

Reappraising FDR's Approach to WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE

By MICHAEL S. BELL

A survey of Franklin D. Roosevelt's strategic thinking prior to American entry into World War II reveals that the traditional historical narratives present a false dichotomy. Typically, FDR is portrayed either as an isolationist and reluctant belligerent being pushed into the war, or as an ardent interventionist seeking to enter the war by almost any means. Rather, FDR blended both of these policies into a coherent and consistent strategic approach toward the situation in Europe. Although his actions seemed to draw the United States inexorably into deeper involvement in the European war, FDR continued to pursue his goal of keeping the United States out of the conflict. Rather than dissembling or wavering, Roosevelt charted a steady and rational approach based on his strategic perspective.

By understanding FDR's strategy, it is possible to gain deeper insight into what appear as contradictory policies and actions on the eve of U.S. entry into the European war and, at the same time, into Roosevelt's strategic leadership. His approach toward the war simultaneously blended the isolationist aversion to war and desire to keep out of European conflicts with active efforts to overthrow Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime, the aim of the interventionists.

Aims and Strategic Approach

Following the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Roosevelt pursued a conscious strategy aimed at keeping the United States out of the European war as a formal belligerent and, at the same time,

ensuring the defeat of Hitler's regime. Within an overall policy of formal neutrality that favored the Allies, the Roosevelt administration looked for opportunities to act in pursuit of those two primary goals. Hoping to influence the outcome of the war, Roosevelt and his administration thought that they could bring about an internal collapse in Germany similar to the events in October and November 1918 that had hastened the sudden end of World War I and the demise of Imperial Germany.

Immediately before the Nazi invasion of Poland, Roosevelt resolved not to repeat the mistakes of Woodrow Wilson concerning neutrality prior to U.S. entry into World

in deed but in thought." In 1939, however, FDR rejected Wilson's approach and deemed it "impossible in a situation such as exists in Europe today for a fair-minded people to be neutral in thought."¹ Once war did break out, FDR addressed the American people by radio and, echoing the isolationists, professed that he hated war. He stated, "I hope that the United States will keep out of this war. I believe that it will." At the same time, Roosevelt discounted U.S. military intervention in the European war, announcing, "Let no man or woman thoughtlessly or falsely talk of America sending its armies to European fields." He observed that a neutrality proclamation was being prepared in accordance with the Neutrality Act and



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Neutrality Bill, November 1939

The Associated Press

We must remember that so long as war exists on earth there will be some danger that even the nation which most ardently desires peace may be drawn into war. . . . I hate war. . . . Let those who wish our friendship look us in the eye and take our hand.

—FDR, August 14, 1936

War I. FDR recalled Wilson's reminder to the American people when war broke out in 1914 "to be neutral not only

Colonel Michael S. Bell, USA, is Director, Commander's Initiatives Group, Multi-National Force–Iraq.

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Reappraising FDR's Approach to World War II in Europe				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 260 Fifth Ave SW (BG 64) Fort Lesley J McNair, Washington, DC, 20319				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

traditional U.S. foreign policies that reached back to the Presidency of George Washington and a longstanding American tradition of armed neutrality. In contrast to Wilson's 1914 approach, FDR declared, "This nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well."²

Within the context of formal neutrality, Roosevelt deliberately pursued opportunities

The duty of this day has been imposed upon us from without. Those who have dared to threaten the whole world with war—those who have created the name and deed of total war—have imposed upon us and upon all free peoples the necessity of preparation for total defense.

—FDR, October 16, 1940

Strategic Assessments and German Power

To fully grasp FDR's balancing of the two aims of his strategy, it is necessary to understand the strategic assessments accepted throughout Washington at the time. During the late 1930s, Roosevelt administration assessments envisioned Germany's power as extremely fragile and its people already chafing under oppression and several years

of full mobilization.

Those beliefs persisted after the outbreak of World War II in Europe, and conditions in Germany were believed to be comparable to those in 1918. In September 1939, FDR predicted

achieve his objectives without a protracted, general war, it was not until 1942 that Hitler placed the German economy on a war footing. Prior to full economic mobilization in 1942, Hitler chose to use, rather than expand, the existing German industrial base, and between 1933 and 1938, only about 10 percent of the gross national product was spent on armaments. Although Hitler clearly wanted war in 1939, he thought it would be short and was not prepared for a general war.

