

# Leveraging Strength: The Pillars of American Grand Strategy in World War II

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by Tami Davis Biddle

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*Abstract: This article argues that U.S. leaders navigated their way through World War II challenges in several important ways. These included: sustaining a functional civil-military relationship; mobilizing inside a democratic, capitalist paradigm; leveraging the moral high ground ceded to them by their enemies; cultivating their ongoing relationship with the British, and embracing a kind of adaptability and resiliency that facilitated their ability to learn from mistakes and take advantage of their enemies' mistakes.*

Looking back on their World War II experience from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Americans are struck, first of all, by the speed with which everything was accomplished: armies were raised, fleets of planes and ships were built, setbacks were overcome, and great victories were won—all in a mere 45 months. Between December 1941 and August 1945, Americans faced extraordinary challenges and accepted responsibilities they had previously eschewed. They planned and implemented actions that gave them a key role in defeating fascism, in preserving democracy in Western Europe, and in protecting American interests around the world. The war was a transforming event for American society: the course of the war, and the consequences of it, set the conditions for the powerful, internationally-dominant United States that is familiar to all Americans alive today. Because of this, contemporary Americans tend to look back on the war as a rite of passage: a moment in time when Americans found their footing and their resolve, and took on huge tasks in the service of an urgent purpose.

This instinct is hardly misplaced. But it is the view of a people reflecting on an event and imbuing it with characteristics that best seem to fit the outcome. This pattern of memory often casts a rosy glow over the planning

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and prosecution of the war, investing the planners of the “greatest generation” with a sure-footed certainty they rarely possessed. The challenge for the historian examining the American grand strategy of World War II is to rediscover the true atmosphere of the 1940s, with all the immense challenges, painful tradeoffs, and breathtaking risks that it brought to the desks of senior planners and policymakers. It is to understand the ways in which mere mortals—who were uncertain, overworked, anxious, and frequently full of doubt—managed to face problems and discharge responsibilities that would, collectively, determine the most fundamental nature of their future existence. It is to understand how American planners and decision-makers envisioned and created a vast war machine, and then put it into the service of both protecting and promoting American interests across the globe.

There are many definitions of the phrase “grand strategy.” Put in concise terms, it is a plan for the intelligent application of national resources to achieve national aims. But those few words are deceptively simple. The first requirement of any grand strategy is that it be physically and economically feasible. Second, it must be sensibly matched to the set of problems at hand. And third, it must be acceptable—morally and culturally—to the people who will pursue it.

Historian Paul Kennedy has reminded us that creating a policy to implement grand strategy is full of unforeseen frictions. He argues that, “Given all the independent variables that come into play, grand strategy can never be exact or foreordained. It relies, rather, upon the constant and intelligent re-assessment of the polity’s ends and means; it relies upon wisdom and judgment.”<sup>1</sup> Focusing on military strategy, political scientist Richard Betts explains that it is “the essential ingredient for making war either politically effective or morally tenable. It is the link between military means and political ends.” But Betts introduces even more cautions than Kennedy does. “Those who experience or study many wars,” he points out, “find strong reasons to doubt that strategists can know enough about causes, effects, and intervening variables to make the operations planned produce the outcomes desired.” He argues that there are vast barriers to good strategy imposed by the cognitive biases of policymakers, and, even if good strategies *are* formulated, their execution will be eroded and complicated by the limitations of the implementing organizations.<sup>2</sup>

If all this is true, then any nation wishing to design and implement a remotely successful grand strategy must be flexible enough to constantly reassess its position and re-chart its course according to the contingencies it

<sup>1</sup> Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security*, Fall 2000, pp. 5-50; quoted material on p. 5.

confronts—contingencies that will multiply exponentially in wartime. But this will be possible only if it has the collective self-awareness to identify and leverage its existing strengths, and to engage in ongoing course corrections. Strategic decisions, and the ability to constantly revisit them and modify them as necessary, must rest upon a sound foundation that draws upon national predilections, successful institutions, and existing culture.

In this article, I argue that the ability of American senior leaders to find their way through a vast thicket of World War II challenges rested upon five key structures. First, Americans built and sustained a functional civil-military relationship—and this made many other things possible in wartime. Second, Americans found ways to mobilize and fight inside a democratic, capitalist paradigm that worked in concert with the nation's existing institutions and predilections. Third, Americans leveraged the moral high ground ceded to them by their enemies, and sustained national will to fight through familiar mechanisms that had well-established roots in the culture. Fourth, Americans used their ongoing relationship with the British to make better strategic choices than they might have made entirely on their own, and to pool knowledge, information, and intellectual capital. Finally, Americans embraced a kind of adaptability and resiliency that facilitated and, in some cases, expedited their ability to learn from mistakes and take advantage of their enemies' mistakes.

In no realm was this process straightforward or easy. By contrast, the path that Americans followed during the war was strewn with dangers and dilemmas. Progress was groping and iterative, and mis-steps were frequent. Indeed, there were moments in the war when Americans were terribly vulnerable to swings of mood, and to the emotional highs and lows that are inevitable in the highly changeable and volatile environment of total war. Human emotions—including over-optimism, despair, suspicion, and egocentrism—shaped the nature of the American war effort, and the legacy it has left.

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Americans, despite their strong wish to stay out of World War II, could not in the end stand apart from the most daunting and virulent problem of the early twentieth century: an expansionist and fiercely racist Germany. If the struggle with Germany was an existential one, the 1941 conflict with Japan was not. It was, instead, a struggle over the control of resources and real estate in the Pacific. But the nature of the fighting transformed the fight itself, and by 1945 there was little difference in the ferocity and intensity of the war being fought in Europe and the one being fought in the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the ongoing

<sup>3</sup>The nature of this war was shaped, too, by the profoundly negative emotions felt by Americans towards Japan in light of the Sino-Japanese war of the 1930s, and, in particular, the bombing of cities then known as Shanghai, Nanking, and Chunking. Additionally, deep-seated racism felt by the Americans toward the Japanese (and by the Japanese towards the Americans) played its part as well.

physical and logistical demands of the Asian war forced a level of effort (both military and civilian) that was perhaps unprecedented in American history. The political endpoint sought by the Americans in both theaters was the same: an unconditional surrender that would allow for a thorough re-shaping of the enemy's postwar political landscape.

