

## THE SLEEP OF THE SAVED AND THANKFUL

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **ABSTRACT**

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As Congress prepared a declaration of war against Japan after Pearl Harbor, one of the biggest questions they faced was whether they should also declare war on Germany. Many argued that the U.S. should declare war only on Japan, since Germany was not involved in the attack. The matter was soon resolved when Hitler acted first and declared war on the U.S. But why did he declare war on the U.S., a country with an almost limitless military potential? The Axis Treaty required Germany to support Japan only if it were attacked, not if it were the attacker. Next to the invasion of the Soviet Union, this was the worst strategic decision the Germans made, dooming them to a two front war they could not win. This paper argues it was because of a strategic deception operation conducted by Britain in the years before Pearl Harbor that manipulated the U.S. into moving from being a neutral power, determined to stay out of the war, to an all but declared ally of Britain. Thus, to Hitler, the declaration of war was a mere formality that acknowledged the de facto state of war that already existed between Germany and the U.S.





## THE SLEEP OF THE SAVED AND THANKFUL

"I went up to father's [Winston's] bedroom...

"Sit down, dear boy...I think I see my way through." He resumed his shaving. I was astonished, and said: "Do you mean that we can avoid defeat?" –which seemed credible- "or beat the bastards?" –which seemed incredible.

He...swung around, and said: - "Of course I mean we can beat them."

Me: "Well I'm all for it, but I don't see how you can do it."

By this time he had dried and sponged his face and turning round to me said with great intensity: - "I shall drag the United States in."<sup>1</sup>

—Randolph Churchill

Britain was not prepared for the opening of World War II in 1939. While Germany had spent the 1930's secretly rearming and growing its armed forces, Britain had failed to do so, both to avoid an arms race with Germany and out of simple economics. Britain was still feeling the effects of the Great Depression, with a moribund economy, massive unemployment, and a crushing national debt. The result of this unpreparedness was that the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was outfought and outmaneuvered in the Nazi Blitzkrieg of May 1940. Driven back to the French port of Dunkirk, the BEF managed to evacuate most of its personnel back to England, but left behind almost all of its tanks, weapons, trucks, and ammunition.

Fortunately for the British they were able to prevail during the Battle of Britain, when the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) tried to gain air superiority over the Royal Air Force during the summer and fall of 1940. This victory prevented the Germans from launching Operation Sealion, their plan to invade Britain. However, it also brought about a strategic stalemate. Although Germany had overrun most of the European

continent, it lacked the combat power to invade and conquer Britain. Likewise, although Britain was able to prevent a German invasion, it lacked the manpower, industrial capacity, and financial resources needed to wage a prolonged war against the Germans.

### U.S. Determined to Stay Neutral

The one country in the world that had these resources was the United States. During World War I, although the U.S. had entered the war late, it had provided the armed strength to tip the war in favor of the Allies. In 1940, however, the U.S. was in no mood for another European war. The high casualties of World War I, revelations of huge war industry profits, the collapse of the League of Nations, lingering poverty caused by the Great Depression, and renewed European fighting left the U.S. public in no mood for another “war to end all wars.”

In 1928, this desire to stay out of any future war was reflected in the Kellogg-Briand pact, named after U.S. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg and French foreign minister Aristide Briand, the men who drafted it. The pact was an international treaty "providing for the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy"<sup>2</sup> signed by the U.S. and sixty other nations.

In the 1930s Congress passed a series of legislation designed to keep the U.S. from being dragged into any future conflicts, as many believed had happened in World War I. The Neutrality Act of 1935 prohibited arms shipments to all belligerents whenever war was declared. The Neutrality Act of February 1936 prohibited public or private loans to warring parties. In May 1937, Congress forbade any American from travelling on ships belonging to belligerent nations.

### Britain's Evolving Strategy Regarding the U.S.

U.S. neutrality served initially British interests. For the first six months of the war, British strategy makers sought to avoid relying too much on the U.S. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain believed that the war would not last very long, a few months at most, so that by the time the American economy could be mobilized to produce significant quantities of weapons and ammunition the war would be over.<sup>3</sup> In Britain, there were still strong feelings of resentment towards the U.S. over the aftermath of World War I, when the U.S. had assumed the leading role in establishing the League of Nations, endlessly preaching Wilsonian idealism about democracy, only to abruptly abandon the peace process and leave the Europeans to sort things out as best they could by themselves.<sup>4</sup> On January 27th, 1940, Chamberlain wrote about the difficulties of dealing with neutrals: "Heaven knows I don't want the Americans to fight for us – we should have to pay too dearly for that if they had a right to be in on the peace terms."<sup>5</sup> Edward R. Murrow, a CBS radio reporter in London during the Blitz, wrote in 1941 that "In the opening months of the war, one often heard the comment, 'God protect us from a German victory and an American peace'. Britain and her Allies proposed to win this one alone."<sup>6</sup>

British military planners realized that Germany was initially more prepared for war and would therefore have an advantage at the beginning of any conflict. However, they believed that if they could survive the initial battles, they would eventually be able to wear Germany down through blockade, bombing and subversion. With no possibility of credits from the U.S., and with the expectation that the war would be relatively short, the British Chiefs of Staff saw the U.S. as "a limited, marginal source of war supplies."<sup>7</sup>

The Treasury, however, was not as optimistic. They realized that Britain did not have the financial resources to wage a prolonged war against the Germans. Unlike in World War I, Britain could not borrow public or private funds from the U.S. because of the Neutrality Acts. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, reported that “unless, when the time comes, the United States are prepared either to lend or to give us money as required, the prospects for a long war are exceedingly grim.”<sup>8</sup> Many in the Foreign Office agreed, thinking they might have more success trying to “woo”<sup>9</sup> America, building trust and good will, rather than keeping her at arm’s length.