Although inaccurate, these assumptions about Germany provided the foundation for FDR's strategic approach. When Berlin opened offensives against Denmark and Norway in April 1940, some American observers optimistically recalled the situation in the summer of 1918. The month prior, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark provided FDR with his assessment that

the blockade had produced undernourishment in Germany, a condition that "tends to undermine the nerves and morale

within the context of formal neutrality, Roosevelt pursued opportunities to aid France and Britain with munitions, aircraft, and supplies

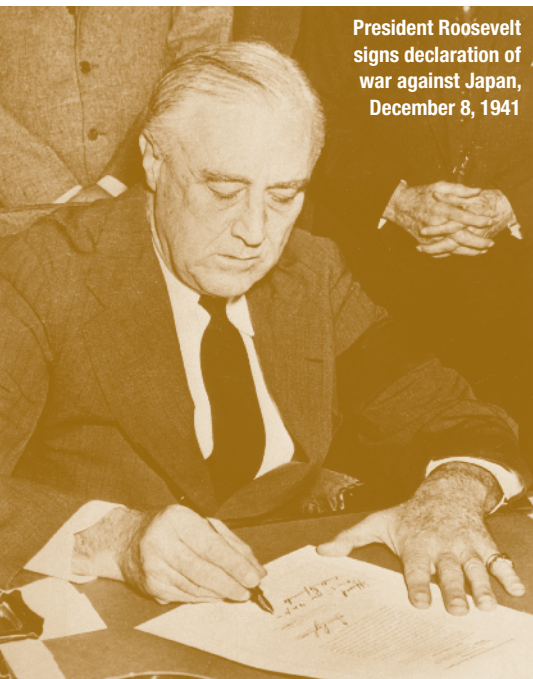
either a German victory or the distinct possibility that "there will be a revolution in Germany itself" by June 1940.⁴ He was not alone. In the State Department, Breckinridge Long noted, "It looks to me as if there is trouble brewing in Germany."⁵

Military intelligence reports from Europe complemented the perceptions held in the White House and State Department. The Army attaché in London reported indications from his sources "that the supply of gasoline for military aircraft and mechanized vehicles in Germany was now estimated to be sufficient for approximately two or three months' operations only." He also believed that the Nazi-Soviet Pact would not alleviate the German fuel shortage since Soviet production barely met the requirements of the Soviet military.

In retrospect, it is evident that the Roosevelt administration's intelligence assessment that the Germany economy had been fully mobilized in the 1930s was inaccurate. In congressional testimony in the spring of 1940, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall expressed the prevailing wisdom that the Germans "have converted their whole nation into an armed camp for the preparation of war with their whole efforts devoted to that purpose."⁶ On the contrary, hoping to

of the entire population." Stark estimated that without new offensives, German stocks might last until the spring of 1941.⁷ Not only would the renewed offensives deplete scarce German resources, but they also seemed in Washington to have been akin to the desperate German offensive on the Western Front in the summer of 1918. From the administration's perspective, there was no need for the United States to dispatch ground forces to fight in Europe. As long as France and Britain remained in the fight, it appeared that the German collapse was on the horizon.

Clearly, FDR's view of the Battle of France in May and June 1940 was influenced by his own tour of the Western Front in the summer and fall of 1918 during the German offensives along the Marne and in Champagne. Furthermore, he became more optimistic after the Dunkirk evacuation exceeded all expectations. At a Cabinet meeting on June 9, the President surmised "that if the French can hold out for three weeks they will be able to win against the Germans."⁸ That same day, Adolph Berle, an Assistant Secretary of State and a member of FDR's New Deal "brain trust," noted that even if the Germans emerged as the "masters of the situation . . . they will be in such bad shape economically" that they will have to open



President Roosevelt signs declaration of war against Japan, December 8, 1941

National Park Service

to aid France and Britain with munitions, aircraft, and supplies. On September 4, he discussed the question of neutrality with his Cabinet. With British and French declarations of war against Germany, the Cabinet decided to issue the customary neutrality declaration. According to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, however, Roosevelt "was not in so much of a hurry to issue the proclamation required under the Neutrality Act." The President wanted to provide Britain and France with "all the opportunity to export munitions of war, none of which could be exported after this proclamation was once issued."³

up peace initiatives.⁹ Berle observed at the end of June, following the French armistice with Germany, “by all tests and standards that we know, a personality like Hitler’s and a movement like that which he has instituted, smashes up in time.”¹⁰ Moreover, the assessments FDR received from the British served to validate the views in Washington.¹¹

In the wake of the Battle of France, Roosevelt continued to chart a course for his administration to bring about a German collapse while minimizing the need for formal U.S. military intervention. Consistent with that strategic concept, Roosevelt announced in July 1940 “that we will not use our arms in a war of aggression, that *we will not wage war in Europe, Africa or Asia* is known not only to every American but to every government in the world.”¹² To Roosevelt, the key was to maintain pressure on Germany until it collapsed upon itself. Economic sanctions and blockade formed the centerpiece of that pressure. With regard to American and British policy, he believed “that the only way out of the difficulties of the world was by the starving of the people of Europe, particularly in regard to their supply of fuel to carry on the war.”¹³

