitt, Welles was a fellow New Dealer. Yet unlike Bullitt, Welles had never strayed from the Democratic Party and supported Woodrow Wilson's policies and thus stayed in good stead with the party machinery. Welles replaced William Phillips who went on to be ambassador to Italy. While Secretary Hull preferred Walton Moore to fill the post, Roosevelt ignored his Secretary's advice and let Welles, Moore, and Wilbur Carr fight over the position while staying aloof.<sup>52</sup> In the end, Roosevelt's decision to let the strongest survive would create bad blood within the State Department and cause its functional collapse in a period of crisis.

President Roosevelt had asked Cordell Hull to act as his Secretary of State knowing he refused to perform administrative duties that he considered menial. Roosevelt appears to have wanted it this way. Many within Roosevelt's inner circle even thought the "old man of Washington" which they called Hull would make a good candidate for president in 1940 save the fact he had no administrative skills.<sup>53</sup> With Cordell Hull abdicating his role as administrator of the State Department, Welles's influence became even stronger as he took on many of the duties that the Secretary normally performs. With his close friendship with Roosevelt and his pseudo-Secretary status, it is easy to see how he came to see himself as above Bullitt and even Hull on matters of foreign policy.

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<sup>52</sup> Irwin F. Gellman, *Secret Affairs: Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 120-135.

<sup>53</sup> Biddle. *In Brief Authority*, 179-181.

While Hull acted with caution towards Welles, Ambassador Bullitt despised Welles as an appeaser. Welles did appear to advocate peace at any price. Within the established foreign policy community, Welles acted as the head of a faction that believed peace could be achieved through negotiations and disarmament.<sup>54</sup> This clashed with Bullitt's firm anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi stance. He feared that Welles would sell out the French, his adoptive nation, in order to maintain peace. When the ambassador learned of Welles's mission, he immediately cabled Washington. Welles had "violated" an unwritten division of functions and had intruded on Bullitt's authority.<sup>55</sup> Like Hull, Bullitt warned that the French would see this last attempt as a sign of weakness and lack of resolve on the part of the United States. Yet the mission went ahead and with Jay Pierpoint Moffet in tow, Welles visited London, Paris, Brussels, Rome, and finally Berlin.

Hull and Bullitt were correct. Welles was the wrong man at the wrong time. From the very beginning, according to Hull, rumors spread as to the mission's nature. Not only did it confuse the Allies, it weakened Roosevelt's stance at home. Isolationists, like Hamilton Fish, jumped at the idea that the Welles's mission had the ulterior motive of making plans to bring the United States into the war on the Allied side.<sup>56</sup> Even though Hull believed Welles followed Roosevelt's instructions to gather information and seek out mutual understanding with the belligerent nations, rumors continued to abound

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<sup>54</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 546-547

<sup>55</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President Personal and Secret*, 403.

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton Fish, *Tragic Deception: FDR and America's Involvement in World War II* (Old Greenwich: Devin-Adair, 1983), 10; Hull *Memoirs*, 738.

in Europe. Along these lines, the French feared that Welles would turn his mission into a “last-ditch attempt at appeasement.”<sup>57</sup>

While America’s friends were confused, America’s potential enemies were not impressed. While Count Ciano appreciated Welles as a gentleman “in appearance and in manner,” Mussolini thought Welles superficial and that any understanding was impossible.<sup>58</sup> Mussolini’s aloofness made Welles more “depressed leaving the [conference] room than when he entered it.”<sup>59</sup> Welles may have even given the Italian Duce the idea that the tough talk of the French and British was all bravado and no substance, thus giving incentive for further demands. By March 17, the mission was as good as over. Welles had failed to sway the Axis weak link, for Hitler had no reason to bargain.<sup>60</sup>

With the return of Welles, Roosevelt switched his attention from peace to arms. Yet the damage had been done. The Allies could not be sure of where Roosevelt and America stood on supporting them. Hitler viewed Roosevelt’s actions as those of a weak democratically-elected leader. Nonetheless, the switch from peacemaker to arms supplier would contribute to the muddle of confused signals being sent by Washington.

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<sup>57</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, 738-739.

<sup>58</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 212.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, 212-214.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, 222-224.



**CHAPTER IV**  
**CASH & CARRY AND THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY**  
**MARCH 1940-JUNE 1940**

With the utter failure of the Welles mission, Roosevelt abandoned any attempt at brokering peace. Instead, as conspiratorial historians assert, Roosevelt maneuvered the United States into a position as undeclared belligerent supporting the Allies. Essentially, diplomacy between Washington and Berlin ceased, Ambassador Kennedy became a secondary player as Roosevelt communicated directly with Winston Churchill, and Ambassador Bullitt played lead actor on center stage.

With the closing of diplomatic alternatives, Roosevelt pushed for greater support for the Allies, both politically and materially. Roosevelt finally understood he had to court Congress in order to change the neutrality laws and move America onto a war footing. Nevertheless, this would not be an easy task. Members in the isolationist camp continued to try to keep America out of the inferno Europe was quickly becoming. Some like Congressman Fish wanted to explore the possibility that statements made in the German press were true and that Roosevelt had instigated the war through his Ambassadors (namely Bullitt).<sup>1</sup> Others in the isolationist camp already began to question if this was an attempt to spread the New Deal abroad.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Bullitt to the President (Roosevelt), April 1, 1939," President's Safe File (PSF)-State-Hull. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.

<sup>2</sup> "Lest We Forget the New Deal's Responsibilities," President's Office File 1561-Neutrality. FDR Library.

The tension between what Roosevelt wanted to do and what he could do would cause much confusion within the United States and among American allies. Between the beginning of the war and the fall of France, the Allies truly thought that America would give more support than the Roosevelt administration actually did. Like the other muddled signals, this came about due to Roosevelt allowing Bullitt to act almost autonomously and carry out his own form of diplomacy. In the end, the fall of France caused turmoil within the United States foreign policy establishment and caused a race to reconstruct some form of order before it was too late.

#### *Neutrality Laws and Cash & Carry*

Soon after the beginning of the war, Congress finally agreed with President Roosevelt to lift some portions of the Neutrality Act. As Edward Stettinius relates in *Lend-Lease: Weapon of Victory*, the Congressional debate over revising the Neutrality Act never eased even in light of the war. Opponents continued to fear that helping the French and British would draw the United States into another war just as the Nye Commission blamed America's entry into World War I on similar arms sales.<sup>3</sup> They thus made the revision eliminate the prohibition on arms sales only.

The revised Neutrality Act passed Congress in November 1939. What would become known as *Cash and Carry* represented only a lifting of the arms embargo. The French still could not acquire loans or aid from the United States. France had to pay for

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<sup>3</sup> Edward R. Stettinius *Lend-Lease: Weapon for Victory* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), 20.

everything up front and the financial drain would soon become issue as the strain became increasingly evident.

### *Business in France*

Even with a war raging, American diplomats in France continued with normal business. One such issue centered on modernizing the laws governing commerce and trade between the two nations. The *Treaty of Establishment, Commerce, and Navigation between the United States of America and France* appears on the surface a normal document protecting the rights and privileges of each party. Article 9, however, specifically protected American nationals of French descent from being conscripted into the French military.<sup>4</sup> This article shows that American officials kept the effects of the war in mind even when revising normal means of diplomacy.

While normal diplomacy between the two countries continued, France (and other countries) continued to receive mixed signals from the United States. While Bullitt cabled Roosevelt saying that he explicitly told the French that the United States would not enter the war, The *New York Times* reported Bullitt as saying that one of four policies of the United States consisted of

moral assurances that the United States [would] leave its isolationist policy and be prepared in the event of war to participate actively on the

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<sup>4</sup> “Murphy to the Secretary of State concerning the ‘Treaty of Establishment, Commerce and Navigation Between the United States of America and France,’ April 1, 1940,” file 711.5121/76, RG 59, National Archives.

side of France and Britain. America prepared to place her entire supply of war materials and finances at their disposal.<sup>5</sup>

Speaking on behalf of the President to the press in 1940, Bullitt seemed to clearly indicate that the United States would enter the war as an ally even if Roosevelt did not order the deployment of troops. Under this impression, Daladier's optimism becomes understandable even if misplaced.

#### *Signs of Strain and the French Cabinet Crisis*

Whereas Bullitt had painted a picture of a France capable and willing to fight to the end at the start of the war, by April 1940 signs of strain clearly shown through this façade. Robert Murphy, Bullitt's aide and Embassy Counsel, reported in his memoirs that French soldiers appeared far more fatalistic at the rail stations in 1939. Gone were the cheers and accolades present at the start of the last war.<sup>6</sup> Murphy assessed the situation as grim and morale as never being to the level made out in Bullitt's dispatches.

While Murphy's distance from both the French leaders and President Roosevelt allowed him to more accurately judge the state of moral readiness, Murphy also saw weakness in the French economy. Murphy reported in April that the drain of skilled artisans and craftsmen from an economy based on small shops and few mass industries was causing severe economic and logistical problems for the French. Even if the United

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<sup>5</sup> "Salient Excerpts from the White Book Issued by the German Foreign Office," *New York Times* Mar 30, 1940, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 30-36.