There can be no question that the geo-strategic good fortune of the United States—with its vast eastern and western “moats” providing for a protected manufacturing base—was an enormous asset to the American cause. The Americans were able to help keep their Allies in the fight in thin times, and they were able to recover and regroup—without great cost—when things went poorly for them. There is no overestimating the value of this unearned state of grace. But simply starting out with advantages is no guarantee of anything in warfare. Americans would not have been able to claim a victory—let alone take up daunting postwar tasks and burdens—if they had not rallied to the challenge facing them in 1941. But the effort had to rest on a firm foundation that leveraged the strengths of a democratic nation, and made efficient use of existing American institutions.

### **The Civil-Military Relationship**

Anyone who works closely with (or inside of) a military organization for any period of time comes quickly to understand that war planning and war fighting are impressively difficult undertakings requiring, in the latter case, an intricate balance of detailed preparation and instinctive flexibility. The terrain of modern warfare is treacherous because it is so unpredictable: humans and machines must interact in highly complex ways—and they must do so in acutely dangerous environments where an adversary seeks to thwart one's every move. Modern warfare requires sophisticated, interdependent organizational structures that can readily fall victim to miscommunication. And the physical and psychological stresses of war, which are duplicated in no other human endeavor, only add to this volatility.

But if the military side of modern war is complex, the civilian side is equally so. Politicians and policymakers face their own challenges and burdens, especially in democracies where they must spend as much time on domestic politics and inter-agency coordination as they spend on the development of policies and plans. They must communicate regularly and clearly with military actors whose triumphs and failures constantly re-shape the political landscape, defining which ends are still possible, and which ones are not. They must locate and secure the material resources they need to support the war effort. They must interact with industry and science to provide the best tools available, and to encourage the design and creation of new ones. They must find adequate numbers of personnel to fill the ranks, fly the planes, and man the ships of war—and they must provide for their training

and sustenance. They must invest the domestic population with a willingness to endure suffering and sacrifice.

There can be little doubt that all of these realities weighed heavily on the shoulders of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the war in Europe intensified during the summer of 1940. On June 16, he telephoned Henry Stimson in his law offices in New York to ask if Stimson might come to Washington to serve as Secretary of War. A man with long and deep experience in government (having been both Secretary of War and State at earlier points in his career), Stimson was sympathetic to Roosevelt's instinct to be active in the fight against fascism. But he was, like the President, aware of the limits on what was possible domestically at that moment in time. Stimson was a Republican, but he chose to serve FDR out of a sense of national duty. To Stimson fell the task of helping to move the nation on to a war footing, even as the prospect of actually *going to war* in Europe remained deeply unpopular with most Americans.

Stimson had been highly successful in the private realms of law and finance. He knew the Constitution, and he knew the nation's strengths and weaknesses. He had service in, and a long attachment to, the United States Army. At the end of World War I, Stimson had met and been impressed by George C. Marshall. A man of integrity and ability, Marshall would be appointed the U.S. Army Chief of Staff in 1939, and would hold the position until the conclusion of the war in 1945. Stimson later pointed out that he would never need to search the Army for "the right top man": that man was already in position in 1940.<sup>4</sup>

Stimson cherished his good relationship with Roosevelt's advisors Harry Hopkins and Edwin "Pa" Watson. And Stimson had immense regard for the staff he was able to build under him; by April 1941 these men and women were in the positions they would hold throughout the war. They were civilians, but they had the confidence of Marshall and the Army. For anything of significance to be accomplished, the civilian officials of the War and Navy Departments would have to pull together with their military counterparts in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence. And they

<sup>4</sup> Henry Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1947), 331. Strong evidence of the mutual respect and admiration held by the two men can be found in the wartime birthday and Christmas greetings that Stimson and Marshall routinely exchanged. On December 23, 1942 Marshall told Stimson, "The strength of your stand in many difficult situations has been a source of inspiration to me and I wish again to express my gratitude for the wisdom of your counsel and for the magnificent support you have invariably given me." On December 31, 1944, Stimson said to Marshall, "each year I feel a growing measure of pride and satisfaction that I have been associated with you in carrying out this greatest war of our history, as well as an ever-growing appreciation of your character and ability." Marshall to Stimson, December 23, 1942, Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Box 84, folder 9, George C. Marshall Foundation, and Marshall Library, Lexington, VA; and Stimson to Marshall, December 31, 1944, Marshall Papers, Box 84, folder 21.

would have to move quickly. One of the most important characteristics that Stimson brought to the table was a genuine sense of urgency. This dedication to rapid progress was shared by Robert Patterson, Stimson's Assistant Secretary of War.<sup>5</sup>

To devise and then implement a grand strategy in wartime places great demands on the civil-military relationship extant within a political entity. It is a dance of extraordinary complexity that is partly structured and partly improvised, but always difficult. To establish strategic aims, and to hold them in view within the cacophony of a democratic political structure, is a challenge of the highest order. It requires an understanding of, and a respect for, the distinct but coordinated roles that must be played by civilian leaders and military leaders. It requires both clear *and* nuanced communication and cooperation between two very different tribes with opposing cultures and habits of behavior. The sound and robust relationship between Stimson and Marshall set a standard: "Their offices were immediately adjacent and the door between them was never closed; they disagreed on occasion but together they gave a singleness of purpose to the uneasy mix of civil and military rarely seen before or since."<sup>6</sup>

The President had the responsibility for leading the nation, and he owned the "bully pulpit" from which to do it, but in 1940 he was in no position to lead where his people refused to go. Understanding that the future of the United States would be inextricably tied to the fate of Britain, FDR sought ways to support his sister English-speaking nation through methods short of war. The genius of the "Destroyers for Bases" deal of September 1940 was in insisting that the British provide a *quid pro quo* to directly aid the cause of American home security. FDR took a direct role in brokering the deal, which managed to balance the immediate needs of Britain against the constraints imposed by the U.S. Congress.

