CHAPTER FIFTEEN

America Re-enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt

For contemporary political leaders governing by public opinion polls, Roosevelt's role in moving his isolationist people toward participation in the war serves as an object lesson on the scope of leadership in a democracy. Sooner or later, the threat to the European balance of power would have forced the United States to intervene in order to stop Germany's

drive for world domination. The sheer, and growing, strength of America was bound to propel it eventually into the center of the international arena. That this happened with such speed and so decisively was the achievement of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

All great leaders walk alone. Their singularity springs from their ability to discern challenges that are not yet apparent to their contemporaries. Roosevelt took an isolationist people into a war between countries whose conflicts had only a few years earlier been widely considered inconsistent with American values and irrelevant to American security. After 1940, Roosevelt convinced the Congress, which had overwhelmingly passed a series of Neutrality Acts just a few years before, to authorize ever-increasing American assistance to Great Britain, stopping just short of outright belligerency and occasionally even crossing that line. Finally, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor removed America's last hesitations. Roosevelt was able to persuade a society which had for two centuries treasured its invulnerability of the dire perils of an Axis victory. And he saw to it that, this time, America's involvement would mark a first step toward permanent international engagement. During the war, his leadership held the alliance together and shaped the multilateral institutions which continue to serve the international community to this day.

No president, with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln, has made a more decisive difference in American history. Roosevelt took the oath of office at a time of national uncertainty, when America's faith in the New World's infinite capacity for progress had been severely shaken by the Great Depression. All around him, democracies seemed to be faltering and antidemocratic governments on both the Left and the Right were gaining ground.

After Roosevelt had restored hope at home, destiny imposed on him the obligation of defending democracy around the world. No one has described this aspect of Roosevelt's contribution better than Isaiah Berlin:

> [Roosevelt] looked upon the future with a calm eye, as if to say 'Let it come, whatever it may be, it will all be grist to our great mill. We shall turn it all to benefit.' . . . In a despondent world which appeared divided between wicked and fatally efficient fanatics marching to destroy, and bewildered populations on the run, unenthusiastic martyrs in a cause they could not define, he believed in his own ability, so long as he was at the controls, to stem this terrible tide. He had all the character and energy and skill of the dictators, and he was on our side.[1]

Roosevelt had already served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Wilson's Administration, and had been the Democrats' vice-presidential candidate

in the1920 election. Many leaders, among them de Gaulle, Churchill, and Adenauer, have been impelled to come to terms with the loneliness inherent in the journey toward greatness by a period of withdrawal from public life. Roosevelt's was imposed on him when he was struck down by polio in 1921. In an extraordinary demonstration of willpower, he overcame his disability and learned to stand with the aid of braces and even to walk a few steps, which enabled him to appear before the public as if he were not paralyzed at all. Until his report to the Congress on Yalta in 1945, Roosevelt stood whenever he delivered a major speech. Because the media cooperated with Roosevelt's attempt to play his role with dignity, the vast majority of Americans never realized the extent of Roosevelt's handicap or had its perceptions of him tinged by pity.

Roosevelt, an ebullient leader who used charm to maintain his aloofness, was an ambiguous combination of political manipulator and visionary. He governed more often by instinct than by analysis, and evoked strongly contrasting emotions.[2] As has been summarized by Isaiah Berlin, Roosevelt had serious shortcomings of character, which included unscrupulousness, ruthlessness, and cynicism. Yet Berlin concluded that, in the end, these were more than dramatically outweighed by Roosevelt's positive traits:

> What attracted his followers were countervailing qualities of a rare and inspiring order: he was large-hearted and possessed wide political horizons, imaginative sweep, understanding of the time in which he lived and of the direction of the great new forces at work in the twentieth century. . . .[3]

This was the president who propelled America into a leadership role internationally, an environment where questions of war or peace, progress or stagnation all around the world came to depend on his vision and commitment.

America's journey from involvement in the First World War to active participation in the Second proved to be a long one—interrupted as it was by the nation's about-face to isolationism. The depth of America's revulsion toward international affairs illustrates the magnitude of Roosevelt's achievement. A brief sketch of the historical backdrop against which Roosevelt conducted his policies is therefore necessary.

In the 1920s, America's mood was ambivalent, oscillating between a willingness to assert principles of universal applicability and a need to justify them on behalf of an isolationist foreign policy. Americans took to reciting the traditional themes of their foreign policy with even greater

emphasis: the uniqueness of America's mission as the exemplar of liberty, the moral superiority of democratic foreign policy, the seamless relationship between personal and international morality, the importance of open diplomacy, and the replacement of the balance of power by international consensus as expressed in the League of Nations.

All of these presumably universal principles were enlisted on behalf of American isolationism. Americans were still incapable of believing that anything outside the Western Hemisphere could possibly affect their security. The America of the 1920s and 1930s rejected even its own doctrine of collective security lest it lead to involvement in the quarrels of distant, bellicose societies. The provisions of the Treaty of Versailles were interpreted as vindictive, and reparations as self-defeating. When the French occupied the Ruhr, America used the occasion to withdraw its remaining occupying forces from the Rhineland. That Wilsonian exceptionalism had established criteria no international order could fulfill, made disillusionment a part of its very essence.

Disillusionment with the results of the war erased to a considerable extent the distinctions between the internationalists and the isolationists. Not even the most liberal internationalists any longer discerned an American interest in sustaining a flawed postwar settlement. No significant group had a good word to say about the balance of power. What passed for internationalism was being identified with membership in the League of Nations rather than with day-to-day participation in international diplomacy. And even the most dedicated internationalists insisted that the Monroe Doctrine superseded the League of Nations, and recoiled before the idea of America's joining League enforcement measures, even economic ones.

The isolationists carried these attitudes toward their ultimate conclusion. They attacked the League of Nations in principle, on the ground that it jeopardized the twin pillars of historic American foreign policy—the Monroe Doctrine and isolationism. The League was believed to be incompatible with the Monroe Doctrine because collective security entitled, indeed required, the League to involve itself in disputes *within* the Western Hemisphere. And was inconsistent with isolationism because the League obliged America to involve itself in disputes *outside* the Western Hemisphere.