States opened up its vast domestic market to the French, Murphy argued that this would be of little use. French exports had not penetrated an American market protected by tariffs, a subject not mentioned much before.<sup>7</sup> Murphy raised the question of government inefficiency on the part of the French. Bullitt's aide also brought to light the fact that, beyond information supplied by the French, American officials must rely on "morsels" gleaned from other sources.<sup>8</sup>

On the military and political front, the French leadership had been shaken to its foundations. The Welles mission had not only failed to accomplish Roosevelt's intended goals, but in crossing signals with what Bullitt was saying, Welles gave the impression that Americans believed that "Germany was invincible and that France and Britain ought to try to get a peace of compromise which would leave Germany in control of Central and eastern Europe."<sup>9</sup> Thus Roosevelt and Washington planners could no longer count on the French spirit of resistance.

The French resolve and its political stability suffered another blow late in April. The French planners woefully underestimated how quickly the Germans could conquer the Scandinavian states. Bullitt reported that Daladier expected German forces to push the Allies out of most of Norway quickly. Bullitt hinted at a growing discord between

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<sup>7</sup> "Murphy to Secretary of State concerning 'Seven Months of War: Financial Review of France's Situation,' April 22, 1940," file 851.51/2836, RG 59, National Archives. Very few documents encountered by the author deal with French capabilities besides those of Ambassador Bullitt. As mentioned in the text, Bullitt overrates French abilities.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Orville H. Bullitt, ed., *For the President: Secret and Personal; Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 410.

the French and British since the French were “bitter about the manner in which the [operation] had been handled” by the British.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the Allied discord, the French government was on the verge of political collapse. Daladier told Bullitt that the loss of Norway would “produce most serious repercussions in France.”<sup>11</sup> Bullitt assured Roosevelt that he did all in his power to shore up the French. He cautioned his president, nonetheless, that if both Daladier and Reynaud were voted out, there are few political alternatives that would challenge the Germans.

Even before the Germans had completed securing Norway, the French Senate secretly met to officially reprimand the Daladier government’s handling of the situation with a vote of no confidence. Daladier had backed the Norway operation with the British, committing troops and naval forces. He resigned due to its imminent failure.<sup>12</sup> Reynaud would take over the reins of government. Yet even with being known as the strong man of Europe, the Reynaud cabinet would be a merry-go-round government ending with the Vichy-based, Petain regime.

### *The Hammer Falls*

The German attack on France beginning on May 10<sup>th</sup> did not come as a surprise to those in Washington. Bullitt had advised Roosevelt that just such an attack would come. According to the French, the Germans were late and risked the spring rains.

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<sup>10</sup> “Bullitt to the President (Roosevelt), April 28, 1939,” PSF-State-Hull. FDR Library.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 410-411.

Nonetheless, France was engulfed in a cabinet crisis that William Langer noted left “France to face the greatest crisis in its history with a government steeped in distrust and factional rivalry.”<sup>13</sup> Historians cannot attribute the weakness of the French government to Roosevelt, as many conspiratorial authors do. FDR’s close confidant, Bullitt, had failed to see this weakness and Roosevelt appears to have ignored other sources, nonetheless. As a catalyst, the Welles mission that Roosevelt approved initiated the crisis.

The severity of the German Blitzkrieg shocked the French General staff. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, Bullitt relayed French pleas for Roosevelt to sway Mussolini to refrain from attacking southern France. The French had to shift all forces to the north, including all-important aircraft. The French also requested that Roosevelt plead with the Pope again in order to “excommunicate” Hitler and hopefully deprive him of support from any Catholic Germans or Italians.<sup>14</sup>

As Julian Hurstfield points out, Bullitt’s high degree of personal connection with the French government had the effect of transmitting the panic felt in Paris directly to Washington. Later on the 14<sup>th</sup>, Bullitt cabled Washington. Bullitt’s description of the situation was bleak. German tanks had passed through the French anti-tank defenses as “if they did not exist” or were “made of straw.”<sup>15</sup> Reynaud assured Bullitt that the French would fight on, but that “the French soldiers, brave as they were, could not stand against simultaneous attacks by tanks on the ground and bombs and machine gun bullets

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<sup>13</sup> William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940*, 445.

<sup>14</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, May 14, 1940,” Safe File-Bullitt, FDR Library.

<sup>15</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, May 14, 1940,” PSF-Safe-France, FDR Library.

from the air.”<sup>16</sup> France needed aircraft. From the beginning of the blitzkrieg until France’s fall, American planners became obsessed with supplying France with aircraft. All other information and issues became secondary.

### *Planes, Planes, Planes*

In the early days of the Second World War, political and military leaders appeared fixated by the possible uses of aircraft. The French were no exception. Roosevelt’s tendency to rely solely on a close confidant for intelligence and information is best illustrated by Ambassador Bullitt’s constant calls for more aircraft for France. As mentioned earlier, Bullitt made most of his connections at the upper levels of the French government. This would allow unintentional misinformation to reach Washington and be just as devastating as German disinformation.

As early as 1937, the French requested through Bullitt that the United States sell it aircraft for defense. As covered before, the problem of the Johnson Act centered mainly on aircraft. The question of aircraft would pit Congress against the president and executive officials against each other. Beginning months before the outbreak of war, in January 1939, Bullitt relayed an increasing stream of requests from Daladier to Roosevelt asking for aircraft. Ironically, many of the early requests were for Martin and Douglas medium bombers, offensive aircraft.<sup>17</sup> French air force officers explained to Bullitt that they believe that their pilots were just as well trained as the German

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<sup>16</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, May 14, 1940,” PSF-Safe-France, FDR Library.

<sup>17</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President: Secret and Personal*, 305-307, 311-315, 317-319



Luftwaffe, yet lacked the aircraft to balance the scales.<sup>18</sup> Air force officers were “very sure of themselves, and that [of] the force under their command.” Nonetheless, these officers stressed the need for American factories to keep production up in order to supply them. Germany would pay for any attacks on France, especially Paris.<sup>19</sup> Until May of 1939, it appeared that France had steeled itself and that America only needed to lend a moderate amount of aid.

The opening of the German assault changed all that. The French resolve was revealed as mere bravado. From the opening hours, German coordinated use of air and ground forces caught the French off guard, and again, their panic became that of American leaders. Accurate reporting and rumors became intertwined. One of many dispatches illustrates the level of panicked reporting. Bullitt relayed a report that the French had tried to evacuate children from the combat area. Two German fighters swooped down, like hawks, and had machine gunned the column and littered the road with “little bodies.”<sup>20</sup> Shortly after this report, other sources contradicted this by showing it only to be a hysterical overstatement.

The weight of German power overwhelmed all in its path. Bullitt cabled Washington saying that Reynaud and other French officials “implored [him] to obtain more planes immediately and [were] exceedingly depressed when [Bullitt] explained

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<sup>18</sup> “Murphy to Secretary of State concerning ‘Visit to French Air Force HQ at Chauny,’ May 4, 1939,” file 740.00/3453, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>19</sup> “Murphy to Secretary of State concerning ‘Visit to French Air Force HQ at Chauny,’ May 4, 1939.”

<sup>20</sup> “Gray to Secretary of State, May 20, 1939,” PSF-Safe-France. FDR Library.

that no planes were available.”<sup>21</sup> Since it appears Roosevelt relied on Bullitt for most of his information and relied far less on his other ambassadors, except for Murphy.

As Langer and Gleason point out, French military weakness was evident in retrospect. France had tried to prepare for war on the cheap. The Maginot Line of defenses gave France a sense of security without the terrific expense of soldiers and equipment.<sup>22</sup> France had just as many (maybe more) aircraft and tanks than the Germans. The flaw in French strategy rested on the fact that while the numbers were there, they had the wrong types of aircraft, ill-suited to quick defense. As noted by Secretary Morgenthau, the French did not start requesting pursuit (fighter) aircraft until the German offensive in the west had started. By then, French request conflicted with American Army orders and time was running out.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Germans also used their forces in concentration, the French forgot the lessons of Clausewitz and Jomini. They, instead, used their forces as spread out support for static defenses.

The one comparable advantage that the French had over the Germans rested with the French Navy. Yet the sailors of France could do little as the Germans overran their homeland. While American policy makers did not see a threat in the French Navy at the start of the war, it would increasingly worry many as the French fought for their lives.

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<sup>21</sup> “Bullitt to Secretary of State, May 14, 1939,” PSF-Safe-France. FDR Library.

<sup>22</sup> William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940*, 448-449.

<sup>23</sup> “Diary entry for Henry Morgenthau, May 16, 1940,” in *The Presidential Diaries of Henry Morgenthau, Jr.: 1938-1945* (microfilm). (Fredrick: University Publications of America, 1981). On May 16, 1940, Morgenthau related a request by the French to take over a Swedish aircraft order for 144 Vultee Vanguard attack aircraft. They, in turn, would trade the United States Army for Curtiss P-36 Hawk fighters.