On May 10th, 1940 the Germans attacked through the Ardennes into Belgium and France, ending the six month long “Phony War”. On that same day, Chamberlain resigned as Prime Minister and was replaced by Winston Churchill. The Dunkirk evacuation and the French surrender on June 17th led to a crisis that caused a major change in British strategy.

With the loss of France, Britain suddenly became critically dependent on the U.S. for food, ammunition, and weapons.<sup>10</sup> In May 1940, as British military planners prepared contingency plans for a French collapse, they stressed that their major assumption was that the U.S. “is willing to give us full economic and financial support, without which we do not think we could continue the war with any chance of success.”<sup>11</sup> This led to a debate within the British government over how the U.S. could best help Britain. Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador to the U.S., argued that the U.S. should be pressed to enter the war as a belligerent power. Others argued that it was in Britain’s best interest to keep the U.S. neutral; otherwise the flow of supplies to Britain

would be cut off as the U.S. began to supply her own armed forces.<sup>12</sup> The debate was resolved by Churchill, who came down forcefully in the first camp.

British strategists considered the consequences of war breaking out between Japan and the U.S., and whether this could be used as a “back door”<sup>13</sup> way of getting the U.S. into the war with Germany. The Chiefs of Staffs argued that this was undesirable, since the U.S. would then cut off supplies to Britain in order to concentrate on the Pacific. Lord Lothian countered that if the U.S. were brought into the war it would stay on the defense in the Pacific, realizing that it was in America’s best interest to keep Britain in the war. He wrote Churchill that “on balance it would be better to have the U.S. in a far Eastern war because only entry into war would rouse the American public to sacrifice butter for guns.”<sup>14</sup> Churchill agreed, saying that “I would rather have an American declaration of war now and no supplies for six months than double the supplies and no declaration.”<sup>15</sup> Churchill told his cabinet

Nothing in the munitions sphere can compare with the importance of the British Empire and the United States being co-belligerent. That if Japan attacked the United States without declaring war on us, we should at once range ourselves at the side of the United States and declare war on Japan.<sup>16</sup>

He later sent a note to President Franklin D. Roosevelt saying that should the U.S. find itself at war with Japan, “you may be sure that a British declaration of war with Japan will follow within the hour.”<sup>17</sup>

Churchill’s strategy was to keep fighting until he could somehow bring the U.S. into war to fight alongside Britain. “Sooner or later the Americans will come,” Churchill said, “but on the condition that we here don’t flinch.”<sup>18</sup> Realizing that the political situation in the U.S. made entry into the war highly unlikely (unless Germany were to

attack the U.S. first), he set an initial objective of getting the U.S. to provide badly needed supplies to Britain. To do this he would have to:

- Convince the U.S. that Britain's cause was just and it could win the war.
- Convince the U.S. that it was in its best interest that Britain won the war by playing up the danger a Europe dominated by Nazi Germany would pose to the U.S.
- Undermine German economic ties and propaganda efforts in the U.S.
- Undermine pacifism and isolationism in the U.S.

Once that was done he could step by step gradually pull the U.S. into a military and political alliance with Britain, until he eventually reached his ultimate objective of the U.S. entering the war as a full ally.

### A Just Cause and a Winnable War

Churchill was a gifted orator. His speeches were broadcast not only in Britain, but to the U.S. and around the world. They became a key component of his communication strategy, eloquently proclaiming the justness of Britain's cause, its determination to win, and how the fates of the "English speaking peoples" were intertwined.

On June 18th, 1940 he gave his famous "Their Finest Hour" speech in the House of Commons, where he tied the fate of the U.S. to Britain's victory in the war:

Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization...if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of a perverted science.<sup>19</sup>

Churchill's speech struck the American consciousness with tremendous force, putting the isolationists on the defensive and awakening the American public to the possibility that "England's war might be, after all, not one of imperialist munitions makers and bankers, that it had a moral importance...The moral causes might after all be America's as well."<sup>20</sup>

By late 1940, the war was not going well for Britain. Many senior officials in the U.S., such as Secretary of State Cordell Hull, thought the U.S. should stop supporting Britain since German victory was inevitable.<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt was extremely pessimistic about Britain's chances after the Germans overran Norway.<sup>22</sup> Lord Lothian reported to his government the attitude in Washington was "Some say give the Allies everything you can so as to keep them fighting. Others say 'Cut your losses and desert your European friends, and man your own frontiers.'" <sup>23</sup> Churchill warned his War Cabinet that when it came to the U.S.