The isolationists had a point. If the entire Western Hemisphere were somehow excluded from the operation of collective security, what was to keep the other nations of the world from organizing regional groupings of their own and excluding them from the operations of the League? In that case, the League of Nations would have led to a restoration of a

balance-of-power system, albeit on a regional basis. In practice, the internationalists and the isolationists converged on a bipartisan foreign policy. Both rejected foreign intervention within the Western Hemisphere and any participation in League enforcement machinery outside of it. They supported disarmament conferences because there was a clear consensus that arms caused war and that the reduction of arms contributed to peace. They favored internationally endorsed general principles of peaceful settlement, such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, as long as these agreements did not imply enforcement. Finally, the United States was always helpful on technical, usually financial, issues with no immediate political consequence, such as working out agreed reparations schedules.

The gap in American thinking between approving a principle and participating in its enforcement became dramatically apparent after the 1921–22 Washington Naval Conference. The Conference was important in two respects. It provided for ceilings in naval armaments for the United States, Great Britain, and Japan, granting to the United States a navy equal in size to that of Great Britain, and to Japan a navy three-fifths the size of the United States. This provision reaffirmed America's new role as the dominant power in the Pacific alongside Japan. Great Britain's role in that theater was henceforth secondary. Most important, a second, so-called Four-Power Treaty among Japan, the United States, Great Britain, and France providing for the peaceful settlement of disputes was to replace the old Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, and to usher in an era of cooperation in the Pacific. But if one of the signatories of the Four-Power Treaty disregarded its provisions, would the others take action against it? "The four-power treaty contains no war commitment. . . . There is no commitment to armed force, no alliance, no written or moral obligation to join in defense . . . ," President Harding explained to a skeptical American Senate.[4]

Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes reinforced the President's words by putting all of the signatories to the pact on notice that America would under no circumstances participate in enforcement measures. But the Senate was still not satisfied. In ratifying the Four-Power Treaty, the Senate added reservations stipulating that this would not commit the United States to using armed force in repelling aggression.[5] In other words, the agreement stood on its own merit; failure to observe it would involve no consequence. America would decide each case as it arose, just as if there were no agreement.

In terms of the way diplomacy had been routinely practiced for centuries, it was indeed an extraordinary proposition that a solemn treaty conferred no right of enforcement, and that enforcement had to be sepa-

rately negotiated with the Congress on a case-by-case basis. It was a foretaste of the debates between the Nixon Administration and the Congress after the Vietnam Peace agreement of January 1973, wherein the Congress argued that an agreement for which America had fought through three administrations of both parties did not confer any right of enforcement. According to that theory, agreements with America would reflect Washington's mood of the moment; whatever consequences grew out of them would likewise depend on Washington's mood at some other moment—an attitude not very likely to engender confidence in America's commitments.

The Senate's reserve had not inhibited President Harding's enthusiasm for the Four-Power Treaty. At the signing ceremony, he praised it because it protected the Philippines and marked "the beginning of a new and better epoch in human progress." How was it possible for a treaty without enforcement provisions to protect a prize as rich as the Philippines? Despite his position on the opposite end of the political spectrum, Harding invoked the standard Wilsonian liturgy. The world, he said, would punish violators by proclaiming "the odiousness of perfidy or infamy."[6] Harding, however, failed to explain how world public opinion was to be determined, let alone marshaled, and for what cause, so long as America refused to join the League of Nations.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, the impact of which on Europe was discussed in chapter 11, turned into another example of America's tendency to treat principles as self-implementing. Although American leaders enthusiastically proclaimed the historic nature of the treaty because sixty-two nations had renounced war as an instrument of national policy, they adamantly refused to endorse any machinery for applying it, much less for enforcing it. President Calvin Coolidge, waxing effusive before the Congress in December 1928, asserted: "Observance of this Covenant... promises more for the peace of the world than any other agreement ever negotiated among the nations."[7]

Yet how was this utopia to be achieved? Coolidge's passionate defense of the Kellogg-Briand Pact spurred internationalists and supporters of the League to argue, quite reasonably, that, war having been outlawed, the concept of neutrality had lost all meaning. In their view, since the League had been designed to identify aggressors, the international community was obliged to punish them appropriately. "Does anyone believe," asked one of the proponents of this view, "that the aggressive designs of Mussolini could be checked merely by the good faith of the Italian people and the power of public opinion?"[8]

The prescience of this question did not enhance its acceptability. Even

while the treaty bearing his name was still in the process of being debated, Secretary of State Kellogg, in an address before the Council on Foreign Relations, stressed that force would never be used to elicit compliance. Reliance on force, he argued, would turn what had been intended as a long stride toward peace into precisely the sort of military alliance that was so in need of being abolished. Nor should the Pact include a definition of aggression, since any definition would omit something and thereby weaken the nobility of the Pact's wording.[9] For Kellogg, the word was not only the beginning, it was the end:

> A nation claiming to act in self-defense must justify itself before the bar of world opinion as well as before the signatories of the treaty. For that reason I declined to place in the treaty a definition of aggressor or of self-defense because I believed that no comprehensive legalistic definition could be framed in advance. . . . This would make it more difficult rather than less difficult for an aggressor nation to prove its innocence.[10]

The Senate was no more impressed by Kellogg's explanations than it had been six years earlier by Harding's exegesis of why the Four-Power Treaty did not mean what it said. Now it added three "understandings" of its own: in the Senate's view, the treaty did not limit either the right of self-defense or of the Monroe Doctrine, nor did it create any obligation to assist victims of aggression—which meant that every foreseeable contingency had been exempted from its provisions. The Senate endorsed the Kellogg-Briand Pact as a statement of principle while insisting that the treaty had no practical implications, raising the question whether involving America even in an enunciation of principle was worth the reservations it would inevitably elicit.