Implementing the Strategy

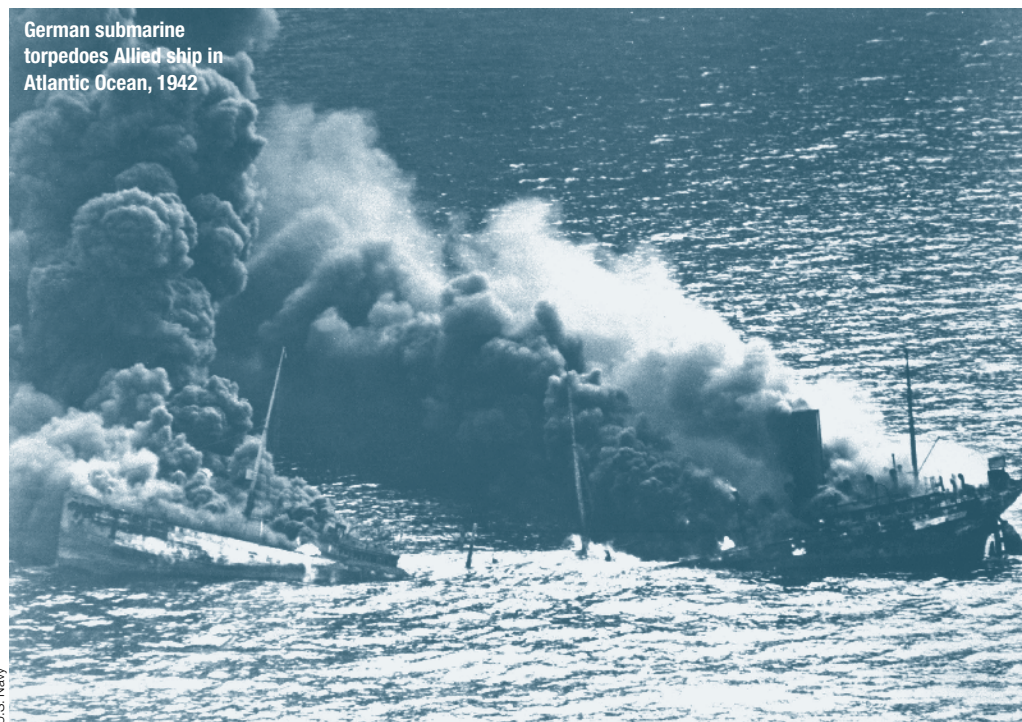
To avoid Wilson’s mistakes, improve his span of control, and aid in formulating and condensing information, Roosevelt established the Executive Office of the President soon after the German invasion of Poland. At the same time, he reduced the ability of the Secretaries of War and the Navy to plan and conduct operations outside of his knowledge by placing the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Naval Operations, and their planning staffs directly under him in the new Executive Office of the President. The next day he remarked, “Don’t think that I am not watching everything with an eagle eye.”¹⁴

Reflecting the ideas that had coalesced in his thinking prior to entering the White House on how to deal with aggressors, FDR pursued a strategy based on coalition economic sanctions, naval blockade, moral suasion in the form of propaganda and psychological warfare, and airpower to contribute to the defeat of aggressors such as Nazi Germany.¹⁵ The result, FDR believed, would lessen and possibly eliminate the likelihood of the United States having to enter the European war as a direct combatant. That strategic approach, Roosevelt recognized, also entailed

some risks. Strategic risk mitigation, furthermore, was a concept that he was accustomed to taking seriously. For example, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy on the outbreak of World War I, he confided that “it is *my* duty to keep the Navy in a position where no chances, even the most remote, are taken.”¹⁶ In December 1940, FDR observed, “If we are to be completely honest with ourselves, we must admit that there is risk in *any* course we may take. But I deeply believe that the great majority of our people agree that the course that I advocate involves the least risk now and the greatest hope for peace in the future.”¹⁷

tinuing to advocate continental defense or the pursuit of narrowly construed, unilateral interests, the military planners recommended “further release of war material” to enable Britain to continue to resist Germany, adding the caveat that such assistance not be detrimental to “procurement programs of our own Army and Navy.”²¹

to Roosevelt, the key was to maintain pressure on Germany until it collapsed upon itself