If the picture was painted too darkly, elements in the United States would say that it was useless to help us, for such help would be wasted and thrown away. If too bright a picture was painted, then there might be a tendency to withhold assistance.<sup>24</sup>

The British knew they had to find some way to show the Americans they were still capable of winning. The one bright spot in the war to that point was the great progress they had made in breaking the German Enigma Code. By decoding U-boat messages they were able to steer convoys away from ambushes, minimizing their losses. ULTRA, the program to decipher the German codes, was the most closely guarded secret in all of Britain. At a joint meeting in Bermuda in 1941 between the U.S. and British military staffs, they shared it all with the Americans to show that "behind the grim headlines a successful campaign was being fought in secret."<sup>25</sup>

*The Covert War in the U.S.* In 1940 the British needed a secure area to establish a headquarters for their intelligence network, and looked to the New World rather than Britain. Britain was under threat from invasion, and already experiencing the first of the bombing campaign that came to be known as the Blitz. There were many advantages to setting up headquarters in the U.S. Resources of every category were in abundance compared to back in Britain. New York also had free communication with the rest of the British Empire, being one of the largest transportation and communication hubs in the world. It was also safe from a German invasion, so that if Britain were to fall to the Germans, New York could be used as a base to rally the rest of the British Empire to come to London's rescue.

Roosevelt allowed the British to set up their intelligence headquarters in New York City. It had the innocuous-sounding name of the British Security Coordination (BSC). In reality, the BSC was a "wide ranging, full-service, offensive intelligence agency"<sup>26</sup> led by a forty-four year old Canadian industrialist named William Stephenson. Stephenson, a pilot for the Royal Air Force in World War I, had made a fortune in steel and electronics after the war. His business ventures took him across the European continent, where his dealings with the steel industry opened his eyes to Germany's covert rearmament program.<sup>27</sup> Personally selected by Winston Churchill to head the BSC, Stephenson arrived in New York in June, 1940. His official title was "Passport Control Officer", a title "acceptable to the FBI, knowing it to be a traditional cover for British intelligence chiefs abroad."<sup>28</sup>

Stephenson soon set up offices in the International Building in Rockefeller Center, in mid town Manhattan. The BSC eventually grew to over 2,000 employees,



taking over the 38th floor, which the Rockefellers rented to Britain for one dollar a year.

From this headquarters, the BSC organized and ran a hemisphere-wide array of clandestine activities designed to promote Britain's interest. The BSC

conducted covert diplomacy; provided raw positive intelligence to London; ran intelligence operations, including recruitment of agents and surveillance; conducted a whole range of special operations, from political warfare against isolationist to perhaps even murder; mounted covert propaganda operations; ran a hemisphere port security operation; built and operated Camp X, a clandestine training establishment in Canada; built and operated a clandestine international communications network; conducted a hemispheric ship-observer scheme; and played a major role in Britain's air and sea control of the movements of people, mail and communications between the Americas and Europe.<sup>29</sup>

*Front Groups.* The BSC secretly established and funded a number of front groups in the U.S. to advance Britain's interests by

doing things the British needed done but did not wish to be seen doing: disseminating propaganda, promoting an American peace-time military draft, pushing through the Destroyer Deal destroying or turning around the isolationists, making sure that the Republican Party nominated an interventionist in 1940.<sup>30</sup>

These front groups were often led by prominent Americans and included supposedly non-partisan, home grown American organizations such as the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, the League for Human Rights, Friends of Democracy, Fight For Freedom (FFF) Committee, American Labor Committee to Aid British Labor, Committee for Inter-American Co-operation, France Forever, America Last, and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies (CDAAA) – also known as the White Committee.

Motivated by their desire to help Britain win the war, these front groups would place pro-British ads in newspapers, publish pamphlets condemning Germany, plant newspaper stories, and portray isolationists as traitors. They were aided by powerful

members of the media working with the BSC, including Henry Luce, publisher of *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune* magazines; Walter Lippmann, columnist for the *Herald Tribune*; Walter Winchell, whose syndicated gossip column was read by over 50 million people in more than 2,000 papers worldwide; Arthur H. Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*; and George Backer, publisher of the *New York Post*.<sup>31</sup>

In 1940 major American newspapers suddenly became much more supportive of Britain. The *Herald Tribune* began to express the view that “if *they* fail, *we* fail”, emphasizing “English heroism, the malignancy and power of the Nazi anti-Christ, and the geopolitical calamity that would befall the planet if the anti-Christ succeeded.”<sup>32</sup> This, “so far as is known, was the first direct British political warfare attack on the ‘hearts and minds’ of the American people.”<sup>33</sup>

*Public Opinion Polls.* One of the front groups’ most effective tactics was to manipulate public opinion polls to exaggerate American support for Britain and to minimize the support for isolationism. According to British intelligence agent Sanford Griffith, “opinion polls are a source of information, a propaganda weapon. Favorable results of the poll are accepted by the newspapers as news and are effective propaganda.”<sup>34</sup> He warned that

“The first thing to know when reading the public opinion polls commonly cited from 1939 to 1942 is that none of them was produced by disinterested seekers of truth. The most prominently published polls were all under the influence of British intelligence, its friends, employees, and agents.”<sup>35</sup>

Famous polls like Gallup, Hadley Cantril, Market Analysts Inc., and Roper were all done under the influence of dedicated interventionists and British intelligence agents.<sup>36</sup> Roper had only one client, Henry Luce of *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune* magazines.