If the United States rejected alliances and was casting doubts on the efficacy of the League, how was the Versailles system to be safeguarded? Kellogg's answer proved far less original than his critique, being that old standby, the force of public opinion:

> . . . if by this treaty all the nations solemnly pronounce against war as an institution for settling international disputes, the world will have taken a forward step, created a public opinion, marshaled the great moral forces of the world for its observance, and entered into a sacred obligation which will make it far more difficult to plunge the world into another great conflict.[11]

Four years later, Kellogg's successor, Henry Stimson, as distinguished and sophisticated a public servant as America had produced in the entire

interwar period, was not able to advance a better remedy against aggression than the Kellogg-Briand Pact—backed, of course, by the strength of public opinion:

> The Kellogg-Briand Pact provides for no sanctions of force. . . . Instead it rests upon the sanction of public opinion which can be made one of the most potent sanctions of the world. . . . Those critics who scoff at it have not accurately appraised the evolution in world opinion since the Great War.[12]

To a distant island power—as the United States stood vis-à-vis Europe and Asia—the disputes of Europe necessarily appeared abstruse and often irrelevant. Since America possessed a wide margin of safety to insulate it from challenges which threatened European countries without affecting American security, the European countries were in effect functioning as America's safety valves. A similar line of reasoning had led to Great Britain's aloofness from day-to-day European politics during the period of its "splendid isolation."

There was, however, a fundamental difference between Great Britain's "splendid isolation" of the nineteenth century and America's isolationism of the twentieth century. Great Britain, too, had sought to steer clear of Europe's daily squabbles. It recognized, however, that its own safety depended on the balance of power, and it was quite prepared to defend that balance by using the traditional methods of European diplomacy. In contrast, America never accepted the importance of either the balance of power or of the European style of diplomacy. Believing itself blessed by a unique and ultimately superior dispensation, America simply did not engage itself, and if it did, then only for general causes and in accordance with its own particular style of diplomacy—which was vastly more public, more juridical, and ideological than Europe's.

The interaction of the European and American styles of diplomacy during the interwar period therefore tended to combine the worst of both approaches. Feeling threatened, the European countries, especially France and the new nations of Eastern Europe, did not accept America's legacy of collective security and international arbitration, or its juridical definitions of war and peace. The nations which had become converts to the American agenda, principally Great Britain, had no experience in conducting policy on that basis. Yet all of these countries were very well aware that Germany could never have been defeated without America's help. Since the end of the war, the balance of power had become even less favorable toward the wartime Allies. In any new war with Germany, American help would be needed more urgently, and probably sooner

than it had been the last time, especially since the Soviet Union was no longer a player.

The practical result of this mixture of fear and hope was that European diplomacy continued to drift further away from its traditional moorings and toward greater emotional dependence on America, producing a double veto: France would not act without Great Britain, and Great Britain would not act contrary to views strongly held in Washington, never mind that American leaders never tired of volubly insisting that they would in no circumstance risk war on behalf of European issues.

America's consistent refusal throughout the 1920s to commit itself to safeguarding the Versailles system proved to be terrible psychological preparation for the 1930s, when international tensions began to erupt. A foretaste of what lay ahead came in 1931, when Japan invaded Manchuria, separated it from China, and turned it into a satellite state. The United States condemned Japan's actions but refused to participate in collective enforcement. In censuring Japan, America introduced a sanction of its own, which at the time seemed like an evasion but which, a decade later, would, in Roosevelt's hands, turn into a weapon for forcing a showdown with Japan. This sanction was the policy of refusing to recognize territorial changes brought about by force. Originated by Stimson in 1932, it was invoked by Roosevelt in the fall of 1941 to demand that Japan withdraw from Manchuria and all of its other conquests.

On January 30, 1933, the world crisis began in earnest with Hitler's accession to the position of German Chancellor. Destiny had decreed that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who did as much as any other individual to lay Hitler low, would take his oath of office a little more than four weeks later. Still, nothing in Roosevelt's first term foreshadowed such an outcome. Roosevelt rarely deviated from the standard rhetoric of the interwar period and repeated the isolationist themes handed down by his predecessors. In a speech before the Woodrow Wilson Foundation on December 28, 1933, Roosevelt addressed the imminent end of the agreed term of the Naval Treaties of the 1920s. He proposed to extend these accords by calling for the abolition of all offensive weapons and—harkening back to Kellogg—by a commitment that no nation permit its military forces to enter the territory of another.

The subject was as familiar as Roosevelt's solution to possible violations of what he was proposing. Once again, the censure of public opinion was invoked as the only available remedy:

> . . . no such general agreement for the elimination of aggression or the elimination of the weapons of offensive warfare would be of any value

> in this world unless every Nation, without exception, would enter into such an agreement by solemn obligation. . . . [T]hen, my friends, it would be a comparatively easy matter to separate the sheep from the goats. . . . It is but an extension of the challenge of Woodrow Wilson for us to propose in this newer generation that from now on war by governments shall be changed to peace by peoples.[13]

There was no provision for what might happen to the goats once they were separated from the sheep.

Roosevelt's proposal was moot by the time it was put forward, since Germany had left the Disarmament Conference two months earlier and refused to return. In any event, banning offensive weapons was not on Hitler's agenda. Nor, as it turned out, did Hitler suffer global opprobrium for having opted for rearmament.

Roosevelt's first term coincided with the heyday of revisionism about the First World War. In 1935, a special Senate Committee under North Dakota's Senator Gerald Nye published a 1400-page report blaming America's entry into the war on armaments manufacturers. Soon thereafter, Walter Millis' best-selling book, *The Road to War,* popularized the thesis for a mass audience.[14] Under the impact of this school of thought, America's participation in the war came to be explained by malfeasance, conspiracy, and betrayal rather than by fundamental or permanent interests.

To prevent America from once again being lured into war, the Congress passed three so-called Neutrality Acts between 1935 and 1937. Prompted by the Nye Report, these laws prohibited loans and any other financial assistance to belligerents (whatever the cause of war) and imposed an arms embargo on all parties (regardless of who the victim was). Purchases of nonmilitary goods for cash were allowed only if they were transported in non-American ships.[15] The Congress was not abjuring profits so much as it was rejecting risks. As the aggressors bestrode Europe, America abolished the distinction between aggressor and victim by legislating a single set of restrictions on both.