*Last-Ditch Moral Diplomacy*

As the Germans stampeded over the French countryside, French Premier Reynaud asked President Roosevelt to use his good offices to stave off a two-front war. The French had been forced to deploy all of their forces to the north in order to meet the German onslaught. This left few army units with no air cover to defend the French border with Italy. Just before the German offensive began, Italy's Duce mobilized Italian units on the border. The thought of a two-front war terrified the French who did not want to get squeezed between the hammer of German forces and the anvil of Italian troops. Without aircraft and mobile army units, the south of France appeared an easy target.<sup>24</sup>

In a last effort to divert disaster, Bullitt asked Roosevelt to again plead with the Pope in Rome to ask the Pontiff to threaten to excommunicate any leader who attacked their peaceful neighbors. Both men hoped that the threat of losing Catholic support in Italy and southern Germany would thwart an attack from the south on France and cause domestic unrest in both countries.<sup>25</sup> Count Ciano notes in his diary that Mussolini scoffed at Roosevelt's vacillations between threats and pleas.<sup>26</sup> Again, Bullitt and Roosevelt misjudged the nature of totalitarian states.

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<sup>24</sup> "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, May 28, 1940," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1940, Volume 1 (General)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1959), 236-237; "The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, June 4, 1940," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1940, Volume 1 (General)*, 238-239.

<sup>25</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President: Personal and Secret*, 414.

<sup>26</sup> Count Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries: 1939-1943; The Complete, Unabridged Diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano Italian Minister for Foreign Relations, 1936-1943*, ed. Hugh Gibson (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1946), 241, 242, 250, 257-258.

Roosevelt also misjudged his own position in world politics. The actions taken by Bullitt and his own words clearly placed the United States on the side of the French and the British. The American president could no longer claim to be a neutral third party asking the Pope for help in the name of humanity. His words of compassion and international law rang hollow as he asked the Catholic Church to take sides in a war where Catholics were on both sides of the conflict. This may explain why when the Pope did speak on the subject, he did not single out Germany or Italy for condemnation. Instead, the Pontiff spoke out against the war in general and asked all sides to hold off further attacks and negotiate. America could no longer ride its moral high horse and act as arms supplier to the French and British at the same time.

### *Plane Envy*

While Roosevelt's moral diplomacy lost what little impact it had, French requests for aircraft brought Roosevelt into conflict with not only Congress, but his military chiefs as well. Even before the beginning of the war, French observers looked at some of the United States' most modern aircraft designs. As early as 1938, France sent civilian and military observers to the United States to examine aircraft and production techniques.<sup>27</sup> Most of the aircraft the French saw were known types that manufacturers sold internationally.

Even with the French unable to buy directly from American manufacturers, Roosevelt created controversy by allowing French military officials to view current

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<sup>27</sup> "Paris to Send Group to Study Our Planes," *New York Times*, June 8, 1938, 5.

production fighters and bombers that the government had not cleared for international sale. The press heavily reported an incident where a prototype American airplane crashed. A French air force officer was among those injured onboard. The crash was an indication that the French were in the United States looking to buy aircraft and that the Roosevelt administration acted as a willing salesman. Having American government officials helping the French appeared as a breach of the Neutrality Act, at least in spirit. Congress and opponents in the press also questioned whether Roosevelt intended to give away secret technology and designs.<sup>28</sup>

The issue of whether Roosevelt was giving too much, both in quality and quantity, to the French infuriated American Air Corps chief Henry “Hap” Arnold as well. Arnold argued against such transfers, and by 1940, Arnold’s criticisms of Roosevelt’s policy toward letting the French have access to cutting-edge technology almost got the air chief fired. Treasury Secretary Morgenthau thought that Arnold verged on insubordination as he refused to allow the viewing by the French to view planes still on drawing board. Arnold also openly voiced his belief that American air defenses were being sacrificed in order to fill the requests of the French.<sup>29</sup>

With Arnold speaking up against his commander and chief, Congress asked the same questions. By May 1940, many feared that France was a lost cause and that

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<sup>28</sup> “Roosevelt Order for French Study of Plane Revealed,” *New York Times*, Feb 18, 1939, 1.

<sup>29</sup> “Diary entry for Henry Morgenthau, March 12, 1940,” in *The Presidential Diaries of Henry Morgenthau, Jr.: 1938-1945* (microfilm). (Fredrick: University Publications of America, 1981). After combat experience, the French found the Curtiss P-36 Hawk inferior to German Bf-109 fighters. They wanted to buy the Hawk’s more modern derivative, the P-40 Tomahawk. Yet, Curtiss could not meet both the pre-existing American order and also build the P-40 for the French. Arnold also feared that, if sent to France, the Germans would capture America’s new front-line fighter.

modern American arms would only serve to help German armament designers. With French defeat apparent by late May 1940, Congress wanted all available armaments to go to fill the American defense build-up.<sup>30</sup> As both Congress and the Roosevelt administration realized that France was a fast-sinking ship, they began to appreciate the fact that American policy could no longer depend on the French. This in and of itself sent the wrong signals to a ally that needed all the moral support it could get.

### *America Hedging Her Bets*

Hap Arnold's resistance represented no unique incident but a growing trend within the American government. By late May 1940, fate had doomed France. President Roosevelt and American officials quickly realized that if France fell, her colonial possessions would go to the victor, Germany. Besides her African and Asian possessions, France had territory in the Western hemisphere. Washington could not accept a German foothold in the New World.

Similarly, the French Navy had remained virtually untouched by the war. With a total tonnage of 524,000 tons, the French had the fourth-largest fleet behind Great Britain, the United States, and Japan.<sup>31</sup> While one-third the size of the British fleet, it represented a powerful force. Officials knew that France had a capable and modern fleet that, for its size, had greater potential power per fleet unit than either the British or American fleets.

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<sup>30</sup> Langer & Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolationism: 1937-1940*, 475.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Elliot Morrison, *The Battle of the Atlantic*. Volume 1 of *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1988), 30-31.

Most of France's front-line ships had been designed and launched in the late 1930's. The *Richelieu*-class battleships had been built in response to Germany's naval build-up and along the same design line as Britain's *Nelson*.<sup>32</sup> Along with the *Richelieus*, France had the two-unit *Dunkerque*-class battlecruisers. In addition to these ships, France had two new battleships, an aircraft carrier, and other warships awaiting completion in the slips.<sup>33</sup>

Completed in the late 1930's or near completion, these ships represented cutting-edge naval power and incorporated many features American ships lacked. As noted in *Jane's Fighting Ships for 1941*, which many naval planners cited, the 35,000-ton *Richelieu* could easily challenge America's newest 36,000-ton *North Carolina*-class. More importantly, the *Richelieu* was operational. *North Carolina* and *Washington* would not be ready for duty until late 1941.<sup>34</sup> France's battlecruisers were, in effect, lightweight battleships capable of challenging any of the U.S. Navy's World War I-vintage battlewagons.

The American public did not ignore the size and capabilities of the French fleet. As early as April 1940, the President's office and those in Congress began receiving mail from citizens concerned with the possibility that Germany would capture the world's fourth-largest navy and add its ships to the combined German-Italian fleet. These letters urged the President to negotiate a trade of the French fleet, which seemed

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<sup>32</sup> Francis E. McMurtire, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships: 1941* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 164-170.

<sup>33</sup> Admiral Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1959), 6-16; *Jane's Fighting Ships: 1941*, 167.

<sup>34</sup> *Jane's Fighting Ships: 1941*, 164-179, 447-454; "The Vichy Fleet." *Proceedings* 88, no. 1 (Jan. 1942): 148.

inactive, for the outstanding debt France still owed from World War I and the present war.<sup>35</sup> Roosevelt did not act on these pleas as long as France was fighting and instead used his energies to stave off total disaster.

While the capture of the French fleet represented a treat to American interests abroad, French possessions in the western Hemisphere symbolized an immediate threat to the nation. While Roosevelt appeared uninterested in a trade of territory as debt repayment in 1938, these islands crept to the front burner of American foreign policy. The island of Martinique took center stage. Fort de France on the island allowed France to help Britain patrol the southern Atlantic and Caribbean while acting as a way-station between the United States and North Africa. As the French collapsed before American eyes, the U.S. Navy began to take a keen interest in the small, tropical island with the “finest naval base in the world.”<sup>36</sup> With German U-boats already lurking in the area, Roosevelt and his advisers feared that these wolves of the sea could harbor at Martinique. Since American policy assumed that the Allies would patrol this area, the American Neutrality Patrol sent few ships to watch over Martinique.<sup>37</sup>

Yet with the American public, the press, and Congress calling for repayment of debts, the French could not help but feel betrayed by the United States. While there is scant evidence that America’s apparent cooling relationship with Paris helped bring

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<sup>35</sup> “Telegram from Mrs. Louis Johnson to Secretary of War, 4 April 1940,” President’s Personal File- File 203-A, FDR Library; “Telegram from E.I. Dawson of Soule Steel Company, 24 May 1940,” President’s Personal File- File 203-A, FDR Library; “Letter from Oliver Holden, American Press Society, 27 May 1940.” President’s Personal File- File 203-A, FDR Library; “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), 8 July 1940,” in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940: Vol. 2 (Europe & Britain)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), 506.