Luce would only release polls that were favorable to the British. Any polls that showed otherwise never made it into print in any of his publications.<sup>37</sup>

Opinion polls supporting the interventionists were widely reported in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *New York Post*, and the *Baltimore Sun*, – the places where the BSC had the most success in finding sympathetic columnists and publishers.<sup>38</sup>

Public opinion polls helped get pro-British measures passed through Congress, since the legislators thought they were supported by the majority of their constituents. In the summer of 1941, BSC-rigged polls showed public support for entering the war on Britain's side at 60 to 90 percent. At the same time, a poll sponsored by Robert M. Hutchins, the isolationist president of the University of Chicago, and conducted by professional pollster Samuel E. Gill, showed support to be only between 20 and 34 percent. BSC's polls were widely reported in the newspapers by British-sympathizing columnists, while Hutchins' was mentioned only in passing, and then in reference to its many "flaws".<sup>39</sup>

One of the most influential public opinion polls in America was the Gallup Poll, founded by Dr. George Gallup. His most trusted assistant, David Ogilvy, was actually a British intelligence officer. Ogilvy had Gallup's complete confidence, so Gallup would provide only a cursory review of Ogilvy's research before it was published. This gave Ogilvy the ability to manipulate the polls with any result he desired. For example, Gallup support for the peacetime draft showed 37 percent in December 1938; 39 percent in December 1939; 50 percent on June 1st, 1940; 63 percent on June 30th, and 70 percent by late August.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, congressional mail was running

overwhelmingly against conscription. Even though some isolationist congressmen suspected the polls were wrong or were somehow being manipulated, they were never able to prove it. "Without these cooked polls the congressional mail would certainly have killed conscription."<sup>41</sup>

In November 1941 the Fight for Freedom Committee, one of BSC's front groups, conducted a poll of the members of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) at the labor union's national convention at the Moose Temple in Detroit. "BSC got just what it wanted – widely distributed front-page news that the delegates were uniformly anti-Hitler, ant-Japanese, and anti-Charles Lindbergh."<sup>42</sup> The results were widely published, leading many Americans to believe that the labor movement supported the British.

*Enlisting Hollywood.* The British also used Hollywood to sway public opinion in their favor. British actors in Hollywood like Laurence Olivier,<sup>43</sup> Leslie Howard (*Gone with the Wind*, 1939), and Ronald Colman were encouraged to take roles that portrayed Britain in the most favorable way possible. Assistant Chief of MI-6, Colonel Claude Dansey, recruited British-Hungarian producer Alexander Korda in this effort. His movies, such as *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), *The Four Feathers* (1939), and *Q Planes* (1939), had the desired propaganda effect as most of the millions who saw them came away with a positive view of England.<sup>44</sup> In 1942, Korda became the first film director ever to be knighted, based on the personal recommendation of Winston Churchill. Senator Gerald Nye, a leading isolationist, suspected what the British were up to, saying "interventionist propaganda films have served to change, if not warp, a lot

of clear thinking in American minds”<sup>45</sup> and futilely demanded that America “be freed of propaganda.”<sup>46</sup>

*Victory in the Stars.* In mid-1941, Louis de Wohl, the “famous Hungarian astrologer,”<sup>47</sup> had a popular syndicated newspaper column, *Stars Foretell*, in which he made eerily accurate predictions about the war in Europe. Many readers believed that Wohl had supernatural powers and could see into the future. What they did not know was that Wohl was actually a captain in the British army and had been brought to the U.S. by the BSC. Every night, a BSC agent would climb the fire escape of Wohl’s Manhattan apartment and deliver bits of information to include in his “predictions”. Based on his amazing record, many readers believed his predictions that England would ultimately defeat the Nazis.

#### Highlighting the Danger to the U.S.

John Colville, Churchill’s private secretary when he became Prime Minister, wrote in his diary in 1940 that “Indirect attempts are being made, through the Dominion’s High Commissioners, etc., to bring the U.S. into the war by painting to members of the [U.S.] Administration the most somber portrait of what we expect from Germany.”<sup>48</sup>

President Roosevelt believed that if Britain were defeated, then Hitler would eventually turn his sights on America. “If we go down you may have a United States of Europe under the Nazi Command far more numerous, far stronger, far better armed than the New World,”<sup>49</sup> Churchill warned. He played on Roosevelt’s fear of the British fleet falling into Hitler’s hands; warning that Germany’s combined sea power would then be seven times greater than the United States’.<sup>50</sup>

You must not be blind to the fact that the whole remaining bargaining counter with Germany would be the fleet, and if this country was left by the United States to its fate no one would have the right to blame those then responsible if they made the best terms they could for the surviving inhabitants. Excuse me, Mr. President, putting this nightmare bluntly.<sup>51</sup>

Churchill instructed Lord Lothian to remind Roosevelt that “if we go down, Hitler has a very good chance of conquering the world.”<sup>52</sup> Lothian warned Roosevelt that “if the Royal Navy lost control of the Atlantic for want of U.S. support, America would be left with a ‘one-ocean’ navy facing threats in both the Atlantic and the Pacific.”<sup>53</sup> When Roosevelt suggested that if Britain fell, the British fleet should fall back to the U.S., Lothian replied that it would depend on whether or not the U.S. had entered the war. After all, the British people would not be likely to entrust their fleet to a neutral America that had refused to defend Britain.<sup>54</sup> To David Scott, the Foreign Office Assistant Under-Secretary with oversight of the American Department, “this is rather like blackmail, and not very good blackmail at that, but I think we are justified in planting the idea rather more firmly in Mr. Roosevelt’s mind.”<sup>55</sup> Churchill continued to feed Roosevelt’s fear of a German victory, sending ominous warnings that the German invasion of Britain was imminent, long after ULTRA intercepts showed that Hitler had given up his plans to launch a cross channel attack.<sup>56</sup>