Throughout 1941, the President moved carefully: he could not afford an open split with Congress, nor could he afford to ignore the Army and Navy's powerful instinct to stock their own cupboards and prepare themselves for war. The Army, reflecting views that were widely held among the American public, were wary of being pulled into a fight to preserve the British Empire. Marshall, like his Commander-in-Chief, felt a need to balance multiple perspectives regarding the way forward. The Lend-lease Bill, enacted in early 1941, provided another compromise that represented the politics of the possible. It required trust in the President, and a concentration of power in his hands in time of crisis. But because it did so much to aid America's alliance partners throughout the savage conflict, it paid tremendous dividends. Indeed,

<sup>5</sup> John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 119; Stimson and Bundy, pp. 341-344.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants and Their War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 105

one can surely argue that Lend-Lease was the greatest legislative achievement of the war.<sup>7</sup>

Once in the war, the Americans were largely able to adapt their civil-military structure to meet the needs of the larger Allied war effort. Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill worked closely and effectively with the military staffs under them. Both men had military advisors who could speak with frankness, and who could, when necessary, point out the pitfalls and shortcomings their political masters' suggestions and strategies. Churchill, who was particularly prone to sudden brainstorming and woolly strategic impulses, was ably restrained on many occasions by his senior Army advisor, General Sir Alan Brooke.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, FDR came to rely on the insights and judgments of his service chiefs, Marshall in particular. But both Churchill and Roosevelt were able to take the reins fully and make insistent demands upon their militaries when they felt justified in doing so. Both understood that they, as the highest elected officials of representative democracies, were ultimately in charge of the war, and responsible for the highest strategic decisions to be made in the course of it. Roosevelt emphasized this in a particularly pointed way in July 1942. Unhappy with the tone and implications of a policy paper that Marshall and Admiral Ernest King had delivered to him, FDR signed his response (for emphasis) "Commander-in-Chief" instead of "President."<sup>9</sup>

### **Leveraging Private Enterprise**

If FDR had to prepare for and prosecute the war within a democratic framework, he had to do so within a capitalist one, as well. War production required partnerships between government and business leaders that were not unlike the partnerships between civilian policymakers and military leaders. In this realm too, it was essential for these relationships to be effective and efficient in a time of crisis.

Before the Americans entered the war, the Roosevelt administration took steps to place industry and production on a sound footing. A good start was made with the appointment of William S. Knudsen to head the Office of Production Management (OPM), and the appointment of John Lord O'Brian as OPM's general counsel. In a profoundly capitalist nation, a smart, innovative master of business law was essential in a time of total war. Knowledgeable,

<sup>7</sup> Stimson and Bundy, pp. 358-360. Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief*, pp. 40-43.

<sup>8</sup> On Alan Brooke, see Alex Danchev and Alex Todman, eds., *War Diaries: Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke, 1939-1945* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Churchill had a similarly productive relationship with the Chief of the Royal Air Force, Sir Charles Portal. See Tami Davis Biddle, "Winston Churchill and Sir Charles Portal: Their Wartime Relationship, 1940 to 1945," in Peter Gray and Sebastian Cox, eds, *Air Power Leadership: Theory and Practice* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2002), pp. 178-198.

<sup>9</sup> See Mark Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier Statesman of the American Century* (Farmington Hills, MI: Twayne Publishing, 1989), p. 99.



creative, energetic people had to go into key positions where they could take initiatives and find ways to overcome hurdles.<sup>10</sup> Before December 1941, their work was limited, however. They stood in the long shadow cast by the bitter experience of World War I, and the widespread conviction that it had been the munitions makers who had lead the nation into that distasteful and costly war.

The War Production Board (WPB), created in January 1942 in order to rationalize and systematize the production and distribution of raw materials, was responsible for insuring that all major industrial producers had their most essential needs met. One author, writing just after World War II, argued that the relation of the WPB to industry was like that of the Chiefs of Staff to the armed forces. It took an overall view of the war effort and directed its strategy: “To ration materials and equipment and keep production of all these things in balance was a hazardous, as well as a new and immense, task for the government. We had to get all the facts, study them, make a decision—and be right.”<sup>11</sup>

Once the United States had entered the war, dramatic and, in many cases, permanent changes came to the American landscape. The war created 17 million new jobs. Industrial production increased by 96 percent and corporate profits after taxes more than doubled.<sup>12</sup> To take advantage of skilled workers who lived in and near U.S. cities, war production facilities sprang up near Detroit, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Buffalo, Hartford, St. Louis, Portland, and Seattle. The South and West saw extensive growth and industrialization as military training camps and war factories exploited the open space in these regions. More than 13 percent of the government’s war plant money was spent in the West, chiefly for permanent assets.<sup>13</sup>

To supply the wide range and large numbers of goods, tools, weapons, and materials that were needed quickly, the Roosevelt Administration created a partnership with private industry that resulted in a unique economic structure. The government had an immense role in funding, supporting, and regulating

<sup>10</sup> Stimson and Bundy, 354-355; Blum, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> Donald M. Nelson, “What Industry Did,” in *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States*, Jack Goodman, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), pp. 216-217. The author added: “To be seriously wrong at any point might have meant disaster on the battlefield or on the homefront.” (See 217.)