The national interest came to be defined in legal rather than geostrategic terms. In March 1936, Secretary of State Hull advised Roosevelt in exclusively legal terms about the significance of the remilitarization of the Rhineland, which had toppled the military balance of Europe and left the countries of Eastern Europe defenseless: "It would appear from this brief analysis that the action of the German Government has constituted both a violation of the Versailles and Locarno pacts, but as far as the United States is concerned it does not appear to constitute a violation of our treaty[16] of August 25, 1921 with Germany. . . ."[17]

After his landslide electoral victory of 1936, Roosevelt went far beyond the existing framework. In fact, he demonstrated that, though preoccupied with the Depression, he had grasped the essence of the dictators' challenge better than any European leader except Churchill. At first, he sought merely to enunciate America's moral commitment to the cause of the democracies. Roosevelt began this educational process with the so-called Quarantine Speech, which he delivered in Chicago on October 5, 1937. It was his first warning to America of the approaching peril, and his first public statement that America might have to assume some responsibilities with respect to it. Japan's renewed military aggression in China, coupled with the previous year's announcement of the Berlin-Rome Axis, provided the backdrop, giving Roosevelt's concerns a global dimension:

> The peace, the freedom and the security of ninety percent of the population of the world is being jeopardized by the remaining ten percent who are threatening a breakdown of all international order and law. . . . It seems to be unfortunately true that the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease.[18]

Roosevelt was careful not to spell out what he meant by "quarantine" and what, if any, specific measures he might have in mind. Had the speech implied any kind of action, it would have been inconsistent with the Neutrality Acts, which the Congress had overwhelmingly approved and the President had recently signed.

Not surprisingly, the Quarantine Speech was attacked by isolationists, who demanded clarification of the President's intentions. They argued passionately that the distinction between "peace-loving" and "warlike" nations implied an American value judgment which, in turn, would lead to the abandonment of the policy of nonintervention, to which both Roosevelt and the Congress had pledged themselves. Two years later, Roosevelt described the uproar that resulted from the speech as follows: "Unfortunately, this suggestion fell upon deaf ears—even hostile and resentful ears. . . . It was hailed as war mongering; it was condemned as attempted intervention in foreign affairs; it was even ridiculed as a nervous search 'under the bed' for dangers of war which did not exist."[19]

Roosevelt could have ended the controversy by simply denying the intentions being ascribed to him. Yet, despite the critical onslaught, Roosevelt spoke ambiguously enough at a news conference to keep open the option of collective defense of some kind. According to the journalistic

practice of the day, the President always met with the press off-the-record, which meant that he could neither be quoted nor identified, and these rules were respected.

Years later, the historian Charles Beard published a transcript showing Roosevelt dodging and weaving but never denying that the Quarantine Speech represented a new approach, while refusing to say just what the new approach was.[20] Roosevelt insisted that his speech implied actions that went beyond moral condemnation of aggression: "There are a lot of methods in the world that have never been tried yet."[21] Asked whether this meant that he had a plan, Roosevelt replied, "I can't give you any clue to it. You will have to invent one. *I have got one.*"[22] He never explained what that plan was.

Roosevelt the statesman might warn against the impending danger; Roosevelt the political leader had to navigate among three currents of American opinion: a small group advocating unambiguous support for all "peace-loving" nations; a somewhat more significant group that went along with such support as long as it stopped well short of war; and a vast majority supporting the letter and the spirit of the neutrality legislation. A skillful political leader will always try to keep open as many options as possible. He will want to present his ultimate course as his own optimum choice rather than as having been imposed by events. And no modern American president was better at this kind of tactical management than Roosevelt.

In a Fireside Chat devoted mostly to domestic issues on October 12, 1937—a week after the Quarantine Speech—Roosevelt tried to satisfy all three groups. Underlining his commitment to peace, he spoke approvingly of a forthcoming conference of the signatories of the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 and described American participation in it as a demonstration of "our purpose to cooperate with the other signatories to this Treaty, including China and Japan."[23] The conciliatory language suggested a desire for peace, even with Japan; at the same time, it would serve as a demonstration of good faith if cooperation with Japan should prove impossible. Roosevelt was equally ambiguous about America's international role. He reminded his audience of his own wartime experience as Assistant Secretary of the Navy: "... remember[ing] that from 1913 to 1921, I personally was fairly close to world events, and in that period, while I learned much of what to do, I also learned much of what not to do."[24]

Roosevelt surely would not have objected if his audience had interpreted this ambiguous statement to mean that his wartime experiences had taught him the importance of nonentanglement. On the other hand, if

that was in fact what Roosevelt meant, he would have gained far more popularity had he simply said so. In the light of his later actions, it is more likely that Roosevelt meant to suggest that he would pursue the Wilsonian tradition by means of more realistic methods.

Despite the hostile reaction to his pronouncements, Roosevelt told Colonel Edward House, Wilson's erstwhile confidant, in October 1937, that it would take time to "make people realize that war will be a greater danger to us if we close all doors and windows than if we go out in the street and use our influence to curb the riot."[25] It was another way of saying that the United States would need to participate in international affairs in an as yet unspecified way to help quell the pattern of aggression.

Roosevelt's immediate problem was an outburst of pro-isolationist sentiment. In January 1938, the House of Representatives nearly passed a constitutional amendment requiring a national referendum for declarations of war except in the event of an invasion of the United States. Roosevelt had to make a personal appeal to prevent its passage. In these circumstances, Roosevelt viewed discretion as the better part of valor. In March 1938, the United States government did not react to Austria's *Anschluss* to Germany, following the pattern of the European democracies, which had confined themselves to perfunctory protests. During the crisis leading to the Munich Conference, Roosevelt felt obliged to emphasize repeatedly that America would not join a united front against Hitler. And he disavowed subordinates and even close friends who so much as hinted at that possibility.