<sup>36</sup> Commander C. Alphonso Smith, “Martinique in World War II.” *Proceedings* 81, no. 2 (Feb. 1955): 169-171.



down France, it may have added to the argument of the peace faction led by Marshal Henri Petain, that was growing within the French government. All of this would plague American policymakers as they tried to pick up the pieces of American foreign policy after the collapse of the French.

### *The End Comes*

From the start of the German offensive till mid-May, bad news continued to roll into Washington. As it had in France, the disaster in Norway and worsening political situation in France had caused a shift of power in the British government. Winston Churchill, former Lord of the Admiralty, became Prime Minister the day Germany slashed through the Western Front.<sup>38</sup> Yet even with the exemplar of the British Bulldog spirit now leading His Majesty's forces, the British could do little. Reynaud pleaded with Churchill to send more British aircraft to the continent. Churchill agreed but had few to spare.<sup>39</sup>

By May 15<sup>th</sup>, Reynaud pleaded with Bullitt, asking for more aircraft. The stress of the situation had made Reynaud unaware that America could not ship supplies quickly enough to have an impact on the current battle.<sup>40</sup> Finally, many in Washington realized that the French had become "obsessed" with German airpower, blaming their defeats on

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<sup>37</sup> "US Naval Vessels Watch Martinique," *New York Times*, July 7, 1940, 1.

<sup>38</sup> William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940*, 446.

<sup>39</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President: Personal and Secret*, 417-418.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 419.

overwhelming German force.<sup>41</sup> By May 28<sup>th</sup>, the Belgians had collapsed and the British retreated from the continent to lick their wounds after their rescue from Dunkirk.

Churchill admitted to the British Parliament that it would be some time before Britain could reform its army and hoped for immediate aid from the United States.<sup>42</sup> The French believed that they had lost well over 50,000 men holding the port open and now felt left alone on the continent to meet their doom.<sup>43</sup>

The lull just after Dunkirk gave some in Paris a fleeting hope that the Germans had exhausted themselves and lost too much men and equipment.<sup>44</sup> Yet this did not last. Italy soon joined the war and Reynaud asked Roosevelt to send the U.S. Navy to the Mediterranean. Roosevelt refused, stating America cannot enter the war zone being neutral. Bullitt asked his President for the disposition of American ships in the Atlantic so that he could calm French fears that their colonies would be protected. Roosevelt denied this request as well.<sup>45</sup>

Americans viewed Petain's appointment as Vice-Premier on May 18<sup>th</sup> as a sign of hope. Maybe the hero of Verdun could rally the French and hold the German advance. Yet as they soon found out, Petain viewed the battle lost. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, Bullitt had lunch with the Marshal. Petain implied that neither Daladier nor Reynaud had given

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<sup>41</sup> After the war, both American and French inquiries into France's sudden defeat found that poor leadership was to blame. In actual numbers, France outnumbered Germany in both aircraft and tanks. While German aircraft held an edge technologically, the French still could have used their forces more effectively. In some cases, French airplanes sat on the ground in quiet sectors while French ground forces were destroyed due to poor command and control.

<sup>42</sup> William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: 1937-1940*, 466-467.

<sup>43</sup> Bullitt, ed., *For the President: Personal and Secret*, 431-433.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 443-444.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, 447.

Bullitt a “completely frank view of the present situation.”<sup>46</sup> Yet, as William Shirer notes, Petain had already convinced himself of France’s defeat and believed Reynaud called him back to “make peace and sign an armistice.”<sup>47</sup>

June marked the end of the Third Republic and of American hopes for a satisfactory outcome to the battle of France. As late as June 10<sup>th</sup>, Reynaud promised Roosevelt the French people would continue to fight if they had to do so from French North Africa. A day later, Reynaud cabled Roosevelt informing the American President that due to limited supplies and America’s inaction, he had to seek an armistice with the Germans in order to stop his countrymen’s suffering.<sup>48</sup>

France’s fall signaled a total collapse of American policy toward Europe. It also signaled a disintegration of American prestige. Even while isolationists, such as Hamilton Fish, argued that Roosevelt had misled the French, British Prime Minister Churchill claimed that America had the moral duty to enter the fray since it had encouraged the Allies to stand firm from the start.<sup>49</sup> From June 1940 until America’s entry into World War II, Roosevelt and his advisers had to reformulate policy while figuratively governing by the seat of their pants.

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, 448.

<sup>47</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), 698-699.

<sup>48</sup> “Telegram from the French Council of Ministers (Reynaud) to President Roosevelt, 14, June 1940,” in *Peace and War*” *United States Foreign Policy; 1931-1941*, 551-552.

<sup>49</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* The Second World War Series. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 185-186; Hamilton Fish, *Tragic Deception: FDR and America’s Involvement in World War II* (Old Greenwich: Devin-Adair, 1983), xx-xxvii, 3-12.

Churchill makes this claim in his post-war memoirs. He argues that the moral diplomacy, assurances of American help, and implied threats of American action compelled America to act. As America sat idly by as France fell, Churchill argued that the British felt alone and betrayed.

**CHAPTER V**  
**GOVERNING BY THE SEAT OF THE PANTS**  
**JUNE 1940 ONWARD**

To say that the fall of France complicated American foreign policy is a vast understatement. France's collapse signaled the end of Roosevelt's policy of trying to have the war come out favorably for the United States without getting directly involved. No back-up plan existed. The swiftness of the German victory caught the Roosevelt administration completely off guard and sent it scrambling to pick up the pieces of its shattered foreign policy after the battle was over. From June 1940 till Germany's second invasion after the Allied North African landings in November 1942, Washington had to reassess what was going on in France and how to deal with the French.

France's collapse created many important foreign policy and national security issues. Even before the armistice, Roosevelt tried to secure the French fleet. Such a powerful force had to be dealt with and neutralized. Second, no one in the administration knew the status of France's world-wide possessions. Could the Germans use the French ports of Martinique or Mer-el-kebir? If so, this would threaten British supply lines through the South Atlantic and America's if the United States entered the war. Finally, who was in charge in France? Petain appeared sympathetic to the Germans? Was he a puppet or the head of a collaborating regime? Ambassador Bullitt's reports had led America astray and during this period, American planners wrestled with what was real and what they thought was real.

These three questions would plague Roosevelt and his advisors for the next two years. During this time, American foreign policy was ad hoc at best and sometimes shooting from the hip. Policymaking was made even harder by America's now-shattered reputation. Like many in Europe, those in the Petain regime believed Washington had goaded France into war. Roosevelt could no longer speak as a friend of France. In the end, America had to bribe France into remaining neutral and limit the German spoils of victory.

#### *Who's in Charge in Paris?*

While France did not officially collapse until the signing of the Franco-German armistice, France was out of the war when German hobnails struck the Paris cobblestones. At the time of France's greatest need; as its leaders fled to the resort town of Vichy, American Ambassador Bullitt remained in Paris. Bullitt's flamboyant style may have led him to believe he acted on behalf of Parisians, but he gave the impression that America was abandoning the French government in its hour of need.<sup>1</sup> Hull faults the ambassador for not maintaining contact with the fleeing French government and Bullitt's deputy, while Robert Murphy raises the interesting hypothetical question of

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<sup>1</sup> Julian G. Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation: 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 8-9.

Bullitt hoped that the presence of foreign diplomats would assure a smooth and peaceful transition from defeated to victor. Bullitt believed, and Roosevelt accepted, his decision would prevent looting and the atrocities of earlier wars. There was also the American tradition of staying in European capitals to act as a calming force.

whether an American presence could have steeled French resolve.<sup>2</sup> These theatrics led to Bullitt's replacement by Admiral William Leahy.

What in fact happened sealed France's fate. Marshal Petain rose to the premiership after the Reynaud government imploded. On his first meeting with Petain, Leahy thought the marshal looked "old, tired, and worried." The real power in the government rested with Petain's deputy, Admiral Francois Darlan.<sup>3</sup> During this meeting, Petain stressed the need for American aid in the form of food and, strangely enough, cigarettes.