<sup>12</sup> Richard Polenberg, *America at War: The Homefront, 1941-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Writing in the summer of 1943, journalist Merlo Pusey explained, “Great Salt Lake and Utah valleys, for example, are undergoing the most profound changes they have experienced since Brigham Young’s pioneers broke their parched soil nearly a hundred years ago. . . . Southern California, the beneficiary of Boulder Dam power has become a seething cauldron of war industry. . . . The Golden State as a whole is getting more than \$390,000,000 in federal money for war plants. . . . In the Northwest, Seattle is the hub of an amazing workshop for war. See Pusey, “Revolution at Home,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* XLII (July 1943) pp. 207-219, portions reprinted in Polenberg, *America at War*, pp. 26-20, quoted material on pp. 29-30. See also, Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 71.

war production, but it left the control of individual enterprises in the hands of industrialists and businessmen. The latter were able to take full advantage of government largesse, funded liberally by taxpayer dollars, to produce the goods required by the vast national project of fighting a war on two fronts.

Roosevelt, having been cautious prior to Pearl Harbor, moved quickly after the attack to leverage American enterprise on behalf of national security. Historian John Morton Blum has written: “In the emergency production of war materials, Franklin Roosevelt was said to believe, energy was more efficient than efficiency. Furthermore, speed was often as important as quality, and costs mattered less than results.” This “necessitarian” view of the war, Blum argued, created ample space for enterprising businessmen to shift the landscape in their favor. Men like Stimson and Patterson, who were well-connected, conservative, northeastern elites, had strong ties to the worlds of business and finance. They, in turn, brought into government other financiers, lawyers, and entrepreneurs who were well positioned to re-establish the ties with industry that the New Deal had sometimes frayed. They worked to mobilize big business and link it to the military establishment.<sup>14</sup>

These businessmen, along with their legal and financial associates, had the skills, tools, and resources that Washington needed in crisis. But this course of events was not without downsides and injustices. Natural advantages accrued to the larger firms that could quickly deliver what the Government wanted and needed. Smaller businesses—the ones that needed big federal subsidies simply to build the factory space required for manufacturing—often fell behind the power curve. The bigger firms not only had existing factory floor space, they had managers and engineers capable of undertaking difficult and complex projects; they had accountants and administrators able to oversee huge orders; they had lines of private credit, and they had agents in Washington keeping an eye out for contracts.<sup>15</sup>

A great deal of industrial and economic power became concentrated in a small number of hands: in 1940, about 175,000 companies provided close to 70 percent of the manufacturing output of the United States, and about 100 companies produced the remaining 30 percent. By early 1943, the ratio was reversed: the one hundred companies that had formerly produced 30 percent now held 70 percent of war and civilian contracts.<sup>16</sup> This situation inevitably produced a degree of rancor and resistance at the time, including disappointment for many, and no small amount of vigorous infighting between stakeholders.<sup>17</sup> But in a time in which speed was of the utmost importance, the good cards were held by those who could garner vast resources and oversee vast

<sup>14</sup> Blum, *V was for Victory*, pp. 111-112, 119-123.

<sup>15</sup> Blum, pp. 121-122; Sherry, pp. 72-73.

<sup>16</sup> Blum, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup> For a sharp criticism, see Bruce Catton, *The War Lords of Washington: The Inside Story of Big Business versus the People in World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1948).

enterprises. It is hard to imagine that the Roosevelt Administration could have gotten such rapid results if it had not relied heavily upon those enterprises in the best position to meet war production requirements quickly and expeditiously.

In addition to organizing and producing the tools of war, the Roosevelt Administration had to rally the American people, place them on a wartime footing, and sustain their will for hard work and sacrifice in a conflict being fought far from American shores. The events at Pearl Harbor pulled the rug out from under the isolationist movement and shocked the nation into a full war posture. Because it aroused national passions, the attack galvanized the nation and spurred production and mobilization efforts beyond anything that would have been possible prior to December 7. On that day, Stimson confided in his diary that while the news of Pearl Harbor had been discouraging and worrying at a tactical level, it also brought a sense of relief. Gone now was the feeling of limbo and uncertainty, and the readily exploitable political atmosphere it had provoked.<sup>18</sup>

Through their acts of bold aggression, their wartime behavior, and their propaganda, Germany and Japan not only aroused a people disinclined to fight, but ignited their fury. Hitler, Goebbels, Mussolini, Hirohito, Yamamoto and others did the work of making themselves thoroughly repugnant to the American people.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the behavior of Axis leaders undergirded the American war effort in three important ways. First, they infused vast energy into that ethereal but vital component of warfare that was the American “will” to fight; they solidified the linkages between the all-important Clausewitzian wartime “trinity” consisting of “primordial violence, hatred, and enmity” (the realm of the people); “chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam” (the realm of the commander and his army); and the “element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes [war] subordinate to reason alone” (the realm of the government), and they helped the American people to overcome years of bitter hostility towards Stalin and the Soviet Union.

The task of the national leadership was to channel this anger in order to support the vast effort and sacrifice that would be required of the American people. Part of this task was taken up explicitly by the government, most notably by the Office of Facts and Figures, and the Office of War Information.<sup>20</sup> But the task was shared by the private realm, which not only stoked and supported an environment of common cause, but embellished it through film, radio, popular weeklies, and advertising. In all of these cultural media, the

<sup>18</sup> Stimson did not rue the passing of what, in his terms, had been the “apathy and division stirred up by unpatriotic men.” See Stimson and Bundy, p. 393

<sup>19</sup> On this general theme see Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 282-313.

<sup>20</sup> Henry F. Pringle, “The War Agencies,” in Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone*, pp. 174-176.

United States had innate strengths. To tie them to the service of the war was (as in the case of industry and business) to build upon a foundation that was already well-established in American society.