On June 22nd, 1941, Churchill gave a speech on Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union. In it he linked the fates of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States in the fight against Hitler’s Germany.<sup>57</sup> He warned that a victory by Hitler would be followed by an invasion of Britain, which eventually would lead to

the subjugation of the Western Hemisphere to his will and to his system...The Russian danger is therefore our danger, and the danger of the United States, just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe.<sup>58</sup>

### German Propaganda and Economic Ties with the U.S.

A few days after Stephenson assumed his BSC role in 1940, Dr. Gerhard Alois Westrick, a German agent posing as a trade official, hosted a party in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Manhattan to celebrate the Nazi's victory over France. There were dozens of prominent businessmen at the party, representing several large U.S. corporations doing business in Europe. Dr. Westrick told them that Britain did not have a chance of winning the war, and German victory was inevitable. He advised them that if they helped cut off U.S. supplies to Britain and blocked U.S. rearmament programs, then "the prospects for American trade with the New German Empire will be beyond your wildest dreams."<sup>59</sup> Stephenson used his contacts in the press to expose Westrick. Headlines in the newspapers about the secret Nazi agent's fifth-column activities forced the State Department to deport him.

German propagandist George Sylvester Viereck was registered as a representative of the German newspaper *Muenchener Neueste Nachrichten* and the German Library of Information. He encouraged Senator Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota to form the Make Europe Pay War Debts Committee. Britain was nearly bankrupt and did not want to be embarrassed by publicity that it had not paid back its World War One loans. Viereck published over twenty pamphlets supporting isolationism, including one that listed all of the contradictory statement made by Britain's Ambassador to the U.S., Lord Lothian, titled *Lord Lothian Against Lord Lothian*. Although Viereck did the writing, Senator Lundeen was listed as the author. BSC leaked this information to columnist Drew Pearson, who exposed Viereck and Lundeen in an article detailing the influence of Nazi agents in America. A grand jury investigated and indicted Viereck for using fictitious names to conceal the true names of authors from the American public.

Ironically, the British were never charged with this offense, even though “they were doing the same thing, many times more prolifically and successfully.”<sup>60</sup> Viereck was found guilty of being a Nazi agent in July 1943, mostly based on evidence provided by British mail censors in Bermuda.

The BSC learned that German industrial conglomerates such as I.G. Farben and Schering AG were heavily involved in the U.S. economy through U.S. subsidiaries of German owned corporations. These subsidiaries were hidden by dummy ownership through companies in neutral countries like Sweden and Switzerland or by secret agreements between them and the parent German companies. When the war started, this network helped supply Germany with intelligence and propaganda support. The BSC carefully researched these links, and then slipped this information to newspapers across the country. One of their front groups published a book called *Sequel to the Apocalypse: How Your Dimes Pay for Hitler's War* that detailed the links between I. G. Farben and Standard Oil. The resultant uproar of negative publicity caused companies like Standard Oil, Ford, ITT, and Bayer to divest all their holdings and dealings with German corporations.<sup>61</sup>

In 1941, fed by information provided by the BSC, the Justice Department brought an antitrust suit against Standard Oil. The suit was widely publicized by a ferocious media campaign and supported by a chorus of newspapermen sympathetic to Britain. The Friends of Democracy launched a blistering attack on Henry Ford, whose Ford Motor Company had close ties to Germany and who had made many anti-Semitic and pro-isolationist comments. They printed pamphlets with Swastikas over Ford's picture, branding him a Nazi propaganda mouthpiece.<sup>62</sup>



## The Pacifists and the Isolationists

In 1940, many of the countries that had been overrun by the German Blitzkrieg were on the verge of starvation because of the British blockade of the continent. Former President Herbert Hoover, who had first come to national prominence twenty-six years earlier by organizing food drives for starving children in Belgium during World War I, announced his plan to break the British blockade and deliver food shipments to the hungry people of Nazi-occupied Europe. The British did not wish to publicly fight with Hoover over their policy of deliberately starving civilians, so they enlisted the help of American Episcopal Bishop Henry W. Hobson. Hobson led Fight for Freedom, a BSC-sponsored front group, in a vigorous defense of the blockade, explaining that it was necessary to starve the Europeans "for their own good".<sup>63</sup> Hobson was successful in stopping Hoover, but it was never revealed to the public that he was acting at the behest of the British, rather than as an impartial private American citizen.