German submarine torpedoes Allied ship in Atlantic Ocean, 1942

U.S. Navy

In the estimate he presented to the military in June 1940 as France was collapsing, FDR asserted that Britain would be able to hold on against Germany. He added that if the United States had to enter the war, it would participate “with air and naval forces only.”¹⁸ In contrast to the views of the President, American military planners and intelligence officers replied that Germany would crush Britain as it did France. They maintained that rather than send any further arms and material overseas, the United States should rearm its own forces and focus on defending the Western Hemisphere and interests in the Pacific.¹⁹ In the ensuing dialogue and FDR’s subsequent meeting with Stark and Marshall on June 24, the military came to accept FDR’s broader view of vital U.S. interests.²⁰ As a result, rather than con-

Roosevelt’s approach, furthermore, was more than military; it simultaneously reflected his appreciation for the existing economic conditions and political environment. With the American economy just emerging from the Great Depression, FDR considered the economic, and subsequently the domestic political, impact of foreign orders. He commented to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau in March 1940, “Let’s face it, these foreign orders mean prosperity . . . and we can’t get the Democratic Party elected in November without prosperity.”²² At the same time, he also pushed for enhancing military preparedness, but doing so in a way that would not cause a domestic uproar. Always sensitive to public opinion, in September 1940, Roosevelt remarked that naval preparedness was the only form of rearmament that was



Adolf Hitler hosts Benito Mussolini in Munich, June 1940

Foreign Records Seized

the success of German submarines meant that Lend-Lease would be of little use if war materiel and munitions did not reach British forces

politically feasible. “American mothers don’t want their boys to be soldiers,” he observed, “so nothing really big can be done at present about expanding the Army. But the Navy is another matter; American mothers don’t seem to mind their boys becoming sailors.”²³

In January 1941, the administration proposed the Lend-Lease Bill, symbolically labeled H.R. 1776 and portrayed as an “aid to democracies” bill, intending that Lend-Lease would maintain freedom in the United States by aiding the Allies and also keep the United States out of the European war as an active combatant. On March 11, 1941, Roosevelt signed into law “An Act to Promote the Defense of the United States” and subsequently designated Harry Hopkins, an old friend and progressive reformer living in the White House, “to advise and assist” him “in carrying out the responsibilities placed upon” him by the act.²⁴ Hopkins viewed his new duties liberally and enjoined government representatives serving on the Lend-Lease liaison group to “concentrate on ‘licking Hitler,’ whether or not it comes strictly under ‘lend-lease.’”²⁵

another phase of things, a semi-belligerent phase.” He perceived that U.S. policy had undergone “a steady drift into a deep gray stage in which the precise difference between war and peace is impossible to discern.” Consistent with the concept of formal but armed neutrality, Berle rejected the thought that the President’s policy meant that war was inevitable. He averred, “Curiously enough, I am not sure that it means war, necessarily.”²⁶ To bolster the administration’s case for not adhering to strict neutrality, Attorney General Robert Jackson advanced the argument “that ‘neutrality’ does not imply impartiality where somebody else starts an unjustified war.”²⁷

The success of German submarines in the North Atlantic in 1941, however, meant that the administration’s Lend-Lease efforts would be of little use if American-made war materiel and munitions did not reach British forces. Consistent with his view of American history and the demands of his strategy, FDR took a broad view of the Monroe Doctrine and during the election of 1940 noted that his policy was to “vigorously support the Monroe Doctrine for the protection of the American

With the passage of Lend-Lease, Berle judged that by early 1941, U.S. foreign policy “really moved into

Hemisphere.”²⁸ In 1941, Roosevelt extended the area covered by the Monroe Doctrine eastward into the middle of the Atlantic. In April, the United States occupied Greenland. Roosevelt subsequently justified the action by stating, “We are applying to Denmark what might be called a carrying out of the Monroe Doctrine” to prevent the transfer of Greenland to Germany.²⁹ He also extended the naval reconnaissance patrols that had been operating in the Atlantic since September 1939 from approximately 300 miles off the coast to over 1,000 miles “for the safety of the Western Hemisphere” and to fulfill “the obligation we have under the Monroe Doctrine.” Those naval patrols radioed the locations of German submarines to British warships and aircraft. He also issued orders for American merchant ships to be convoyed to Iceland, an order soon expanded to include neutral and, ultimately, British ships. When asked how far the patrols would extend, Roosevelt replied, “As far on the waters of the seven seas as may be necessary for the defense of the American hemisphere.”³⁰ At Iceland, U.S. Navy escort destroyers turned Lend-Lease convoys over to the Royal Navy for the remainder of the voyage to Britain.