During the Great Depression the local movie house had become a much beloved institution in most American towns because it offered an inexpensive escape from the trials of daily life. During the war it offered the same service, but it also became a distribution point for information and propaganda. The silvery images and jaunty voice-overs of the Movietone News would typically precede the feature films of the day, many of which found subtle ways of reaffirming American values and war aims, and stoking hatred of the enemy.<sup>21</sup> Hollywood personalities were enlisted to sell war bonds and to take the lead in demonstrating norms of patriotism and optimism. Film directors like Frank Capra and William Wyler, who orchestrated celluloid efforts to explain the causes, methods, and aims of war, became national assets—resources to be deployed in the service of victory.

Americans desired prompt and readily accessible news of the war, and this was provided amply by the newspapers and popular journals that had begun to proliferate during the interwar years. *Time* and *Newsweek* followed the progress of the war; *Reader's Digest* offered upbeat feature stories that could be read while waiting at a bus stop. Magazines aimed at women, such as the *Ladies Home Journal*, told American housewives how to get by on rationed supplies (even as their advertisers promoted hand cream and lipstick). Industries trumpeted their war work with pride; indeed, the pages of American magazines were filled with ads that not only celebrated the American arsenal of democracy, but pointed readers to the vast array of desirable consumer products that would be on offer from these same factory floors once the war had been won. Arousing both pride in the fight and a yearning for peace—and doing so in a single, one-page package—was a particular genius of American wartime advertisers.

*The Anglo-American Relationship.* Very swiftly after Pearl Harbor, U.S. and British decisionmakers met to reaffirm commitments and to further coordinate their efforts. The Anglo-American alliance was important in itself because it forced and sustained an ongoing conversation between two parties interested in the same overarching goal. And while that conversation was never easy, it helped in many instances to produce better decisions by both sides than either one may have made on its own. Just as importantly, the Americans and the British formed a formidable partnership—as Churchill knew they would—by pooling resources, intelligence, and intellectual capital. While the U.S. alliance with the Soviet Union was never a close or particularly

<sup>21</sup> Historian Michael Sherry points out that Americans were called upon, most often, to defend *private* interests and to discharge *private* moral obligations, especially to their families. See Sherry, pp. 89-90. See also Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 11; Blum, pp. 95-96.

trusting one, it served the fundamental interests of both parties. Most importantly of all, however, the Grand Alliance managed to survive all the tensions of a long war without disintegrating; this was an outcome, and indeed a triumph, that the Axis powers had not expected.

Trying to align the efforts and interests of two parties in war adds more layers of complexity and bureaucracy to what is already a profoundly difficult endeavor. No two actors, no matter how much they may have in common, have interests that mesh completely. Creating the foundation of an effective wartime alliance requires commitment, patience, and a willingness to prioritize the alliance itself over the constant hurdles that threaten to fracture it. Methods of communication and liaison need to be established; decisionmaking processes need to be agreed upon and normalized; hierarchies and command chains need to be built, and implementing agencies and structures need to be put into place. And all that must happen before the two parties embark on an effort to coordinate their troops on the field of battle—with all the chaos battle inevitably brings.

General Marshall's World War I experience had convinced him of the essential requirement for inter-service and inter-allied cooperation in war. And he would become a leading voice for mechanisms to support both. This led to the concept of "unity of command": placing all British and U.S. forces (air, ground, and naval) under the command of a single individual. At British urging, the Americans agreed to the creation of an Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) to plan Anglo-American strategy, and to direct Anglo-American forces around the globe. This necessitated the development in the United States of a parallel structure to the British Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee; it forced the Americans to raise the level of their game overall, creating a planning apparatus that was more efficient and talent-based than ever before. Indeed, Marshall took the opportunity to thoroughly sort and sift the Army staff, "reducing the number of individuals with direct access to him from sixty-one to six."<sup>22</sup>

The conversations that took place at the CCS level were complex, competitive, and, in many instances, filled with rancor. But they were genuine conversations: they brought to light multiple perspectives; they forced ongoing analyses of the relationship between ends and means, and they demanded that ideas be supported by logic, evidence, and rigorous argumentation. They facilitated reflection and forced compromise in the same way that the institutions of a well-structured democratic government do.

<sup>22</sup>The American Joint Chiefs of Staff organization (JCS) existed during the war at presidential discretion; afterwards, it would be given legislative standing as part of the National Security Act of 1947. See Stoler, *George C. Marshall*, pp. 90-93. Quoted material on pp. 92-93. The author points out that Marshall put in motion the largest shake-up of the Army staff since the Elihu Root reforms of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He removed the "deadwood" considered to be a "fire hazard."

Just days after the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Prime Minister Churchill planned an immediate trip to Washington. “I feel it would be disastrous,” he cabled FDR, “to wait for another month before we settled common action in face of the new adverse situation particularly in the Pacific.”<sup>23</sup> As *HMS Duke of York* carried him across a cold and stern sea, Churchill outlined the contours of the war as he saw it. The “prime fact” of the war at that time, he argued, was Hitler’s failure to win a quick victory in Russia. Neither Britain nor the United States had a role in this drama “except to make sure that we send, without fail and punctually, the supplies that we have promised.” These vital supplies were the means by which the Anglo-Americans would be able to “hold influence over Stalin” and “weave the mighty Russian effort into the general texture of the war.”<sup>24</sup> Churchill understood that events on Europe’s Eastern Front would be enormously consequential—not only for Russia and Germany, but for Britain and the United States, as well. And in this he surely would prove to be right. By bearing the brunt of the battle with the *Wehrmacht*, the Red Army would, ironically, played a major role in preserving democracy in Western Europe, and helping to facilitate the postwar rise of the United States.

With respect to the vast struggle now to be faced in the Pacific, Churchill knew that the Japanese had the immediate upper hand and were likely to concentrate their efforts on taking Manila, Singapore, and the Burma Road, all in order to help consolidate their military position in the East Indies. Any chance to counter this trajectory would ride upon restoring Anglo-American sea power. Indeed, few other tasks ranked higher at that point in time than expanding global sea power. Ships would serve as the lifeline to the Soviet ally; they would preserve vital economic channels; they would facilitate the construction of bases and military facilities around the world; they would move men and materiel to places from which they would be launched against the enemy, and they would sustain the warriors’ efforts once underway.