One of the main targets for the British deception operation was the isolationists, prominent people who for various reasons wanted the U.S. to stay out of a European war. The British targeted these isolationists, with the intent to either persuade them to change their minds and support the British, or to undermine the public support for them. Stephenson's tactics included "great flows of outside money and assistance for their opponents; surprise charges of wrongdoing just before election time; virulent attacks untraceable to anyone; the distribution of books in their districts charging them with disloyalty."<sup>64</sup>

America's Ambassador to Britain in 1940, Joseph P. Kennedy (father of future President John F. Kennedy) was convinced Germany was going to win the war. He sent a constant stream of reports back to America as the Battle of Britain raged, writing

that England was going to lose the war and the U.S. should stay out of it at all costs. To Churchill, Kennedy was a threat that needed to be removed. Foreign Minister Lord Halifax reported having a conversation with Kennedy where he said that he was going to publish a newspaper article a few days before the 1940 presidential election. The article would be harshly critical of Roosevelt and his support for England, in order to throw the election to Republican Wendell Willkie. Word of this was passed on to Roosevelt, who quickly recalled Kennedy back to the U.S. Roosevelt appointed former Governor of New Hampshire John G. Winant Ambassador in his place, a position he held until resigning in 1946.<sup>65</sup> After the war, Winant became only the second U.S. citizen, after Dwight D. Eisenhower, to be awarded the British Order of Merit.

Isolationist Congressman Hamilton Fish III from New York was the BSC's main target for the 1940 congressional elections. The BSC formed the Nonpartisan Committee to Defeat Hamilton Fish, a front group to prevent Fish from being reelected. It circulated a picture of Fish with jailed German-American Bund leader Fritz Kuhn ("the American Fuhrer") with the caption "VOTERS OF DUTCHESS, ORANGE AND PUTNAM COUNTIES IS HAMILTON FISH PRO-NAZI?" The photo seemed to show Fish and Kuhn in a meeting, when it was actually taken in 1938 when Kuhn was testifying before Fish's committee.<sup>66</sup>

In August 1940, Dillard Stokes, using information provided by the BSC, published an article in the *Washington Post* charging Fish with income tax evasion. Stokes said that Fish had failed to declare \$25,000 he received from Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo as part of an oil investment scheme. Fish said that he had lost half the money in the investment, as well as some of his own, and returned the other half to

Trujillo. Although Fish had consulted with the IRS, who determined he did not need to declare the money or pay taxes on it, the bad publicity from associating with a man like Trujillo hurt his reelection campaign.<sup>67</sup>

On October 21, 1940, weeks before the election, Drew Pearson, also using information provided by the BSC, wrote in his "Washington Merry-Go-Round" column that Fish was being subsidized by the Nazis, who were paying overinflated rent on his properties. The charge was completely false, but came only weeks before the election. Fish narrowly won reelection as a Republican in a heavily Republican district. BSC continued its operation against Fish, finally winning in 1944 when he lost his reelection bid.<sup>68</sup>

In May 1941 BSC agents leaked to the press that Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana was using his free congressional mailing privileges to not only mail out his isolationist speeches, but also German propaganda provided by the German Steuben Society and the German Library of Information in New York. In the resulting congressional investigation, Senator Wheeler was forced to admit that he had sold the isolationist America First committee one million of his free mailing envelopes. He lost a tremendous amount of influence and prestige due to the storm of bad press.<sup>69</sup>

### Drawing the U.S. into the War

From the outbreak of the war in Europe in September 1939 until the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the U.S. was officially a neutral power. Churchill's public and private diplomacy, as well as Stephenson's "dirty tricks", had moved U.S. public opinion from overwhelming support for isolationism and neutrality to feelings of sympathy and support for Britain. But good will was not enough; Britain needed

concrete support from the U.S., preferably by joining the war as a cobelligerent. If Churchill could not draw the U.S. into the war all at once, he might be able to do it in gradual steps. He pushed, cajoled and politicked the U.S. into taking many actions that moved it closer to becoming a belligerent power.

*The Destroyer Deal.* On May 15th, 1940, in his first letter to Roosevelt as Prime Minister, Churchill asked for “the loan of forty or fifty of your older destroyers.”<sup>70</sup> This request was initially rejected by Roosevelt, who did not think he could get congressional approval for it. Later that month, with many in the U.S. believing that Britain was going to lose the war, the U.S. sent a proposal to Britain through Lord Lothian for the lease of airfields on Trinidad, Bermuda and Newfoundland in order to strengthen the defense of the U.S. Churchill rejected the offer on May 27th unless Britain received something in return, like the destroyers. Negotiations continued until September 2nd, when Roosevelt agreed to transfer 50 older destroyers left over from World War I to the Royal Navy in exchange for leases and basing rights in Newfoundland, the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua and British Guyana. This Destroyer for Bases Agreement was important as much for symbolic reasons as for its military impact. “America was now neutral in word only. In actual fact, it had now already entered the war as a nonbelligerent ally of democratic Great Britain.”<sup>71</sup> The New York times wrote “The destroyers steaming toward Halifax were not only symbols of an ever-closer Anglo-American rapprochement, but in the opinion of some observers, sealed what in effect was an unofficial alliance between the English-speaking nations...”<sup>72</sup> Churchill described the Destroyer deal in his memoirs as “an event which brought the United States definitely nearer to us and to the war.”<sup>73</sup>

*The Battle of the Atlantic.* After the fall of France, Britain was heavily dependent on the U.S. for ammunition, weapons and food. But in order to reach Britain, supplies first had to cross the U-Boat infested Atlantic Ocean. Keeping these sea lines of communication open was the top priority for the Royal Navy, which was overwhelmed with the task. Churchill sought help from the U.S., asking Roosevelt to allow the U.S. Navy to escort convoys bound for England. Initially escorts were limited to a “Neutrality Patrol” within 500 miles of the eastern seaboard, but in April 1941 Roosevelt agreed to Churchill’s request to move the “Pan American Security Zone” east almost as far as Iceland. This led to several encounters with German U-Boats, including the sinking of the destroyers *Greer* on September 4th, 1941; the *Kearny* on October 17th; and the *Reuben James* on October 23rd.