What troubled Leahy was the apparent close association Darlan had with Berlin. The admiral worried that Darlan planned to take France closer to Germany. The numerous trips to Berlin the French admiral had taken worried Leahy. Leahy's fears were not unfounded. As early as August 1940, reports from Vichy indicated that the French, while resistant, accepted a plan for "close collaboration with the Germans on such matters as imports, exchange controls, and emigration."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, America became increasingly unpopular in the French press. While much of this can be attributed to Nazi coercion, the French printed articles lambasting "liar diplomats," such as Bullitt, Biddle, and Kennedy. President Roosevelt took similar abuse as the press claimed "influential persons" within the American government "push[ed] France into misfortune."<sup>5</sup> Roosevelt's statements against French collaboration

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<sup>2</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Macmillian, 1948), 789-791; Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 40-42

<sup>3</sup> William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (Hamden: Archon, 1965), 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> "Telegram from Mathews to the Secretary of State, August 24, 1940," file 851.01/121, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>5</sup> "Gray to the Secretary of State, November 4, 1940," file 711.51/137, RG 59, National Archives.

only fueled the French discontent since they believed Roosevelt ignored their situation.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, Marshal Petain declared “France’s traditional friendships no longer existed,” with clear implication towards the United States.<sup>7</sup> America now resided outside the “order” which France existed. Petain and his subordinates (or handlers) wanted France to have a good position within Germany’s “new order” since the war had destroyed the old one.

Admiral Darlan was a firm believer in this order. According to George Melton’s biography of Darlan, while not being a fascist, Darlan believed that Germany would ultimately prevail. He hoped that through cooperation, France could garner a privileged position in the new order.<sup>8</sup> With Darlan making political ties in Berlin, Washington feared he would offer the French assets, such as its fleet, in return for German concessions. With America’s traditional ties to France broken, the Roosevelt administration struggled to piece together a working policy. No longer could Roosevelt use morality or diplomacy. The situation was only made worse as the State Department entered a crisis that hampered its usefulness and pitted American diplomat against American diplomat.

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<sup>6</sup> “Memo of Conversation between Hull and French Ambassador Henry-Haye, November 4, 1940,” file 71.51/145, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>7</sup> “Memo of Conversation Between Welles and Henry Haye, October 16, 1940,” file 711.51/135, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>8</sup> George E. Melton, *Darlan: Admiral and Statesman of France; 1881-1942* (Westport: Prager, 1998), 77, 86-87.

*The Breakdown at State*

The collapse of the Third Republic also signified the eclipse of the State Department in foreign affairs. The American State Department did not even plan for such a contingency and as Julian Hurstfield points out, used policies “still premised largely on the assumptions of 1940.”<sup>9</sup> As the old assumptions proved wrong, factions sprang up to take control of the department.

The situation came as an outgrowth of Hull’s decision not to act as administrator of his department, but rather, advisor to the president. As Francis Biddle noted in his memoirs, the situation went from bad to worse owing to Hull’s poor health. What little energy the Tennessean had he devoted to his president. The absence of Hull only accelerated the breakdown of his department.<sup>10</sup> Other members of Roosevelt’s inner circle considered the State Department as a set of “cliques and factions” where each operated independently.<sup>11</sup>

As de facto leader of the peace faction within the department, Sumner Welles abused his power to a degree in pressing Roosevelt for his peace mission. Of course, the president allowed this factionalism to occur because that was how he maintained close watch on policy and his subordinates. Welles’s private crusade so angered Hull, that the

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<sup>9</sup> Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation*, 69-70.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), 179-183; Graham H. Stuart, *The Department of State: A History of Its Organization, Procedure, and Personnel* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 344-345

<sup>11</sup> Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Lowering Clouds; 1939-1941* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 216-218.



Secretary singled Welles out and slowly sidelined his subordinate. Hull had come to regard Welles as disloyal to him and stepping beyond his position.<sup>12</sup>

Hull had help. Welles's nemesis, Ambassador Bullitt, took the Under Secretary's mission as an affront. As Roosevelt began to view Welles as a political liability, especially in light of his pro-Soviet stance, the president conspired with Bullitt to force Welles out of the government completely. Details on it are sketchy, but press reports claimed that Welles had made homosexual advances towards men on several occasions.<sup>13</sup> Ambassador Bullitt wrote to Roosevelt that Welles was both a political and security liability since he could be blackmailed.<sup>14</sup> Bullitt had played a key role in eliminating his opponent by obtaining the services of FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover in order to dig up incriminating evidence and get rid of his foe.

Yet the damage was done. As the rumors swirled around Washington, conservative papers claimed Welles to be a communist. Leftist papers countered that the department, headed by a fascist Hull, sought to eliminate the closest ally Russia had. Politics and intrigue entered diplomacy. Eventually Welles would be forced to resign (in September 1943), but long before then the As Welles resigned in September 1943, a crisis at the State Department destroyed the credibility of America's diplomatic corps.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Lowering Clouds; 1939-1941*, 401-402; Hull, *Memoirs*, 1230.

<sup>13</sup> Will Brownell, *So Close to Greatness: A Biography of William C. Bullitt* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 294.

<sup>14</sup> Orville H. Bullitt, ed., *For the President: Secret & Personal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 512-514.

<sup>15</sup> Adolf Berle, *Navigating the Rapids: 1918-1971; From the Papers of Adolf A. Berle* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 441-445.

From 1940 on, the State Department played a diminishing role in foreign policy as other agencies, especially the military, took up the slack.

### *The Question of Aid*

With the American foreign policy establishment fighting within itself and American credibility gone among the new French leadership, the Roosevelt administration had to find another way to prevent the unthinkable: a challenge to British control of the Atlantic. America had no friends at Vichy. Daladier, Reynaud, and their subordinates were arrested and at the disposal of the Germans.<sup>16</sup> The only ace that America held rested with France's need for food and relief supplies. American used bribery where diplomacy failed and force was not an option.

From the very beginning, Marshal Petain asked for American aid. Aid in the form of food and fuel became America's ace card when dealing with the French. Germany began immediately after the armistice to ship food from the occupied zone to Germany. Aid was America's only way to keep France neutral while staying neutral itself. Upon arriving in Vichy, Ambassador Leahy spoke with Marshal Petain about the French fleet. Darlan reassured Leahy that if he received orders from "any authority to turn them over to anybody," he would scuttle the fleet.<sup>17</sup> Petain then shifted the discussion to the question of aid in the form of food, medicine, and clothing. Petain gave Leahy the impression that the French in the unoccupied zone were starving. Leahy

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<sup>16</sup> "Weddel to the Secretary of State, July 13, 1940," file 851.01/76, RG 59, National Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Leahy, *I Was There*, 12-13.

believed that America, by providing aid, could gain the trust of the French people and the Petain regime, thus pulling it away from Berlin's orbit.

Roosevelt, in turn, ordered Leahy to attempt to use aid as an incentive for the French to maintain strict neutrality. Vichy agreed to inform Washington of all ship movements and dispositions. In order to lessen the incentives for the Germans to attempt a seizure of the French merchant marine, French merchant vessels traveling to Europe from America had to have a counterpart traveling to America at the same time. In addition, the French assured Washington that no German agents would be allowed in French North Africa, especially Dakar. Nonetheless, the question of where the aid was going to and of German infiltration in North Africa would threaten to destroy this second diplomatic structure.

### *To Buy a Fleet*

Washington's plans to rely on the Allies for control of the Atlantic fell apart with the French surrender. Secretary of the Interior and Roosevelt's close friend, Harold Ickes noted in his memoirs that the president worried the most about Germany acquiring the French fleet after the French defeat. The new Churchill government reinforced the fears of Roosevelt and others by charging that Marshall Phillippe Petain and his second-in-command and head of the navy, Admiral Darlan planned to turn the fleet over to the Germans in order to buy favor with those that controlled half their country.<sup>18</sup> The rapid events in June 1940 left many questioning whether the Germans had already captured

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<sup>18</sup> Melton, *Darlan*, 82-83.

some fleet units based at channel ports. While the fighting still raged, reports coming out of France indicated that the whereabouts of the *Jean Bart* (sister-ship of the *Richelieu*), the battlecruiser *Strasbourg*, and other vessels could not be confirmed.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, the French had saved their fleet. At the last minute, the French moved any ship that could float to North African ports. This included the partially complete *Jean Bart*, which wound up at Casablanca.<sup>20</sup> Everything else, they destroyed. Although they had succeeded in preventing their seizure, the French were finished. The news only grew worse. The original terms of the German-dictated armistice specified that all major fleet units had to be “demobilized and disarmed in ports to be designated by Germany and Italy.”<sup>21</sup> Some accounts reported that the fleet might continue to fight since most French ships were outside continental France. While Darlan succeeded in getting the Germans to modify the original terms, the hopeful reports were wrong. No major French ship defected.

Overnight, the fears of many Americans seemed close at hand. If the Germans acquired the French fleet, the combined tonnage of German, Italian, and French ships would outnumber and outmatch the British. It was not just a question of whether the Axis could defeat the Royal Navy at sea. As many in Washington knew, Britain could easily be shut off from its supply lines through the Mediterranean and starved into submission.<sup>22</sup> Without the Royal Navy, America would lose its last buffer in the

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<sup>19</sup> James B. Beston, “Conquests Bring Nazis Wealth of Materials,” *New York Times*, 9 June 1940, E5; “French Warships at British Ports,” *New York Times*, 22 June 1940, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Admiral Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordel, *The French Navy in World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1959), 83-95.

<sup>21</sup> “Ghost Fleet,” *Newsweek*, 8 July 1940, 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1944), 150.