The maturing military contacts between the United States and Britain led to a strategic planning conference in Washington from January 29 until March 29, 1941. The conference, the first of the American-British Conversations, produced a fundamental agreement on grand strategy known as ABC-1. In the Pacific, the two countries would maintain a policy of deterrence against Japan, and, in the event of U.S. entry into the war, the Anglo-American priority would become securing the Atlantic and defeating Germany and Italy. Although U.S. planners considered that a major invasion of Europe might be necessary, Roosevelt endorsed a joint strategy for victory over Germany that rested on complementing the British blockade with strategic bombing and subversion on the continent.³¹ Following the conference, American military planners dedicated efforts to revising the basic joint war plan, Rainbow Five. Meanwhile, Roosevelt and his advisors resisted acknowledging any requirement for sending a large American ground force to Europe again. Other forces would substitute for another American Expeditionary Force. By May, based on Secretary of War Henry Stimson’s directives, the War Department understood that the basic U.S. policy during the period of

so-called neutrality was that “British forces are to be considered as an American Expeditionary Force.”³²

Adapting the Strategy

Meanwhile, by September 1941, General Marshall faced growing pressures to reduce the size of American ground forces. Although he sought to preserve and possibly increase their size, he recalled that “proposals for the navy and air demanded first attention” and that “opposition to a large army was very widespread” on account of “a feeling that such an army was passé, no longer needed.”³³ Clearly, FDR was sympathetic to articles in the media that depicted the potential U.S. contribution to the war effort as being confined to air and sea forces and manufacturing, and he requested that Marshall come to the White House to discuss the proposal to reduce the ground component of the Army.³⁴ Compounding Marshall’s challenge was Secretary Stimson’s belief that the recent demonstration in the Pacific by nine four-engined American bombers amounted to “the reversal of the strategy of the world” and would allow the projection of U.S. power in areas such as the Western Pacific “over the Japanese obstruction.”³⁵

Marshall’s arguments, however, seemed to make an impact on FDR, who undoubtedly recognized the strategic risk if his assumptions about the effectiveness of sea and air power did not hold true. There is no evidence that Roosevelt continued to entertain the idea that American ground forces could be reduced to free up resources for air and naval programs. Instead, he increasingly examined ground force requirements, and Stimson was impressed when Roosevelt scrutinized tank production, “going over the figures with great penetration and great shrewdness.”³⁶ Marshall’s arguments, furthermore, set the stage for Presidential consideration of the results of a more detailed study of requirements that FDR had requested in July.

By late September 1941, the military planning effort FDR requested began to coalesce in what became known as the Victory Plan. Stimson found the planning process “very educational and very helpful.”³⁷ The process clearly impacted the estimates held by both Marshall and Stimson. As a result of War Department planning activities, Marshall had continuously revised his own assessment of wartime ground force



U.S. Coast Guard

Crew of USCGS *Spencer* watches explosion of depth charge that sunk German U-175 submarine, 1943

requirements, from an Army of 2,000,000 in the summer of 1940 to the 8,800,000 troops called for in the 1941 Victory Plan.³⁸ The planning effort also resulted in Stimson reappraising his view of wartime requirements. Reviewing the preliminary product, Stimson admitted he was “rather appalled” by “the size of the undertaking of matching Germany” but found that “the reasoning is good.”³⁹ After discussing the Victory Plan for several days with the officers of the War Plans Division, Stimson characterized it as “a very fruitful study”⁴⁰ and judged that, even if not adopted, it would “have a good deal of educational effect on the President.”⁴¹

In late September, Stimson and Roosevelt had a frank discussion of the Victory Plan and, in Stimson’s words, “what would happen if and when we got into the war.” According to the Secretary of War, FDR “was afraid of the assumption of the position that we must invade and crush Germany.” Such a declaration, the President reasoned, would merely spark “a very bad reaction” and might serve, as Stimson recognized, “to stiffen and unite the German people.” Further, it might make direct American intervention in the war more likely by undermining what Stimson believed was evidence that “public opinion in Europe and

We don't like it—we didn't want to get in it—but we are in it and we're going to fight it with everything we've got.

—FDR, December 9, 1941

also German morale” were being affected by German setbacks in Russia.⁴²

Not convinced that full mobilization or active U.S. entry into the war were necessary, FDR continued to adapt his basic strategy. He considered arming merchant ships, the solution he had advocated to Woodrow Wilson in early 1917. Although noting that the Neutrality Act specifically forbade providing arms to merchant ships, he observed to the press that during “the so-called quasi-war against France in 1798,” many armed merchantmen “beat off French privateers.” He added that in accordance with international law, merchant ships achieved similar results during the War of 1812 against British attacks.⁴³ The following month, Roosevelt requested that Congress repeal the 1939 Neutrality Act and authorize him to arm merchantmen. In November, both Houses of Congress removed the major

restrictions of the act, allowing American merchantmen, armed and unarmed, to go anywhere legally and carry any cargo. On November 20, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox proclaimed, "Our vessels will be armed in two weeks."⁴⁴

by late September 1941, the military planning effort FDR requested began to coalesce in what became known as the Victory Plan

submarine threat in the North Atlantic, and while waiting for authorization to arm merchant ships, he reported that "we have the guns ready and the crews trained." The situation in Europe seemed positive as well. Berle assessed that the German forces in the