*Iceland.* In May 1940, Churchill sent an infantry brigade to Iceland, to prevent the Germans from capturing the strategically located island. In early 1941, he asked Roosevelt to send U.S. troops to garrison the island, which was done in July. This had a twofold purpose: it not only freed the British infantry brigade to be redeployed elsewhere, but Churchill later privately admitted that it was also done to accelerate American intervention in the war alongside Britain.<sup>74</sup> The move greatly increased the chance of an incident between a U.S. Navy ship on convoy escort duty and a German submarine.

*The Atlantic Charter.* On August 9th, 1941, Churchill and Roosevelt met for the first time on the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the cruiser *Augusta* in Newfoundland, Canada. Their discussions led to the Atlantic Charter, which later became the foundation for the United Nations. President Roosevelt underplayed its importance,

taking pains to explain that it was not a treaty, because then it would require approval by the senate, which was far from certain. Churchill, on the other hand, returned to England implying the charter demonstrated mutual resolve to stand together for freedom and democracy. In a radio address, he “casually”<sup>75</sup> mentioned the fact that two U.S. destroyers had accompanied his ship part of the way back to England. To Hitler, this was evidence of the close military relationship developing between the two countries.

*The South American Map.* On October 27, 1941, President Roosevelt gave a speech claiming to have a map of South America, made by Hitler’s government, which reflected Germany’s plan to conquer the continent, exploit its natural resources, and redraw its national boundaries to better suit the Third Reich. The map outraged the American public, who had always considered the Western Hemisphere to be “their” domain. While there were some suspicions that the map was a BSC or OSS forgery, it turned out to be genuine. The BSC had smuggled it out of the German Embassy in Argentina by an attaché who was later murdered by the Gestapo.<sup>76</sup> The BSC turned the map over to the FBI, who passed it on to Roosevelt. Roosevelt used it in his Navy Day radio address to the nation on October 27th, 1941, warning the country that “this map makes clear the Nazi design not only against South America but against the United States itself.”<sup>77</sup>

*The Victory Program.* In late November, 1941 a Captain in the U.S. Army left a package for Senator Wheeler in his senate office, containing a 350 page document marked TOP SECRET. It was titled “Victory Program”, and outlined the War Department’s plan to go to war against Germany. The Captain said he was “motivated

out of concern for the American people and to warn them that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was trying to drag the nation into war against Nazi Germany.”<sup>78</sup> Wheeler leaked the document to the isolationist *Chicago Tribune*, which printed it as a front page story. The German Embassy in Washington forwarded a copy to Berlin, where it was shown to Hitler.

Hitler had been assured by his advisers that even a Japanese attack could not compel the U.S. into a war with Germany. He changed his mind, though, when he learned of the “Victory Program”. He was certain that it revealed the American’s true intent, and that war between the two of them was inevitable. What he did not know was that the “Victory Program” was actually a hoax created by the BSC, combining a few snippets of accurate intelligence that the British knew the Germans were already aware of, as well as a great deal of highly inaccurate information.<sup>79</sup>

### Analysis

Pearl Harbor left the U.S. with little choice but war with Japan. War with Germany, however, was not a foregone conclusion. As Congress prepared a declaration of war against Japan, one of the biggest questions they faced was whether or not they should also declare war on Germany. Many thought the U.S. should just focus on Japan, since Germany was apparently not involved in the attack. The matter was soon resolved when Germany acted first and declared war on the U.S. before Congress could make a decision. American diplomat George Ball later noted

If Hitler had not made this decision and if he had simply done nothing, there would have been an enormous sentiment in the U.S....that the Pacific was now our war and the European war was for the Europeans and we Americans should concentrate our effort on Japan.<sup>80</sup>

Many people to this day believe that Germany declared war on the U.S. because it was bound to by treaty with Japan, but this is not true. The Tripartite Treaty, signed by Germany, Japan and Italy in September 1940, was defensive in nature. The three countries pledged “to assist one another with all political, economic and military means if one of the Contracting Powers is attacked by a Power at present not involved in the European War or in the Japanese-Chinese conflict.”<sup>81</sup> It made no mention of what would happen if one of the signers was the attacker, instead of the one attacked. Its obvious intent was to keep the U.S. neutral and out of the war, since if the U.S. attacked one of the powers it would also have to fight the others in a two front war.