In early September 1938, at a dinner celebrating Franco-American relations, the American Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, repeated a standard platitude—that France and the United States were "united in war and peace."[26] This was enough to trigger an isolationist uproar. Roosevelt, who could not have known of Bullitt's comments in advance since they were the sort of boilerplate rhetoric left to the discretion of ambassadors, nevertheless took pains to reject the insinuation that the United States was aligning itself with the democracies as being "100 percent wrong."[27] Later that month, when war seemed imminent and after Chamberlain had already met with Hitler twice, Roosevelt sent Chamberlain two messages, on September 26 and 28, urging a conference of the interested powers that, in the existing circumstances, could only magnify pressures for major Czech concessions.

Munich seems to have been the turning point which impelled Roosevelt to align America with the European democracies, at first politically but gradually materially as well. From then on, his commitment to thwarting the dictators was inexorable, culminating three years later in Amer-

ica's entry into a second world war. The interplay between leaders and their publics in a democracy is always complex. A leader who confines himself to the experience of his people in a period of upheaval purchases temporary popularity at the price of condemnation by posterity, whose claims he is neglecting. A leader who gets too far ahead of his society will become irrelevant. A great leader must be an educator, bridging the gap between his visions and the familiar. But he must also be willing to walk alone to enable his society to follow the path he has selected.

There is inevitably in every great leader an element of guile which simplifies, sometimes the objectives, sometimes the magnitude, of the task. But his ultimate test is whether he incarnates the truth of his society's values and the essence of its challenges. These qualities Roosevelt possessed to an unusual degree. He deeply believed in America; he was convinced that Nazism was both evil and a threat to American security, and he was extraordinarily guileful. And he was prepared to shoulder the burden of lonely decisions. Like a tightrope walker, he had to move, step by careful, anguishing step, across the chasm between his goal and his society's reality in demonstrating to it that the far shore was in fact safer than the familiar promontory.

On October 26, 1938, less than four weeks after the Munich Pact, Roosevelt returned to the theme of his Quarantine Speech. In a radio address to the Herald-Tribune Forum, he warned against unnamed but easily identifiable aggressors whose "national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the threat of war."[28] Next, while upholding disarmament in principle, Roosevelt also called for strengthening America's defenses:

> . . . we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared.[29]

In secret, Roosevelt went much further. At the end of October 1938, in separate conversations with the British air minister and also with a personal friend of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, he put forward a project designed to circumvent the Neutrality Acts. Proposing an outright evasion of legislation he had only recently signed, Roosevelt suggested

setting up British and French airplane-assembly plants in Canada, near the American border. The United States would supply all the components, leaving only the final assembly to Great Britain and France. This arrangement would technically permit the project to stay within the letter of the Neutrality Acts, presumably on the ground that the component parts were civilian goods. Roosevelt told Chamberlain's emissary that, "in the event of war with the dictators, he had the industrial resources of the American nation behind him."[30]

Roosevelt's scheme for helping the democracies restore their air power collapsed, as it was bound to, if only because of the sheer logistical impossibility of undertaking an effort on such a scale in secret. But from then on, Roosevelt's support for Britain and France was limited only when the Congress and public opinion could neither be circumvented nor overcome.

In early 1939, in his State of the Union message, Roosevelt identified the aggressor nations as being Italy, Germany, and Japan. Alluding to the theme of his Quarantine Speech, he pointed out that "there are many methods short of war, but stronger and more effective than mere words, of bringing home to aggressor governments the aggregate sentiments of our own people."[31]

In April 1939, within a month of the Nazi occupation of Prague, Roosevelt for the first time designated aggression against smaller countries as constituting a general threat to American security. At a press conference on April 8, 1939, Roosevelt told reporters that "the continued political, economic and social independence of every small nation in the world does have an effect on our national safety and prosperity. Each one that disappears weakens our national safety and prosperity."[32] In a speech before the Pan American Union on April 14, he went a step further by arguing that the United States' security interests could no longer be limited to the Monroe Doctrine:

> Beyond question, within a scant few years air fleets will cross the ocean as easily as today they cross the closed European seas. Economic functioning of the world becomes therefore necessarily a unit; no interruption of it anywhere can fail, in the future, to disrupt economic life everywhere.
>
> The past generation in Pan American matters was concerned with constructing the principles and the mechanisms through which this hemisphere would work together. But the next generation will be concerned with the methods by which the New World can live together in peace with the Old.[33]

In April 1939, Roosevelt addressed Hitler and Mussolini directly in a message which, though ridiculed by the dictators, had been cleverly designed to demonstrate to the American people that the Axis countries indeed had aggressive designs. Surely one of America's subtlest and most devious presidents, Roosevelt asked the dictators—but not Great Britain or France—for assurances that they would not attack some thirty-one specific European and Asian nations for a period of ten years.[34] Roosevelt then undertook to obtain similar assurances from those thirty-one nations with respect to Germany and Italy. Finally, he offered America's participation in any disarmament conference resulting from a relaxation of tensions.

Roosevelt's note will not go down in diplomatic history for meticulous staff work. For instance, Syria and Palestine, French and British mandates respectively, were listed as independent states.[35] Hitler had a grand time using Roosevelt's message as a prop in one of his Reichstag speeches. To general hilarity, Hitler slowly read the long list of countries which Roosevelt was imploring him to leave alone. As the Führer pronounced the names of country after country in a bemused tone of voice, peals of laughter echoed through the Reichstag. Hitler proceeded to inquire of each of the countries listed in Roosevelt's note, many of which were already quaking before him, whether they indeed felt menaced. They, of course, strenuously denied any such concern.

Though Hitler scored the oratorical point, Roosevelt achieved his political objective. By asking only Hitler and Mussolini for assurances, he had stigmatized them as the aggressors before the only audience that, for the moment, mattered to Roosevelt—the American people. To enlist the American public in supporting the democracies, Roosevelt needed to frame the issues in terms that went beyond the balance of power and to portray them as a struggle in defense of innocent victims against an evil aggressor. Both his note and Hitler's reaction to it helped him to achieve that objective.