Soviet Union were "obviously risking everything" in a desperate gamble. Based

In late November, Roosevelt called Stimson, Knox, Marshall, and Stark to the White House for "a conference over the general strategy of the situation." The threat of imminent military action by Japan, however, dominated the discussion.⁴⁸ Complicating matters, on December 4, isolationist papers published a detailed account of the Victory Plan. With Roosevelt's approval, Stimson addressed the disclosure in a press conference the following day. Characterizing the plan as "unfinished studies" that did not constitute "an authorized program of the government," Stimson nonetheless posed the question, "What would you think of an American General Staff which in the present condition of the world did not investigate and study every conceivable type of emergency which may confront this country and every possible method of meeting that emergency?"⁴⁹

On the evening of December 7, 1941, following the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, FDR dictated the war message that he read to Congress the next day. In the audience on Capitol Hill, Eleanor Roosevelt noted the "curious sense of repetition" she felt as she reflected on Wilson's message in 1917. From her perspective, the Japanese attack on the United States had been an act of pure desperation carried out as part of "German strategy."⁵⁰ FDR chose not to request a declaration of war against Germany and Italy and continued to pursue a policy of armed neutrality in the Atlantic. Nonetheless, following the Japanese attack, he told his Cabinet several times that he expected a desperate Germany to declare war on the United States.⁵¹ Apparently, FDR had two motivations for waiting. By not asking Congress to declare war, he could continue to delay, and perhaps avoid altogether, U.S. entry into the European war. In addition, waiting for a German declaration of war on the United States would allow him to achieve Wilson's goal of being judged by historians as having had war thrust upon him.⁵²

With the declaration of war on the United States by Hitler and Benito Mussolini on December 11, Roosevelt's hope of avoiding entry into the war came to an end.⁵³ Roosevelt informed Congress that German "forces endeavoring to enslave the entire world are now moving towards this hemisphere." The Roosevelt administration, however, interpreted the German declaration of war as an act of desperation by a regime coming apart and hoping to save its grip on power through



Smoke rises from Hickam Field during attack on Pearl Harbor

U.S. Navy

In the Cabinet, Stimson, Knox, Ickes, and Treasury Secretary Morgenthau chafed under the President's restraints on greater American military intervention in the war.⁴⁵ Roosevelt, however, apparently had no intention of asking Congress for a declaration of war. He remained committed to his belief that armed neutrality would achieve American aims. From the Oval Office, his strategy seemed to be working. Roosevelt observed that Hitler "knows he is racing against time" and that having "heard the rumblings of revolt among the enslaved peoples" knows that "the days in which he may achieve total victory are numbered."

Into the War

In the fall of 1941, members of the Roosevelt administration were hopeful, even those who urged greater active involvement in the war. Knox seemed confident that the United States would master the German

on reports of German losses, Berle noted, "It seems increasingly clear that the German operations in Russia are approaching disaster."⁴⁶ On November 17, 1941, Coordinator of Information William Donovan reported to Roosevelt that the German people already were experiencing greater hardships than they had during "the years 1914-1918." Donovan noted "that a considerable number" of Germans were "extremely frightened" of British air raids and that German losses in the Soviet Union had produced "a staggering blow" on the home front. Morale seemed to be at low ebb. Recalling the phenomenon of 1918, Donovan predicted, "One major setback or even prolonged slaughter and the German will to sacrifice and to conquer might hang dangerously in the balance."⁴⁷

Meanwhile, despite the optimism in some administration circles, the War Department General Staff's estimates in the Victory Plan continued to have an impact.

further expansion. As if expressing a sense of relief, the President asserted that the German quest for world dominance “long known and long expected” had finally “thus taken place.” That day, Roosevelt requested that Congress “recognize a state of war between the United States and Germany” in the struggle between

that employed other elements of American power and influence as well as the power of potential allies. At the same time, the adaptive aspect of FDR's strategic leadership, and his consciousness of the inherent risks in any war, encouraged policy shifts, continuous military planning, and constant preparation for other

with the declaration of war on the United States by Hitler and Mussolini, Roosevelt's hope of avoiding entry into the war came to an end

“the forces of justice and of righteousness” and “the forces of savagery and barbarism.”⁵⁴