In all this, the Americans had a central role to play. Their quest to secure trans-oceanic supply routes was multi-pronged, requiring: 1) anti-submarine measures; 2) the construction of large numbers of cargo ships and planes; 3) the emplacing and securing of new naval bases and 4) the development of new cargo and ferry routes. Much of this was accomplished with the help of the British, and none of it could have happened without the coordinated effort of business, science, technology, and bureaucracy. In 1942, the United States and Britain used sea lines to send Russia over 3,000 airplanes and over 4,000 tanks—along with boatloads of other equipment including

<sup>23</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, December 10, 1941, reprinted in Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 284. Members of the American military were not entirely sure they wanted Churchill on the scene so quickly, influencing fundamental decisions.

<sup>24</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, December 16, 1941, in Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol I, pp. 294-309.

food, boots, and trucks. Back in the United States, the construction and utilization of cargo aircraft enabled emergency supplies to be delivered around the world as needed.

Not surprisingly, the British and the Americans instinctively relied on the naval power that had helped them rise to their existing positions in the world. Since both were democracies, they tended to look warily upon large standing armies—including all the expense they require, and all the political and social disruption they can bring. Both were inclined to sea power due to their geography; both had an educated population capable of taking advantage of modern technology; both sought (whenever possible) to avoid the use of large armies in wartime, and both had a deep-seated revulsion to the land warfare that had taken place between 1914 and 1918.

In a similar vein, both nations were quick to embrace the promised advantages of air power, particularly long range or “strategic” bombing. And both did so despite the fact that this choice ultimately limited the manpower and resources available to their land armies. Tactical air power paid immediate dividends for them, and would prove a crucial asset to the Anglo-American allies throughout the course of World War II.<sup>25</sup> The record of strategic bombing was much more complex. Its use during World War I had been both limited and partial, and the “lessons” drawn from it had been based largely on extrapolation and hyperbole. During the interwar years a small group of interwar air power theorists would lead the way in making large claims for strategic bombardment, and these had natural resonance in two nations that had an instinctive distaste for large armies.<sup>26</sup>

The British began their World War II strategic bombing effort in 1939, with an air service that had been independent of the British Army since 1918. Despite autonomy and a 20-year emphasis on long range bombardment, the Royal Air Force had failed to come fully to terms with the immense operational

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, *Thomas A. Hughes, Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Benjamin Franklin Cooling, ed., *Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> The most outspoken of those theorists were Giulio Douhet of Italy, Sir Hugh Trenchard of Great Britain, and Gen. Billy Mitchell of the United States. The literature on the history of air warfare and strategic bombardment is vast. Some prominent titles include the comprehensive British and American official histories: Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945* vols I-IV, (London, HMSO, 1961); Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vols I-V (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). See also: Donald Miller, *Masters of the Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Richard G. Davis, *Bombing the European Axis Powers* (Montgomery, AL: Air University Press, 2006); Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare* (2002); Henry Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (London: Greenhill Books, 2001); Richard G. Davis, *Carl E. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993); Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1993); Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

challenges posed by the latter. Only after ineffectiveness, high casualties, and a change in doctrine to less costly (but also less accurate) nighttime bombing did the British air strikes begin to pay some dividends.<sup>27</sup> By 1943, however, they were increasingly effective and important; indeed, the Ruhr campaign of that spring upset a vast munitions expansion plan that Albert Speer had envisioned, and the powerful attacks on Hamburg later in the year did extensive damage and left the German leadership reeling.<sup>28</sup>

The greatest disappointment to the British (and later to the American) airmen was the discovery, during the course of the war, of just how vulnerable and inaccurate their bombers were. The Germans were determined and creative defenders of their territory, and in the early years of the war they took a fearsome toll on invading bombers. And the bombardment itself was anything but precise: errors were typically measured in miles, not yards. This latter fact would shape the nature of the Anglo-American war effort, and leave a deeply controversial legacy. Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine that—in light of their strategic culture, geo-political circumstances, and technological affinities—either Britain or the United States would have eschewed the appeal of air power and charted a course that would have relied more heavily on land power.<sup>29</sup>

Britain's victory in the 1940 Battle of Britain was crucial to the Allied war effort. By preserving effective (although not total) control of its own air space, Britain preserved its ability to serve as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier”—a secure space from which the Anglo-Americans could continue to plan and fight the war. Starting in 1942, the Americans and the British fought the air war together by sharing resources (including intelligence and the lessons of operational experience), and by combining—if not always coordinating—their efforts in the sky.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their instinctive choice to invest heavily in sea and air power, both the British and the Americans recognized that efforts on land would be necessary to secure and consolidate victory on multiple battlefronts. But just when, where, and how those armies might be used was an issue of consider-

<sup>27</sup> The most thorough and authoritative account of this shift from ineffectiveness to proficiency can be found in the volumes of the official history by Sir Charles Webster and Nobel Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany*, vols I-IV.

<sup>28</sup> For detailed evidence of this based on a careful examination of the German sources, see Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Penguin, 2006), esp. pp. 597-601.