Atlantic. As pointed by Admiral Harold Stark in Plan Dog, a British collapse would leave a vacuum in South America into which the Germans could slowly encroach.<sup>23</sup>

While Stark argued for a Japan-first policy if America was forced to fight, he did allow that Washington had to secure the Western Hemisphere against the Axis before undertaking operations in the Pacific.

In a speech before Congress, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox used just such an argument to justify the passing of the Naval Expansion Act of 1940. The final passage of the act came as a response of the new threat to the Americas. Knox argued that the United States had a “one-ocean navy” that was concentrated in the Pacific. According to Knox, the fleet must remain there as a deterrent to the Japanese who might want to take advantage of French and British preoccupation. Even with the expanded building program, it would be 1943 before America could build a “two-ocean fleet.”<sup>24</sup> Knox went on to argue that America needed to help Britain contain Germany until that time.

As stated before, the size and capabilities of the French fleet caused much concern in the American public as Americans wrote their representatives asking for a deal between America and France concerning their fleet.<sup>25</sup> Soon Roosevelt could not ignore the outcry. While not asking the French to hand over their fleet, President

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<sup>23</sup> “Plan Dog, 12 November 1940,” President’s Personal File-Safe Files-Plan Dog, FDR Library, [www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box4/t48b03.html](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box4/t48b03.html) (accessed 5/20/2004).

<sup>24</sup> “Knox’s Statement of the Perils Facing Britain and America,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1941, 4.

<sup>25</sup> “Telegram from Mrs. Louis Johnson to Secretary of War, 4 April 1940,” President’s Personal File-File 203-A, FDR Library; “Telegram from E.I. Dawson of Soule Steel Company, 24 May 1940,” President’s Personal File- File 203-A, FDR Library; “Letter from Oliver Holden, American Press Society, 27 May 1940.” President’s Personal File- File 203-A, FDR Library; “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), 8 July 1940,” in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940: Vol. 2 (Europe & Britain)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), 506.

Roosevelt cabled Vichy suggesting that the French fleet anchor in the United States for the duration of the war. His stated rationale was to take away any incentive for both Germans and British to attempt to seize the fleet.<sup>26</sup> Roosevelt's overtures, however, clearly were directed toward keeping the Germans from getting the fleet. As the only bargaining chip France had against the Germans, Admiral Darlan refused the request stating that the fleet was needed in order to maintain order in the French colonies.<sup>27</sup> Both houses of Congress also responded to the outcry by passing resolution asking the president to attempt to buy Martinique and other possessions in the Americas from the French and secure the Western Hemisphere.<sup>28</sup>

### *Maintaining Neutrality*

With America still officially neutral and the French refusing to send their fleet to a neutral port, Washington had few options and little recourse in the matter. With half of France occupied, the Germans held an enormous political advantage over the French. Ambassador Bullitt, and later Admiral William Leahy, reported that the Germans used French POWs as bargaining chips in order to force the French to collaborate.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), 8 July 1940," in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940; Volume 2 (Europe)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), 506

<sup>27</sup> Melton, *Darlan*, 75,90-95.

<sup>28</sup> *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 76<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session; Index* 86, no. 19 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 239.

<sup>29</sup> "Consideration of Problem of Giving Food relief to France Without Aiding Germany," in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940; Volume 2 (Europe)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), 537-557; Leahy, *I Was There*, 18-22.

Admiral William Leahy replaced William C. Bullitt as Ambassador to France in July 1940. Washington recalled Bullitt since he appeared to have grown too close to the Reynaud government. There are also indications that Roosevelt hoped Leahy could get close to Darlan.

harsh British policy toward its former ally only exacerbated the matter. Churchill imposed a blockade of the continent and cut off supplies to both occupied and unoccupied France. Economically, this drove the French closer to their German occupiers. Shortly after the Franco-German armistice, Britain seized French vessels in British ports and treated their crews as prisoners of war. Pre-war suspicion of the British and its navy began to surface among French officers, notably Darlan.<sup>30</sup> Darlan, who had been an outspoken anglophobe before the war, took up his previous ways and made several speeches against the British.

Tension over British seizure of ships and the stand off at Alexandria exploded with British Prime Minister Churchill making a costly political mistake.<sup>31</sup> A day after the British seized French vessels in Britain, a British taskforce, commanded by Admiral Sir James Somerville, arrived off Mers-el Kebir. At anchor there were the battleships *Dunkerque*, *Strasbourg*, *Provence*, and *Bretagne*, along with several destroyers. This constituted a good portion of the French navy. Somerville ordered the French to surrender their ships or sail them to the United States to wait out the war. When French Admiral Marcel Gensoul refused, the British sank or crippled most of the ships.<sup>32</sup> British action led to a growing collaborationist sentiment within the French government and navy.

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<sup>30</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 125-128.

<sup>31</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 125-132.

The British had given an ultimatum to Admiral Rene Godfroy, commanding officer of French units ported at Alexandria. In it, the British demanded that the French turn over their ships, demobilize them in place, or be boarded. From then on, the French sailors were de facto prisoners of the British.

<sup>32</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 125-132.

The attack near Oran led to the French asking the Germans for the change of the armistice terms mentioned before in order to allow the French to protect their shipping. In effect, the French began an undeclared war against the British. At the time of the attack, British and French ships were at Fort de France in Martinique. The immediate reaction on the part of the French worried many in Washington, including General George Marshall, that the fighting would spill over into the Western Hemisphere.<sup>33</sup> Although Churchill justified the attack on the grounds that the armistice was “bound to place the French fleet as effectively in the power of Germany” as French ships in Portsmouth were in British power, Washington felt itself between a rock and a hard place.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the British, American policymakers had to rely on French assurances. Since America was neutral, American diplomacy thus concentrated on forcing the French to maintain neutrality at home at in its possessions.

Acting in accordance with Plan Dog, Washington concerned itself with Martinique foremost. Vichy promised Washington that it had no intentions to either fortify the island or allow the Germans to use Fort de France as a base for its submarines.<sup>35</sup> Naval planners recognized that Fort de France would be a perfect submarine base from which the Germans could shut down shipping from South America. This being the case, American policy first centered on neutralizing the threat in the Western Hemisphere. Stationed at Martinique, were several units of the French fleet.

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<sup>33</sup> George C. Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall* Vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 259-260.

<sup>34</sup> Winston Churchill, “The Attack on the French Fleet,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* Vol. 6 (New York: City Publishing, 1940), 589-590.

<sup>35</sup> C. Alphonso Smith, Commander USN, “Martinique in World War II,” *Proceedings* 81, no. 2 (February 1955), 171-172.



The Roosevelt administration gain an agreement with Vichy that no ships stationed outside of Europe would return to France from their posts without getting permission from the United States.<sup>36</sup> This applied to both warships and merchant vessels.

Along with these assurances, France agreed to allow the United States to station observers in Martinique, Guadalupe, and French Guiana. Admiral Georges Robert in Martinique was explicitly ordered to work with the American naval observer to take steps “as might in the judgment of the United States be required to avoid any disquiet on the part of the United States.”<sup>37</sup> Washington also asked that American-built aircraft on the carrier *Bearn* be returned to the United States. On this point the French refused, but the first American naval observer assigned to the island later reported that these planes were tantamount to scrap.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, even without supplies coming from Europe and minimum personnel, naval planners knew that Martinique had fuel oil and supplies that could be useful to German U-boats. Although Admiral Roberts at Fort de France observed strict neutrality while remaining loyal to Vichy, this question would lead to tension with the United States. Washington extended the neutrality patrols to Martinique even though the navy assets in the area were pitifully limited. After a U-boat gained permission to off-load an injured

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Koburger, *Franco-American Relation: 1940-1945* (Westport: Praeger, 1994), 34.

<sup>37</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Undersecretary of State (Welles), 7 October 1940,” in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940; Volume 2 (Europe)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), 385-386.

<sup>38</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Undersecretary of State (Welles), 7 October 1940,” in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940; Volume 2 (Europe)*, 385-388.

crewman, America lodged a complaint with Vichy and threatened to cut off aid to the unoccupied French territories.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Final Breakdown*

Germany appeared to hold all of the cards in regards to American attempts to keep France and its fleet neutral. From the time of the armistice, Germany had made ever-increasing demands on the occupied zone of France. Leahy reported to Washington that he feared that the Germans were withholding food in order to gain more concessions from Vichy.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the starvation in the occupied zone, Vichy began to send food and other aid there. These transfers clearly violated the agreement with the United States. Washington wanted to avoid indirectly subsidizing the Nazi war effort. If aid arrived in the form of American products, the Germans would have incentive to demand more from the zone.

Evidence of collusion on the part of the French began to surface in mid-1941. Robert Murphy, now American counsel in North Africa, cabled Washington with news that his sources reported German activity in Algiers, Tunisia, and Dakar. It also appeared that Germany was pressuring Vichy for a more pliable North African government.<sup>41</sup> If Germany took control of these areas, they would not only acquire

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<sup>39</sup> Koburger, *Franco-American Relation: 1940-1945*, 34-35.