Roosevelt was quick to translate America's new psychological threshold into strategic coin. During the same month, April 1939, he inched the United States closer to *de facto* military cooperation with Great Britain. An agreement between the two countries freed the Royal Navy to concentrate all of its forces in the Atlantic while the United States moved the bulk of its fleet to the Pacific. This division of labor implied that the United States assumed responsibility for the defense of Great Britain's Asian possessions against Japan. Prior to World War I, an analogous arrangement between Great Britain and France (which had led to the concentration of the French fleet in the Mediterranean) had been used as an

argument that Great Britain was morally obliged to enter World War I in defense of France's Atlantic coast.

Isolationists observing Roosevelt's actions were deeply disturbed. In February 1939, before the outbreak of the war, Senator Arthur Vandenberg had eloquently put forward the isolationist case:

> True, we do live in a foreshortened world in which, compared with Washington's day, time and space are relatively annihilated. But I still thank God for two insulating oceans; and even though they be foreshortened, they are still our supreme benediction if they be widely and prudently used. . . .
>
> We all have our sympathies and our natural emotions in behalf of the victims of national or international outrage all around the globe; but we are not, we cannot be, the world's protector or the world's policeman.[36]

When, in response to the German invasion of Poland, Great Britain declared war on September 3, 1939, Roosevelt had no choice but to invoke the Neutrality Acts. At the same time, he moved rapidly to modify the legislation to permit Great Britain and France to purchase American arms.

Roosevelt had avoided invoking the Neutrality Acts in the war between Japan and China, ostensibly because no war had been declared, in reality because he believed that an arms embargo would hurt China far more than it would Japan. But if war broke out in Europe, it would be formally declared and he would not be able to resort to subterfuge to circumvent the Neutrality Acts. Therefore, in early 1939, Roosevelt called for a revision of the Neutrality Acts on the ground that they "may operate unevenly and unfairly—and may actually give aid to the aggressor and deny it to the victim."[37] The Congress did not act until after the European war had actually started. Indicating the strength of the isolationist mood, Roosevelt's proposal had been defeated three times in the Congress earlier in the year.

The same day that Great Britain declared war, Roosevelt called a special session of the Congress for September 21. This time, he prevailed. The so-called Fourth Neutrality Act of November 4, 1939, permitted belligerents to purchase arms and ammunition from the United States, provided they paid in cash and transported their purchases in their own or neutral ships. Since, because of the British blockade, only Great Britain and France were in a position to do so, "neutrality" was becoming an increasingly technical term. The Neutrality Acts had lasted only as long as there had been nothing to be neutral about.

During the so-called phony war, America's leaders continued to believe

that only material aid was required of them. Conventional wisdom had it that the French army, behind the Maginot Line, and backed by the Royal Navy, would strangle Germany through the combination of a defensive ground war and a naval blockade.

In February 1940, Roosevelt sent Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles on a mission to Europe to explore the possibilities of peace during the "phony war." French Prime Minister Daladier inferred that Welles was urging a compromise peace that left Germany in control of Central Europe, though the majority of Welles' interlocutors did not interpret his remarks that way and, for Daladier, the wish may have been father to the thought.[38] Roosevelt's purpose in sending Welles to Europe had been not to mediate so much as to demonstrate his commitment to peace to his isolationist people. He also wanted to establish America's claim to participation should the "phony war" culminate in a peace settlement. Germany's assault on Norway a few weeks later put an end to that particular mission.

On June 10, 1940, as France was falling to the Nazi invaders, Roosevelt abandoned formal neutrality and came down eloquently on the side of Great Britain. In a powerful speech in Charlottesville, Virginia, he combined a scathing denunciation of Mussolini, whose armies had attacked France that day, with America's commitment to extend all-out material aid to every country resisting German aggression. At the same time, he proclaimed that America would increase its own defenses:

> On this tenth day of June, 1940, in this University founded by the first great American teacher of democracy, we send forth our prayers and our hopes to those beyond the seas who are maintaining with magnificent valor their battle for freedom.
>
> In our American unity, we will pursue two obvious and simultaneous courses; we will extend to the opponents of force the material resources of this nation; and, at the same time, we will harness and speed up the use of those resources in order that we ourselves in the Americas may have equipment and training equal to the task of any emergency and every defense.[39]

Roosevelt's Charlottesville speech marked a watershed. Faced with Great Britain's imminent defeat, any American president might have discovered in the Royal Navy an essential component to the security of the Western Hemisphere. But it is difficult to imagine any contemporary of Roosevelt —of either political party—who, having had the courage and foresight to recognize the challenge, would have had the willpower to lead his isola-

tionist people, step by step, toward the commitment to do whatever was necessary to defeat Nazi Germany.

The expectation thus raised that America would, sooner or later, become Great Britain's ally was surely one of the most decisive elements in sustaining Churchill's decision to continue to fight alone:

> We shall go on to the end. . . . And even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the Old.[40]

Roosevelt's methods were complex—elevated in their statement of objectives, devious in tactic, explicit in defining the issues, and less than frank in explaining the intricacies of particular events. Many of Roosevelt's actions were on the fringes of constitutionality. No contemporary president could resort to Roosevelt's methods and remain in office. Yet Roosevelt had clearly seen that America's margin of safety was shrinking and that a victory of the Axis Powers would eliminate it. Above all, he found Hitler to be anathema to all the values for which America had historically stood.

After the fall of France, Roosevelt increasingly stressed the imminent threat to American security. To Roosevelt, the Atlantic was possessed of the same meaning which the English Channel held for British statesmen. He saw it as a vital national interest that it not be dominated by Hitler. Thus, in his State of the Union Address of January 6, 1941, Roosevelt linked American security to the survival of the Royal Navy:

> I have recently pointed out how quickly the tempo of modern warfare could bring into our very midst the physical attack which we must eventually expect if the dictator nations win the war.
>
> There is much loose talk of our immunity from immediate and direct invasion from across the seas. Obviously, as long as the British Navy retains its powers, no such danger exists.[41]

Of course, if that were true, America was obliged to make every effort to prevent Great Britain's defeat—in the extreme case, even to enter the war itself.