<sup>29</sup> Out of exasperation over the inaccuracy of long range bombing, Winston Churchill in September 1942 complained bitterly to Chief of Air Staff Sir Charles Portal. In response, Portal offered to change the emphasis of the RAF back to an army-oriented posture. Churchill, despite his frustration, declined. See Tami Davis Biddle, “Churchill and Portal,” pp. 184-185.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, even before the Americans entered the war they aided the British aerial effort by supplying valuable 100 octane gasoline to the airplanes fighting in the 1940 Battle of Britain. See Richard Hallion, “The American Perspective,” in *The Burning Blue: A New History of the Battle of Britain*, Paul Addison and Jeremy Crang, eds. (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 84.



able discrepancy between the two allies. Its most important manifestation was in the debate over a “second front,” which came to a head in the summer of 1942. The details of this story have been well told elsewhere, but a few highlights are important in the context of this essay.<sup>31</sup>

Like all those of his generation, Winston Churchill had been scarred by the ferocity and devastation of the fighting on the Western Front in World War I, and he did not welcome the prospect of a repeat performance.<sup>32</sup> His experience and instincts inclined him to delay a large, direct clash with Hitler’s armies in Western Europe for as long as possible. He preferred to first weaken the Germans through the hammer blows of aerial bombing, the slow squeeze of sea power, steady campaigns on the periphery, and the disruptive effects of special forces and partisans.

The leaders of the U.S. Army were more optimistic, preferring a direct approach. Their experience on the World War I battlefield, while grueling, had been brief compared to that of their British ally. Their instinct was to uphold the Clausewitzian principle of seeking the point where victory *must* be won against an enemy if that victory is to be timely, complete, and lasting. General Marshall feared the impact of a slow, peripheral strategy against Hitler. He was not convinced, in particular, that the American people would tolerate a protracted war in the European theater. The U.S. Army shared his views, and suspected that the British were shaping strategy to suit the politics of their empire.<sup>33</sup>

Gordon Harrison, the author of the U.S. Army’s official history of the 1944 cross-channel attack, noted the inevitable tension between the British and American positions on how and when to attack Hitler. He argued, perceptively, that British sobriety and American optimism offered a good balance against one another: “[T]he British, whose mobilization was already far advanced, were inclined to see operations through the glass of current resources which, in general, could be increased in one category only by reduction in another. The United States, on the other hand, even while struggling desperately to build up the stocks needed for defense in the Pacific, was still continuously aware of its huge potential resources.”<sup>34</sup> Henry Stimson would observe, in his wartime diary, that the American plan for an early cross-

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Mark 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), pp. 64-102; Leo F. Meyer, “The Decision to Invade North Africa (TORCH)” and Richard M. Leighton, “Overlord versus the Mediterranean at the Cairo-Tehran Conferences” in K.R. Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1960), pp. 173-198 and pp. 255-285.

<sup>32</sup> He was, by temperament, an “Easterner”: he preferred clever, indirect approaches to the enemy. (The term “Easterner,” which has its roots in the First World War, referred to those who preferred to concentrate strategic efforts away from the stalemated Western Front of 1914-1918.)

<sup>33</sup> A wonderfully clear and concise view of Anglo-American tension is offered in Stoler, *George C. Marshall*, pp. 93-100.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, US Army, 1950), p. 13.

Channel attack was the “vitalizing contribution of our fresh and unwearied leaders and forces.”<sup>35</sup>

In the United States, General Marshall’s desire to prepare for a cross-Channel attack in 1942 and then launch it in 1943 rested upon his every instinct as a soldier. He believed, simply, that victories are won when one takes the fight to the enemy. President Roosevelt had not precluded any strategic possibilities in early 1942. However, as was so often the case, he was hard to read and harder to predict. Stimson sensed that the President coveted flexibility. In the end, British military conservatism and Churchill’s own wariness worked on the President. This effect, combined with the President’s own desire to commence the fight in the West in 1942, caused him to back the British plan for an invasion of North Africa, and clearing the Mediterranean for Allied use.<sup>36</sup> Marshall’s plan for a direct assault into France in 1943 was thus replaced by the invasion of North Africa (Operation Torch) in November of 1942. The Army Chief knew that the demands of the North African operation would preclude a cross Channel attack in 1943. From North Africa, the natural course was to continue the fight in the Mediterranean—first through an assault on the island of Sicily, and thence into Italy.

In the meantime, the Americans made progress in the Pacific theater, moving forward in a two-pronged attack that saw the Navy and Marines, under the control of Admiral Chester Nimitz, “island hop” their way towards Japan while the U.S. Army, under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, moved through New Guinea and, later, the Philippines. The dual approach, driven by service rivalry and a struggle for authority between strong personalities, meant dispersal of troops and resources rather than concentration. But the consequence was not, in retrospect, so damaging as Marshall had worried it might be. The ever-expanding industrial base in the United States was able to sustain operations on multiple fronts. The double assault confused the Japanese and forced them to disperse their forces, as well. And the island-hopping campaign through the Gilberts, Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas, prevented flanking attacks on the Army’s advance.<sup>37</sup>

The President’s decision for Torch was a bitter blow to General Marshall because it meant privileging the British peripheral strategy, and delaying the landing of troops in France until 1944. But it is hard to see, in hindsight, how Marshall’s hopes for an earlier cross-Channel attack could have been realized successfully. In early 1942, the U.S. Army had not gained enough experience in the fight to know just how optimistic many of their own

<sup>35</sup> Stimson and Bundy, p. 423.

<sup>36</sup> For a time, in the spring of 1942, it looked as if the British and FDR were in accord – at least in principle – with Marshall’s preferred approach. But the British had reservations about the plan that they could not overcome, and FDR realized that if the British were not on board, it was foolish for the Americans to insist on it at that point in time. See Stoler, *George C. Marshall*, pp. 93-102.

<sup>37</sup> See Samuel Eliot Morison, *Strategy and Compromise* (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), pp. 85-87.

assumptions were. In this instance, American instinct unchecked by British sobriety would have been dangerous. It is hard to imagine how the Anglo-Americans would have been able to produce the necessary sea assets—especially landing craft—that would have been needed for a successful landing in France. And even if the invasion had gone forward and had been timed to coincide with the vast Eastern Front battles of the summer of 1943, it would have done so without air superiority. Thus, even if the Anglo-Americans had been able to win a beachhead, exploiting it would have been very difficult indeed: casualties would have been high—and a stalemated front would hardly have been out of the question.<sup>38</sup> And a 1943 Channel crossing would have greatly strained the effort in the Pacific. Instead, the delay in the European second front enabled the Pacific campaign to develop a head of steam.