<sup>40</sup> Leahy, *I Was There*, 13-23.

<sup>41</sup> "Telegram from the Consul General at Algiers (Cole) to the Secretary of State, 19 November 1941," in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1941; Volume 2 (Europe)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), 466-468; "Telegram from the Charge in France to the Secretary of State, 18 August 1942," in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1942; Volume 2 (Europe)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962), 359; Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, 84-86.

much of the French fleet, but the bases from which to operate. The British and Free French had already attempted to seize Dakar but failed.<sup>42</sup> Roosevelt agreed with London's assessment of Dakar's strategic significance. If the Germans could operate from this West African port, they could close off sea traffic coming from Cape Horn. Similarly, if Germany forced Vichy to allow German operations from Tunisia, they could close off traffic through the Suez Canal.<sup>43</sup> The real possibility of this caused many in Washington to question Vichy's good faith.

The question of the Japanese use of French merchant vessels in Asia also strained the Roosevelt's faith in Vichy's sincerity. Even after the armistice, France wanted to buy munitions to send via their merchant marine to Indochina. Washington feared that these arms would find their way into German hands or be seized by the Japanese. By 1941, Japan had gained permission from French Admiral Jules Terraux to use airfields in northern Tonkin and harbor rights in the region. France asked America for support, but Under Secretary Welles replied that America could lend little support.<sup>44</sup>

After the American Congress declared war in December 1941, Washington pressed Vichy to limit Japan's use of French territory. The administration stressed that France had to maintain strict neutrality or the United States may be forced to cut off aid to North Africa. What Washington failed to realize was that Vichy had already lost effective control over its Asian territories. Admiral Terraux, while asking for the arms

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<sup>42</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 184-188.

<sup>43</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Undersecretary of State (Welles), 7 October 1940," in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1940; Volume 2 (Europe)*, 385.

<sup>44</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 195.

to fight, was forced to the realization that for France to hold any influence in the area, he had to cooperate with the dominant power, Japan.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, all Washington saw was that its enemies were using the assets of a declared neutral. In addition, North Africa seemed ripe for German conquest. To try and force Vichy back into strict neutrality, Roosevelt cut aid shipments to North Africa. Yet the plan backfired. Between the time that the agreements between Washington and Vichy were made and mid-1942, Pierre Laval had retaken power in Vichy. Petain remained a figurehead, while Darlan reverted to head of the navy only. Laval was an open collaborationist. With Washington breaking the aid agreements, Laval used this as an excuse to bring warships to Toulon in the unoccupied zone and denounced the United States.<sup>46</sup> When Washington protested the battlecruiser *Dunkerque's* move from Casablanca to Toulon, Laval argued that America had already broken its word and freed France from responsibility. America and her newfound allies would have to find another way to deal with this belligerent neutral.

### *Dealing in Force*

The possibility of Germany controlling the entrance to the Mediterranean, the sea-lanes around Africa, and most of North Africa, drove American war planners to place North Africa as a prime invasion point. American fears strengthened Winston Churchill's argument for going after the Axis "soft underbelly." While most American

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<sup>45</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 213.

planners, including Admiral Ernest King, wanted to invade France directly, the threat of Germany cutting off shipping forced Roosevelt's hand.<sup>47</sup> By late 1942, American diplomacy would give way to an American invasion in North Africa.

America did not enter into what would become *Operation Torch* without intelligence. As part of the evolving aid agreements with Vichy, Robert Murphy (who now worked for General Dwight D. Eisenhower) had made a pact with the governor of North Africa, General Maxime Weygand. The Murphy-Weygand agreement was, on its face, a means for the United States to make sure that aid to North Africa did not end up in German hands.<sup>48</sup> Yet, at its core, the agreements allowed the Americans to set up a clandestine intelligence network in North Africa and prepare the way for what Washington hoped was a peaceful invasion.

Robert Murphy best illustrates the position of diplomats after America's entry into the war. While officially Counsel to French North Africa, Murphy reported to General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Just as Ambassador Kennedy no longer acted in the same capacity since Roosevelt talked directly with Churchill, Murphy worked outside of the diplomatic channels. Diplomats now served the military, since the military acted as America's diplomatic corps.

Prior to the invasion, American agents under Murphy tried to make contact with as many sympathetic French officers as possible. Roosevelt had ordered Murphy to

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<sup>46</sup> "Laval Puts France on Road to Full Nazi Collaboration," *Newsweek*, 27 April 1942, 26-27; "Suspension of the Economic Aid Program Following Laval's Return to Power in France: Considerations for Revival of Program," in *Foreign Relations of The United States: 1942; Volume 2 (Europe)*, 285-312.

<sup>47</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 90.

<sup>48</sup> "Interest of the United States in Political and Economic Conditions in French North Africa," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1942; Volume 2 (Europe)*, 224-284.

North Africa in September 1940 hoping that he may find the most patriotic Frenchmen there.<sup>49</sup> On September 21st, just as the Americans started to form an anti-fascist alliance with General Weygand, the British and Free French under General Charles de Gaulle began their abortive attack on Dakar. The loss of men and damage to ships complicated American efforts and soured relations with many French officers. Murphy reported that French anglophobia was the most intense among naval personnel after this attack.<sup>50</sup> Those in Washington hoped that Britain's use of Free French troops would negate the anglophobia, but the French naval personnel viewed de Gaulle's forces as traitors.<sup>51</sup> The overall effect may have destroyed any chance for a peaceful invasion. General Weygand, who commanded the respect of most Frenchmen was recalled to Vichy and replaced. By mid-1942, Darlan arrived in North Africa to stabilize the region after Weygand's departure on the pretext of visiting his son. The man the Allies feared most as a collaborator now became the only way to secure French help.<sup>52</sup>

In his biography of Darlan, George Melton notes that as long as America remained neutral, the admiral remained committed to working with Berlin. However, America's declaration of war changed all of this. Darlan feared that he would not be the one the United States supported and this fact added to the incentive to relieve Weygand.<sup>53</sup> With Laval coming back into power, Robert Murphy told Washington that "due to a shaky political situation" Darlan will come to North Africa and may bring the

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<sup>49</sup> Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, 68-69.

<sup>50</sup> Harry C. Blucher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), 116.

<sup>51</sup> George C. Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall* Vol. 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1991), 32.

<sup>52</sup> Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 200-225; Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, 76-77.

<sup>53</sup> Melton, *Darlan*, 128-129.

fleet with him.<sup>54</sup> While working as General Eisenhower's deputy, General Mark Clark found out later that Darlan had ordered French intelligence officers to make contact with the Americans. Clark called Darlan a political opportunist and did not trust this man with the "shifty eyes."<sup>55</sup> Darlan came to Algiers on the pretense of seeing his sick son.

Despite the political intrigue, American planners still assumed that the French would welcome them ashore. Although General Clark secretly went to North Africa prior to the invasion to contact sympathetic French officers, French forces staunchly resisted the invasion for the first two days. Many felt that they acted according to Marshal Petain's wishes.<sup>56</sup> Darlan did not help. Clark became increasingly frustrated as the French admiral seemed to stall for time. Nonetheless, Clark knew that Darlan was the only authority that the French troops would obey.<sup>57</sup>

French Admiral Paul Auphan pointed out in his account of World War II that the Allies made the mistake of not coordinating with French units individually. American troops came ashore where those loyal to Vichy were stationed and not the points held by Murphy's contacts. From November 8<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>, there was no official agreement or truce between the Allies and French. This being so, all French vessels became legitimate targets. During the opening phases of French cruisers, destroyers, and submarines attacked American warships off Oran. The incomplete battleship *Jean Bart*

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<sup>54</sup> Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York:Harper, 1950),70.

<sup>55</sup> Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 96, 107.

<sup>56</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 110.

<sup>57</sup> Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 105-111.

opened fire from her berth. The American battleship *Massachusetts* responded and dueled with the French vessels until *Jean Bart* sank at her berth.<sup>58</sup>

The lopsided battle ended when Darlan agreed to let the Allies use North Africa without upsetting its present governmental structure. Clark had to virtually threaten Darlan with forced captivity to get him to back the Allied cause and not waffle. The so-called Darlan Deal upset many in the United States but Roosevelt supported Eisenhower's decision since it brought French resistance to an end.<sup>59</sup> As Clark viewed his contact with the man, Darlan was "a political investment forced on us by circumstance."<sup>60</sup> As part of the negotiations, Eisenhower tried to get Darlan to order the French fleet to North Africa. Darlan refused, citing the fleet's lack of fuel oil. He reiterated his previous assurances that the naval officers at Toulon would never allow the Germans to get any of the ships there.

The day after the Darlan Deal went into effect, American fears appeared to be coming true. German forces attempted to seize the ships at Toulon. Even though Darlan cabled Admiral de Lubard at Toulon to "invite" him and the fleet to North Africa since Germany had broken the armistice, de Lubard made no preparations to sail.<sup>61</sup> Yet, to the surprise of the Germans, the French held true to their word. As the French scuttled the majority of their larger units, American worst fear disappeared beneath the oil-covered waters of Toulon.