On the surface, Roosevelt's strategy might be judged a failure because it did not achieve its two immediate goals. Despite FDR's efforts, the United States entered World War II in December 1941 as an active belligerent while Hitler retained his hold on power. Such a cursory assessment, however, ignores the final outcome of the war and misses FDR's accomplishments as a strategist. Because of his strategic instincts, the situation after Pearl Harbor did not represent a complete catastrophe for the United States. Although Washington was only partially mobilized at the time, the preparations and planning that had been conducted since 1939 set the stage for a decisive U.S. contribution to the eventual defeat of Hitler's regime and its partners. Over the short term, FDR's strategic framework was not successful in achieving his goals in 1941, but it developed the plans and laid the foundation for what he undoubtedly considered essential to the prosperity of the United States, namely the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany and its partners and the preservation of a global system of free trade and open markets.

Following the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Roosevelt pursued an adaptive strategy. The centerpiece of his strategic framework was a set of goals that he derived from a fundamental appreciation of American interests and the threats to them. That goal-oriented framework enabled FDR to shift policies and mobilize and employ alternate means as part of his overall strategy, particularly as conditions and circumstances changed during the course of the war. Motivated by much more than military expediency or unilateral advantage, Roosevelt complemented military approaches with a broad political agenda

eventualities. Roosevelt saw the purpose of the war as defeating Nazi Germany and creating the enduring conditions for a peaceful postwar world, and that vision generated a remarkable degree of consistency in his strategic direction in Europe. In a comment to Stimson in 1935, the President aptly described the strategic instincts that would serve him well after war broke out: “I have an unfortunately long memory and I am not forgetting either our enemies or our objectives.”⁵⁵ **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, vol. 2, *The Inside Struggle, 1936–1939*, entry for August 26, 1939 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 704–705.

² Franklin D. Roosevelt, radio address, “On the European War,” September 3, 1939, Master Speech File No. 1240, Franklin D. Roosevelt Speech File, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL), available at <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/090339.html>>.

³ Ickes, entry for September 9, 1939, vol. 2, 715.

⁴ Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, vol. 3, *The Lowering Clouds, 1939–1941*, entry for September 16, 1939 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 9.

⁵ Breckinridge Long, *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long: Selections from the Years 1939–1944*, ed. Fred L. Israel, entry for October 11, 1939 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 27.

⁶ Statement of General George C. Marshall, May 29, 1940, appearance before U.S. Senate Subcommittee, Committee on Appropriations on Senate amendments to the Military Establishment Bill for 1941, *Appearances of General of the Army George C. Marshall Before the Congress of the United States, 1939–1945*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, n.d.), 362.

⁷ Admiral H.R. Stark, “Rough Informal Estimate of the Foreign Situation,” March 1, 1940, in folder: Navy: January–March 1940, Departmental File, Box 58, President's Secretary's File, FDRL.

⁸ Ickes, entry for June 9, 1940, vol. 3, 202.

⁹ Adolph A. Berle diary, entry for June 9, 1940, Box 212, Berle Papers, FDRL.

¹⁰ Berle, entry for June 30, 1940.

¹¹ Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1940–1945*, ed. Ben Pimlott, entry for May 24, 1940 (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1986), 20; War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee Papers, “British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality,” May 25, 1940, W.P. 40(168), CAB 66/7, Public Record Office, Kew.

¹² Draft of Roosevelt's Message to Congress, Second Appeal—Additional Defense Appropriation, July 10, 1940, Master Speech File Number 1289, Speech File, FDRL. Italics in the original by Roosevelt.

¹³ Entry for July 19, 1940, Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries, XXX: 24–25, microfilm edition, Reel 6, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; Berle, entry for June 18, 1940.

¹⁴ Executive Order No. 8248, “The Reorganization of the Executive Office of the President,” September 8, 1939, in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1939: War—and Neutrality*, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), 490–506; Ickes, entry for September 9, 1939, vol. 2, 721.

¹⁵ Bok Peace Award submission 1923, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, FDRL.

¹⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt to Eleanor Roosevelt, August 2, 1914, *F.D.R.: His Personal Letters*, vol. 2, 1905–1928 (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948), 239.

¹⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, radio address, “On National Security,” December 29, 1940, Master Speech File Number 1351, Speech File, FDRL, available at <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/122940.html>>.

¹⁸ Memorandum, “Views on Questions Propounded by President on War Sit,” WPD 4250–3, Record Group 165, War Plans Division General Correspondence, National Archives.

¹⁹ Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, “National Defense Policy,” June 17, 1940, WPD 4250–3, Record Group 165, War Plans Division General Correspondence, National Archives.