Roosevelt had for many months been acting on the premise that America might have to enter the war. In September 1940, he had devised

an ingenious arrangement to give Great Britain fifty allegedly over-age destroyers in exchange for the right to set up American bases on eight British possessions, from Newfoundland to the South American mainland. Winston Churchill later called it a "decidedly unneutral act," for the destroyers were far more important to Great Britain than the bases were to America. Most of them were quite remote from any conceivable theater of operations, and some even duplicated existing American bases. More than anything, the destroyer deal represented a pretext based on a legal opinion by Roosevelt's own appointee, Attorney General Francis Biddle —hardly an objective observer.

Roosevelt sought neither Congressional approval nor modification of the Neutrality Acts for his destroyer-for-bases deal. Nor was he challenged, as inconceivable as that seems in the light of contemporary practice. It was the measure of Roosevelt's concern about a possible Nazi victory and of his commitment to bolstering British morale, that he took this step as a presidential election campaign was just beginning. (It was fortunate for Great Britain and for the cause of American unity that the foreign policy views of his opponent, Wendell Willkie, were not significantly different from Roosevelt's.)

Concurrently, Roosevelt vastly increased the American defense budget and, in 1940, induced the Congress to introduce peacetime conscription. So strong was lingering isolationist sentiment that conscription was renewed by only one vote in the House of Representatives in the summer of 1941, less than four months before the outbreak of the war.

Immediately after the election, Roosevelt moved to eliminate the requirement of the Fourth Neutrality Act—that American war materials could only be purchased for cash. In a Fireside Chat, borrowing a term from Wilson, he challenged the United States to become the "arsenal of democracy."[42] The legal instrument for bringing this about was the Lend-Lease Act, which gave the President discretionary authority to lend, lease, sell, or barter under any terms he deemed proper any defense article to "the government of any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States." Secretary of State Hull, normally a passionate Wilsonian and an advocate of collective security, rather uncharacteristically justified the Lend-Lease Act on strategic grounds. Without massive American help, he argued, Great Britain would fall and control of the Atlantic would pass into hostile hands, jeopardizing the security of the Western Hemisphere.[43]

Yet, if this were true, America could avoid participation in the war only if Great Britain were by itself able to overcome Hitler, which even Churchill did not believe was possible. Senator Taft stressed this point in

his opposition to Lend-Lease. The isolationists organized themselves as the so-called America First Committee, headed by General Robert E. Wood, Chairman of the board of Sears, Roebuck and Company, and supported by prominent leaders in many fields, among them Kathleen Norris, Irvin S. Cobb, Charles A. Lindbergh, Henry Ford, General Hugh S. Johnson, Chester Bowles, and Theodore Roosevelt's daughter, Mrs. Nicholas Longworth.

The passion behind the isolationists' opposition to Lend-Lease was captured in a comment by Senator Arthur Vandenberg, one of their most thoughtful spokesmen, on March 11, 1941: "We have tossed Washington's Farewell Address into the discard. We have thrown ourselves squarely into the power politics and the power wars of Europe, Asia and Africa. We have taken the first step upon a course from which we can never hereafter retreat."[44] Vandenberg's analysis was correct, but it was the world that had imposed the necessity; and it was Roosevelt's merit to have recognized it.

After proposing Lend-Lease, Roosevelt made his determination to bring about the defeat of the Nazis more explicit with every passing month. Even before the Act was passed, the British and American chiefs of staff, anticipating its approval, met to organize the resources about to be made available. While together, they also began planning for the time when the United States would be an active participant in the war. For these planners, only the timing of America's entry into the war remained yet to be settled. Roosevelt did not initial the so-called ABC-1 Agreement, according to which, in case of war, top priority would be given to the struggle against Germany. But it was clear that this was due to domestic imperatives and constitutional restrictions, not to any ambiguity about his purposes.

Nazi atrocities increasingly eroded the distinction between fighting to promote American values and fighting to defend American security. Hitler had gone so far beyond any acceptable norm of morality that the battle against him assimilated the triumph of good over evil into the struggle for naked survival. Thus, in January 1941, Roosevelt summed up America's objectives in what he called the Four Freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These goals went far beyond those of any previous European war. Not even Wilson had proclaimed a social issue like freedom from want as a war aim.

In April 1941, Roosevelt took another step toward war by authorizing an agreement with the Danish representative in Washington (whose rank was minister) to allow American forces to occupy Greenland. Since Den-

mark was under German occupation and since no Danish government-in-exile had been formed, the diplomat without a country took it upon himself to "authorize" American bases on Danish soil. At the same time, Roosevelt privately informed Churchill that, henceforth, American ships would patrol the North Atlantic west of Iceland—covering about two-thirds of the entire ocean—and "publish the position of possible aggressor ships or planes when located in the American patrol area."[45] Three months later, at the invitation of the local government, American troops landed in Iceland, another Danish possession, to replace British forces. Then, without Congressional approval, Roosevelt declared the whole area between these Danish possessions and North America a part of the Western Hemisphere Defense system.

In a lengthy radio address on May 27, 1941, Roosevelt announced a state of emergency and restated America's commitment to social and economic progress:

> We will not accept a Hitler-dominated world. And we will not accept a world, like the postwar world of the 1920s, in which the seeds of Hitlerism can again be planted and allowed to grow.
>
> We will accept only a world consecrated to freedom of speech and expression—freedom of every person to worship God in his own way —freedom from want—and freedom from terror.[46]

The phrase "will not accept" had to mean that Roosevelt was in effect committing America to go to war for the Four Freedoms if they could not be achieved in any other way.

Few American presidents have been as sensitive and perspicacious as Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in his grasp of the psychology of his people. Roosevelt understood that only a threat to their security could motivate them to support military preparedness. But to take them into a war, he knew he needed to appeal to their idealism in much the same way that Wilson had. In Roosevelt's view, America's security needs might well be met by control of the Atlantic, but its war aims required some vision of a new world order. Thus "balance of power" was not a term ever found in Roosevelt's pronouncements, except when he used it disparagingly. What he sought was to bring about a world community compatible with America's democratic and social ideals as the best guarantee of peace.