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<sup>58</sup> Blutcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 176; Auphan, *The French Navy in World War II*, 220-237.

<sup>59</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 109-114

<sup>60</sup> Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 130.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*, 116.



Just as the fall of the Third French Republic had caught Washington off guard, so did Lubard's response to the German demand. Ever since Bullitt had failed to provide adequate information before the war on the state of the French government, military, and society: America wandered blindly for a way out of the mess. In the end, war did not help clear up the diplomatic mess, since France was never at war with America. It took the French to solve America's problem by defeating themselves.

## CHAPER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

The fall of France in 1940 was indeed one of the greatest crises in modern European history, but also a catastrophe for history as a discipline. As Robert Dallek points out, the “‘revisionist’ and ‘court’ histories of the subject that appeared shortly after the war were more polemical attacks and replies.”<sup>1</sup> How the American government reacted to events in Europe became intertwined with politics and whether FDR was the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century American president or its greatest swindler. Conspiratorialists (like Fish and Tansill) base their argument on Roosevelt’s domestic politics and view FDR’s politics through the lens of post-war anti-communism. In contrast, Dallek correctly illustrates how politics has corrupted the history of Franco-American relations. It also clouds any attempted to analyze Roosevelt’s administration and see how its functioning affected foreign policy.

By looking at the “how” rather than the “why,” historians can continue to explore this topic while distancing themselves from political biases. Instead of arguments based on the assumption that President Roosevelt knowingly fooled the French or that Roosevelt merely reacted to events, historians can see that other factors played a role. Historians have, for the most part, ignored Roosevelt’s mode of governing. Scholars give FDR’s predisposition to govern personally rather than using normal channels only a passing glance and instead focus on personalities. As the French case illustrates, Roosevelt relied mainly on Hull, Bullitt, and Welles. Roosevelt wanted men of strong

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Dallek, “Franklin Roosevelt as War Leader,” *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 5 (December 1971), 1503.

will, yet strong devotion to him alone. They thus developed their own agendas and prescriptions for the situation. Roosevelt avoided normal channels of communication and preferred ad hoc, personal interaction. He gave the impression that each of these men was his most important assistant. This led to each trying to gain the President's ear. FDR welcomed the clash of personalities that these men represented. The fights gave FDR a way, he believed, to maintain control over foreign policy.

Roosevelt's personal style of governing exacerbated this since no formal chain of command existed to smooth relations and balance the egos of the participants. A fracturing of the foreign policy structure was the only possible outcome. Roosevelt had used the idea of "divide and rule" in domestic politics to great success, but it resulted in disaster for American foreign affairs.

Historians also ignore the fact that Roosevelt preferred to keep all but his closest advisors guessing what he planned next. Doing this, FDR tended keep his subordinates in the dark as to what their peers were doing. This helped lead to the conflicting agendas Bullitt and Welles tried to advance. Instead of FDR building a coordinated team that could possibly have dealt with the rapidly evolving crisis in France and elsewhere, FDR wanted to maintain his position out in front of American foreign policy. He was also a consummate politician who wanted to maintain control of all aspects of American foreign policy. In a manner, FDR acted as a micromanager but without coordinating his subordinates. Thus, American foreign policy was doomed to be disjointed and incoherent.

The obsession with secrecy was not the only characteristic of FDR's administration. In the case of French relations, Roosevelt sought to build up France

while at the same time seeking peace. As illustrated, the President tried to keep different options open to try to play both ends against the middle. To avoid doing anything that would destroy his chances at the polls, FDR sought to get what he wanted while seeking a middle ground between isolationism and involvement. Roosevelt needed to find the easiest way to carry out his policies, so he used his proxies to feel out the extremes of each possibility. This became Roosevelt's attempt at carrot-and-stick diplomacy. He hoped the two policies would complement each other, but instead they contradicted each other.

Added to problems in foreign policy, domestic issues played a large role as well. Although this was not a domestic debate over taxes or a New Deal program, Roosevelt operated in the same manner. The fate of nations rested on the perceptions of policy makers, but FDR treated his policies in the same way. The degree to which the French deluded themselves cannot be totally ignored; nonetheless, Roosevelt's pronouncements gave them false hope that America would awake to the threat and join the war on their side. The President's moral diplomacy failed while American vacillation between two extremes confused those Roosevelt hoped to support.

In addition, isolationists, such as Hamilton Fish, did not bother to coordinate with the White House on policy. In some ways, Fish and others worked actively against Roosevelt's policies. Just as the administration appeared to have multiple voices, other voices spoke out for America.

The French planned their defense on the contradictory signals from the United States and lost hope after choosing the wrong voice to hear. They chose to trust Roosevelt. Was the policy espoused by Bullitt what Roosevelt would or could actually

do? In times of crisis, certainties are rare. Yet those issues that seem certain become gospel and policies are based on them. The French based their strong stance against Hitler on the belief that they could hold back the Nazis with strong aid from the United States.

When the American aid was not forthcoming, French officials panicked. Their government collapsed and the French war effort suffered. Yet they continued to hope the United States would come to France's rescue, due to the impressions they received from Washington. It does not matter whether America could have altered the balance, except that the French based their policies thinking that America could. Yet America appeared to back out from involvement after stressing the need for the Allies to stand up to aggression. When America seemed to falter and not live up to its promises, the French felt betrayed.

Whether Roosevelt tricked France into war or not the point of which much of the historical debate revolves is irrelevant to a degree. The fact remains that the French thought they had been betrayed. After the fall of France, the sense that they had been betrayed helped bring the Petain regime to power. Daladier and Reynaud appeared to be American puppets or fools. This complicated an already terrible situation. With those sympathetic to the Allied cause tainted by the perception of betrayal, America could no longer offer its good services because of the lack of trust.

With no friends on the continent, America had to resort to bribery. There was nothing else. Roosevelt's contradictory foreign policy of trying to leave all options open had left no other option but aid. Aid in the form of food, fuel, and commodities became the United States' only foreign policy tool. With the possibility of Germany acquiring

the French fleet, Washington bribed the French into compliance. While this succeeded, the lack of friends within the Vichy requiem may have closed doors that could have made *Operation Torch* an easier victory.

Normally when historians rate the greatness of presidents, Franklin Roosevelt ranks near the top for his leadership. Some of this praise may be undeserved, as his policy towards France at this time clearly shows. While traditionalists and conspiratorialists attack and defend FDR, those historians who understand Roosevelt's method of governing, such as Robert Dallek, stand by the assertion that Roosevelt based his moves on pragmatism. Others, such as James MacGregor Burns, argue that Congress was the greatest hindrance to an effective foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, these historians continue to overlook Roosevelt as operator, driving force, and prophet to all those who made American foreign policy fail. Bullitt and Welles would not have taken their places of prominence without Roosevelt. Roosevelt allowed his administration to operate in an ad hoc fashion that was vulnerable to the very crises that overtook it. As Roosevelt's successor stated, the buck stops with the president. Roosevelt had responsibility for the fiasco with France as well as the rest of American policy. How he dealt with the beginnings of the Second World War show why it happened. It behooves future historians to explore his governing style more in-depth. It may lead to further understanding of the substance of Franklin D. Roosevelt's foreign policy.

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<sup>2</sup> Dallek, "Franklin Roosevelt as War Leader," 1503-1511.

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## APPENDIX

### Important Individuals in This Study

**General Henry “Hap” Arnold:** Head of the U.S. Army Air Corps (Force)

**Adolf Berle:** U.S. Assistant Secretary of State

**Francis Biddle:** U.S. Attorney General

**William C. Bullitt:** U.S. Ambassador to France, 1936-1940

**Winston Churchill:** Head of the British Admiralty until 1940, then British Prime Minister

**Admiral Francios Darlan:** French Admiral of the fleet, second-in-command to Marshal Petain until 1942

**Cordell Hull:** U.S. Secretary of State

**Harold L. Ickes:** U.S. Secretary of the Interior

**Admiral William Leahy:** U.S. Ambassador to France, 1940-1942

**Henry Morgenthau, Jr.:** U.S. Secretary of the Treasury

**Robert Murphy:** Ambassadors Bullitt’s aid in Paris until 1940, then U.S. Charge’ de Affairs in French North Africa

**Marshal Philipe Petain:** French Premier and head of the Vichy French government

**Franklin D. Roosevelt:** President of the United States of America, 1932-1945

**Sumner Welles:** U.S. Under Secretary of State

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Clayton R. Baird was born and raised in Maryville, Tennessee near Knoxville. There, he attended high school and later the University of Tennessee. While at UT Knoxville, he received a Bachelor of Arts in history in 1998 and a Bachelor of Arts with honors in political science in 2001. While at UT, he received the Ruth Stevens Fellowship in Comparative Politics and Foreign Affairs. In 2004, Clayton received a Master of Arts in history from Texas A&M University and a Certificate in International Affairs from the Bush School for Public Policy. Clayton Baird currently lives at 2116 Thomas Ave. Maryville, TN awaiting orders to report for Naval Officer Candidacy School.