²⁰ Memorandum from Marshall to Strong, June 24, 1940, and draft “Basis for Immediate Decisions Concerning the National Defense,” June 22, 1940, WPD 4250–3, Record Group 165, War Plans Division General Correspondence, National Archives.

²¹ Final revision, “Basis for Immediate Decisions Concerning the National Defense,” June 27, 1940, WPD 4250–3, Record Group 165, War Plans Division General Correspondence, National Archives. On the shift of military planners, see Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy*

in *World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 24–29.

²² Henry Morgenthau, Jr., entry for March 30, 1940, Presidential Diaries, FDRL.

²³ Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1964), 68.

²⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt to Harry Hopkins, March 27, 1941, “Franklin D. Roosevelt,” Box 214, Special Assistant to the President, 1941–1945, The Papers of Harry L. Hopkins, FDRL.

²⁵ Lynn R. Edminster to Harry Hopkins, May 22, 1941, “Ideas about the War,” Box 158, Special Assistant to the President, 1941–1945, The Papers of Harry L. Hopkins, FDRL.

²⁶ Berle, entry for March 9, 1941.

²⁷ Berle characterized Jackson’s argument as consistent with the international law theories of the 17th-century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius. Entry for March 13, 1941, Berle.

²⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, notes filed June 1940, Democratic Platform, Speech File (No Number), FDRL.

²⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, press conference, April 15, 1941, in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1941: The Call to Battle Stations*, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1950), 117–120.

³⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, press conference, April 25, 1941, 132–135.

³¹ Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941–1942*, vol. 3, *The United States Army in World War II: The War Department* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), 33–48.

³² Estimate of the Situation on Aid to Britain, May 19, 1941, 4323–31, War Plans Division General Correspondence, 1920–1942, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, RG 165, National Archives.

³³ George C. Marshall, interview, January 15, 1957, *George C. Marshall: Interviews and Reminiscences for Forrest C. Pogue*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Research Foundation, 1991), 279.

³⁴ Memorandum of Conference in the Office of the Chief of Staff, September 20, 1941, Subject: Information for the President, “Ground Forces in Connection with Lippmann Article,” NM–84 Entry 422, Box 20, RG 165, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, National Archives.

³⁵ Stimson, entry for September 12, 1941.

³⁶ Stimson, entry for September 17, 1941.

³⁷ Stimson, entry for August 30–September 7, 1941.

³⁸ Marshall, vol. 2, 491.

³⁹ Stimson, entry for September 13, 1941.

⁴⁰ Stimson, entry for September 17, 1941.

⁴¹ Stimson, entry for August 30–September 7, 1941.

⁴² Stimson, entry for September 25, 1941.

⁴³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, press conference, September 23, 1941, 393–396.

⁴⁴ Long, entry for November 20, 1941, 224.

⁴⁵ Frank Friedel, *Franklin Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 394–395.

⁴⁶ Berle, entry for March 9, 1941; Frank Knox to John G. Winant, November 10, 1941, General Correspondence: 1941, The Papers of Frank Knox, LCMD.

⁴⁷ William J. Donovan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 17, 1941, Coordinator of Information: 1941, Box 128, Subject File, President’s Secretary’s File, FDRL.

⁴⁸ Stimson, entries for November 23 and 25, 1941.

⁴⁹ Stimson, entries for December 4 and 5, 1941.

⁵⁰ [Anna] Eleanor Roosevelt, *Eleanor Roosevelt’s My Day: Her Acclaimed Columns, 1936–1945*, ed. Rochelle Chadakoff, entry for December 9, 1941 (New York: Pharos Books, 1989), 226.

⁵¹ Ickes, entry for December 14, 1941, vol. 3, 664.

⁵² Franklin D. Roosevelt, Extemporaneous, Informal Remarks at Dinner of the Trustees of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Inc., Washington, DC, February 4, 1939, in Rosenman, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1939: War—and Neutrality*, 117–118. Wilson’s declaration of war against Germany before Congress said, in part: “With a profound sense of the solemn and even tragical character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves . . . I advise that the Congress . . . formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon [the government and people of the United States].” Woodrow Wilson, War Messages, 65th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document no. 5, Serial no. 7264, available at <<http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/usawardeclaration.htm>>.

⁵³ On Hitler’s long-range goals and his decision to declare war on the United States, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *World in the Balance: Behind the Scenes of World War II* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981), 68–69, 89–93.

⁵⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, message to Congress, Declaration of War on Germany, December 11, 1941, Master Speech File, No. 1402, Speech File, FDRL.

⁵⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt to Henry L. Stimson, February 6, 1935, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs*, vol. 2, *March 1934–August 1935* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 397–398.



Field Marshal Keitel signs surrender instrument in Berlin, May 7, 1945

U.S. Army