In this atmosphere, the president of a technically neutral United States and Great Britain's quintessential wartime leader, Winston Churchill, met in August 1941 on a cruiser off the coast of Newfoundland. Great Britain's

position had improved somewhat when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June, but England was far from assured of victory. Nevertheless, the joint statement these two leaders issued reflected not a statement of traditional war aims but the design of a totally new world bearing America's imprimatur. The Atlantic Charter proclaimed a set of "common principles" on which the President and Prime Minister based "their hopes for a better future for the world."[47] These principles enlarged upon Roosevelt's original Four Freedoms by incorporating equal access to raw materials and cooperative efforts to improve social conditions around the world.

The Atlantic Charter cast the problem of postwar security entirely in Wilsonian terms and contained no geopolitical component at all. "After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny," the free nations would renounce the use of force and impose permanent disarmament on the nations "which threaten . . . aggression." This would lead to the encouragement of "all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments."[48] Two categories of nations were being envisaged: aggressor nations (specifically Germany, Japan, and Italy), which would be permanently disarmed, and "peace-loving countries," which would be permitted to retain military forces, though, it was hoped, at greatly reduced levels. National self-determination would serve as the cornerstone of this new world order.

The difference between the Atlantic Charter and the Pitt Plan, by which Great Britain had proposed to end the Napoleonic Wars, showed the extent to which Great Britain had become the junior partner in the Anglo-American relationship. Not once did the Atlantic Charter refer to a new balance of power, whereas the Pitt Plan had purported to be about nothing else. It was not that Great Britain had become oblivious to the balance of power after just having fought the most desperate war in its long history; rather, Churchill had realized that America's entry into the war would of itself alter the balance of power in Great Britain's favor. In the meantime, he had to subordinate long-term British objectives to immediate necessities—something Great Britain had never felt obliged to do during the Napoleonic Wars.

When the Atlantic Charter was proclaimed, German armies were approaching Moscow and Japanese forces were preparing to move into Southeast Asia. Churchill was above all concerned with removing the obstacles to America's participation in the war. For he understood very well that, by itself, Great Britain would not be able to achieve a decisive victory, even with Soviet participation in the war and American material support. In addition, the Soviet Union might collapse and some compro-

mise between Hitler and Stalin was always a possibility, threatening Great Britain with renewed isolation. Churchill saw no point in debating postwar structure before he could even be certain that there would be one.

In September 1941, the United States crossed the line into belligerency. Roosevelt's order that the position of German submarines be reported to the British Navy had made it inevitable that, sooner or later, some clash would occur. On September 4, 1941, the American destroyer *Greer* was torpedoed while signaling the location of a German submarine to British airplanes. On September 11, without describing the circumstances, Roosevelt denounced German "piracy." Comparing German submarines to a rattlesnake coiled to strike, he ordered the United States Navy to sink "on sight" any German or Italian submarines discovered in the previously established American defense area extending all the way to Iceland. To all practical purposes, America was at war on the sea with the Axis powers.[49]

Simultaneously, Roosevelt took up the challenge of Japan. In response to Japan's occupation of Indochina in July 1941, he abrogated America's commercial treaty with Japan, forbade the sale of scrap metal to it, and encouraged the Dutch government-in-exile to stop oil exports to Japan from the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia). These pressures led to negotiations with Japan, which began in October 1941. Roosevelt instructed the American negotiators to demand that Japan relinquish all of its conquests, including Manchuria, by invoking America's previous refusal to "recognize" these acts.

Roosevelt must have known that there was no possibility that Japan would accept. On December 7, 1941, following the pattern of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and destroyed a significant part of America's Pacific fleet. On December 11, Hitler honored his treaty with Tokyo by declaring war on the United States. Why Hitler thus freed Roosevelt to concentrate America's war effort on the country Roosevelt had always considered to be the principal enemy has never been satisfactorily explained.

America's entry into the war marked the culmination of a great and daring leader's extraordinary diplomatic enterprise. In less than three years, Roosevelt had taken his staunchly isolationist people into a global war. As late as May 1940, 64 percent of Americans had considered the preservation of peace more important than the defeat of the Nazis. Eighteen months later, in December 1941, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the proportions had been reversed—only 32 percent favored peace over preventing triumph.[50]

Roosevelt had achieved his goal patiently and inexorably, educating his people one step at a time about the necessities before them. His audi-

ences filtered his words through their own preconceptions and did not always understand that his ultimate destination was war, though they could not have doubted that it was confrontation. In fact, Roosevelt was not so much bent on war as on defeating the Nazis; it was simply that, as time passed, the Nazis could only be defeated if America entered the war.

That their entry into the war should have seemed so sudden to the American people was due to three factors: Americans had had no experience with going to war for security concerns outside the Western Hemisphere; many believed that the European democracies could prevail on their own, while few understood the nature of the diplomacy that had preceded Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor or Hitler's rash declaration of war on the United States. It was a measure of the United States' deep-seated isolationism that it had to be bombed at Pearl Harbor before it would enter the war in the Pacific; and that, in Europe, it was Hitler who would ultimately declare war on the United States rather than the other way around.

By initiating hostilities, the Axis powers had solved Roosevelt's lingering dilemma about how to move the American people into the war. Had Japan focused its attack on Southeast Asia and Hitler not declared war against the United States, Roosevelt's task of steering his people toward his views would have been much more complicated. In light of Roosevelt's proclaimed moral and strategic convictions, there can be little doubt that, in the end, he would have somehow managed to enlist America in the struggle he considered so decisive to both the future of freedom and to American security.

Subsequent generations of Americans have placed a greater premium on total candor by their chief executive. Yet, like Lincoln, Roosevelt sensed that the survival of his country and its values was at stake, and that history itself would hold him responsible for the results of his solitary initiatives. And, as was the case with Lincoln, it is a measure of the debt free peoples owe to Franklin Delano Roosevelt that the wisdom of his solitary passage is now, quite simply, taken for granted.