According to Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler’s Foreign Minister, by the time of the Pearl Harbor attack Hitler had decided that American policy in the Atlantic had “practically created a state of war”<sup>82</sup> and that therefore, the declaration was a mere formality. Hitler’s declaration of war on the U.S. on December 11th, 1941, caught German diplomats completely off guard. German diplomat Erich Kordt quoted Hitler as saying that “a great power like Germany declares war itself and does not wait for war to be declared on it.”<sup>83</sup> Dr. Schmidt, an interpreter for Ribbentrop, believed that Hitler wanted to beat Roosevelt with the war declaration for reasons of personal prestige.<sup>84</sup> According to William Stephenson, “The fuehrer felt that he alone had the right to plan surprise attacks against unsuspecting victims. Here the U.S. had arrogantly used his own tactics against him. Angered, giddy with visions, Hitler gloried in beating Roosevelt to the punch.”<sup>85</sup>

Upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Churchill telephoned Roosevelt and said he was preparing a declaration of war on Japan. This was in keeping with a



promise he had made the month before that “should the United States become involved in a war with Japan, a British declaration would follow within the hour.”<sup>86</sup> This declaration was made even before Britain learned of Japanese attacks on its own colony in Malaya. Churchill still feared that the U.S. would go to war only with Japan; he wanted to make sure they also went to war with Germany.

### Conclusion

According to author David Reynolds, “It is not correct to say that the United States did not become involved in the war until it was attacked. It was attacked precisely because it was already involved.”<sup>87</sup> Britain achieved its objective of dragging the U.S. into war thanks to a carefully planned and coordinated deception campaign. This operation slowly manipulated American public opinion to move from a position of staunch isolationism to an all but belligerent power by the time of the Pearl Harbor attack.

The deception operation was equally successful on the mind of Adolph Hitler. His declaration of war on the United States was one of Germany’s worst strategic mistakes in World War II.<sup>88</sup> British deception fueled his paranoid fantasies, and worked mainly because it served to confirm his belief that Roosevelt was just as treacherous as Hitler himself.

The day after Pearl Harbor, when one of his Chiefs of Staff advocated a deferential attitude towards the USA, Churchill “answered with a wicked leer in his eye, ‘Oh! That is the way we talked to her while we were wooing her; now that she is in the harem, we talk to her quite differently!’”<sup>89</sup> That night he wrote in his diary

So we had won after all...I had studied the American Civil War...American blood flowed in my veins. I thought of a remark...that the United States is

like a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate. Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful.<sup>90</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Yale Law School, "Kellogg Briand Pact 1928," <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/kbpact.htm> (accessed March 16, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> David Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 75.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 232.

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 218.

<sup>17</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 238.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew C. Price, *The Advancement of Liberty: How Democratic Principles Transformed the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008) in Praeger Security International (accessed February 11, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Cave Brown, *"C": The Secret Life of Sir Stewart Menzies, Spymaster to Winston Churchill* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), 258.

- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 64.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 92.
- <sup>23</sup> Price, *The Advancement of Liberty*.
- <sup>24</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 207.
- <sup>25</sup> William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 179.
- <sup>26</sup> Thomas E. Mahl, *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-44* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998), 9.
- <sup>27</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 35.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 105.
- <sup>29</sup> Mahl, *Desperate Deception*, 14.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>32</sup> Brown, *"C": The Secret Life of Sir Stewart Menzies*, 261.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Mahl, *Desperate Deception*, 70.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 69.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 70.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 76.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 72.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 80.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 83.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 84.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 77.
- <sup>43</sup> Chris Hastings, "Laurence Olivier, Secret Agent," *The Telegraph*, July 15, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1557490/Laurence-Olivier-secret-agent.html> (accessed February 12, 2009).

- <sup>44</sup> William B. Breuer, *Deceptions of World War II* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 59.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 107.
- <sup>48</sup> Brown, *"C": The Secret Life of Sir Stewart Menzies*, 258.
- <sup>49</sup> Price, *The Advancement of Liberty*.
- <sup>50</sup> Louis C. Kilzer, *Churchill's Deception: the Dark Secret That Destroyed Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 269.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 207.
- <sup>52</sup> Price, *The Advancement of Liberty*.
- <sup>53</sup> Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 114.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 115.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Kilzer, *Churchill's Deception*, 269.
- <sup>57</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World, 1940-41* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 302.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., 303.
- <sup>59</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 106.
- <sup>60</sup> Mahl, *Desperate Deception*, 104.
- <sup>61</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 280.
- <sup>62</sup> Mahl, *Desperate Deception*, 99.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 183.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 107.
- <sup>65</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 149.
- <sup>66</sup> Mahl, *Desperate Deception*, 110.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 127.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>69</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 293.

<sup>70</sup> Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 114.

<sup>71</sup> Price, *The Advancement of Liberty*.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 132.

<sup>74</sup> Kershaw, *Fateful Choices*, 313.

<sup>75</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 262.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>77</sup> White House Press Release, "Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Navy Day Address' on the Attack on the Destroyer Kearney," October 27, 1941, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1941/411027a.html> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>78</sup> Breuer, *Deceptions of World War II*, 113.

<sup>79</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 299.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>81</sup> Yale Law School, "Three-Power Pact between Germany, Italy, and Japan, Signed at Berlin, September 27, 1940," <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/triparti.asp> (accessed December 17, 2008).

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 299.

<sup>86</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Churchill's Broadcast on War with Japan," <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/ww2/churchilljapan.html> (accessed December 17, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Price, *The Advancement of Liberty*.

<sup>88</sup> Williamson Murray, "The Collapse of Empire: British Strategy, 1919-1945," in *The Making of Modern Strategy*, ed. Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 423.

<sup>89</sup> Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 284.

<sup>90</sup> Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 303.