Having lost the first battle in the CCS's own second front campaign, however, Marshall was more determined than ever to win the next one. He continued to believe that a cross-Channel attack was vitally necessary to prevent a separate peace between the Soviets and the Germans, to insure an Anglo-American voice in the European postwar settlement, and to insure future Soviet participation in the war against Japan. Throughout 1943, therefore, Marshall established new plans and laid the foundation for a revival of the second front argument. Bringing the powerful Naval Chief Admiral Ernest King on board, he made clear that the American Joint Chiefs would support continued Mediterranean operations in 1943, but only if they were run within the confines of a build-up for a cross-Channel attack in 1944. Pacific offensives would continue, and gain relatively higher priority than before.

Because Marshall knew he had to convince a reluctant audience, he formulated his arguments carefully, and honed his presentation of them. This, in turn, required him to once more elevate the quality and professionalism of American military planning by reforming and reinforcing the joint Army-Navy planning apparatus.<sup>39</sup> Marshall and Stimson worked on FDR throughout the year, watching him carefully and giving him little opportunity to be drawn back into Churchill's Mediterranean orbit. This was a non-trivial task since Churchill put up a stiff resistance and battled back at every opportunity. Finally, however, at the Teheran conference in November 1943, Churchill was hemmed in: FDR backed Marshall, and Stalin pushed for an Anglo-American drive into France.<sup>40</sup> The cross-Channel operation was set for May 1, 1944 (OVERLORD), along with a supporting operation in Southern France (ANVIL). Stalin endorsed the

<sup>38</sup> In his arguments to Churchill and the British War Cabinet Defence Committee on April 14, 1942, Marshall was, in hindsight, overly optimistic regarding the American ability to produce landing craft and win air superiority. See Minutes of Meeting of British Defence Committee, April 14, 1942 in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Collection, Verifax 652, Reel 86, Item 2408, Papers of George C. Marshall, George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, VA.

<sup>39</sup> Stoler, *George C. Marshall*, pp. 102-108.

<sup>40</sup> Richard M. Leighton, "Overlord Versus the Mediterranean at the Cairo-Tehran Conferences," in Greenfield, *Command Decisions*, pp. 255-285.

approach, arguing that experience in Russia had shown that pincer operations were more effective than large offensives from a single direction.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout 1944, a schism was developing over the degree to which the Anglo-Americans ought to begin shaping the postwar political settlement with Russia. Increasingly fearful that the Soviets would use their tactical momentum to dictate the nature of the postwar peace, Churchill wished to begin bargaining as early as possible. By contrast, the Americans were anxious to complete the fight against the *Wehrmacht* before focusing too much on what would come afterwards. Moreover, they were at pains to avoid further straining the relationship with the Soviet Union, especially since they assumed that Russian participation would be essential in the hard final battles against Japan.

In fact, both positions had merit. But, as is always the case in strategy, hard choices had to be made about priorities and the allocation of resources. For his part, Eisenhower moved carefully to seek out compromises where possible, and to keep the Anglo-American alliance cemented together. Keeping an eye toward preventing Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe, Churchill was in favor of moving some armored divisions into the Balkans to conduct raids and support partisans. But the requirements of a full Balkan offensive were neither made clear by Churchill, nor debated by strategists during the war. Afterwards, however, the debate over a *possible* Balkan offensive gained a life of its own as the emerging “Cold War” saw Eastern Europe drawn into the Soviet sphere of influence. Prominent journalists like Hanson Baldwin and Chester Wilmot argued that U.S. strategy during the endgame had been inflexible and politically naïve.<sup>42</sup>

One can surely argue that the Americans—and Roosevelt foremost among them—were counting on a postwar European settlement that relied more on institutions than on a balance of power. If this was naïve it was also squarely in line with the American public’s idea of why the war was being fought, and what justified its huge sacrifices. And Roosevelt’s deeply-felt concern about the American public’s patience (shared fully by Marshall) was by no means misplaced. But other factors are more important for this particular analysis. The U.S. strategic preference did help sustain Soviet cooperation through the end of the war, thereby preserving the option of having Stalin help in the Far East if needed. It demanded an immediate and sizable German response, and thereby facilitated direct progress in the war against the *Wehrmacht*. It hastened the end of the consequential V-2 strikes on

<sup>41</sup> Morison explains: “When Mr. Churchill proposed a peripheral landing, anywhere between Norway and Dakar, Mr. Roosevelt was apt to retort, ‘All right, but where do we go from there?’ which vexed the Prime Minister since from many of his favorite targets you could not go anywhere.” *Strategy and Compromise*, p. 29. On Stalin’s view see Maurice Matloff, “The Anvil Decision: Crossroads of Strategy,” in Greenfield, *Command Decisions*, p. 387.

<sup>42</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, *Great Mistakes of the War* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1950); Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (London: Collins, 1952). Also, Captain W.D. Puleston (USN, Ret.) “Revealed—Blunders of World War II, in *US News & World Report*, February 4, 1955.

Britain from the Low Countries, and it enabled greater predictability and progress in the Pacific theater.<sup>43</sup>

Any counterfactual assessment of a Balkan offensive has to assess its potential downsides as well as its potential advantages. The land itself was rugged, and communications were poor. Its political landscape was difficult and unpredictable. It is by no means inconceivable that the Anglo-Americans might have gotten bogged down there, thus extending the war in Europe and possibly giving the Soviets *more* maneuvering room rather than less. Even in a better scenario, re-orienting Anglo-American troops to the Balkans would have drawn resources from the continental build-up and complicated procedures for re-deployment to the Pacific.

In assessing the overall utility of Anglo-American interaction during the war, one must focus on the broad picture. The British had plenty of anti-American bias, and the Americans returned it in full measure. And wartime differences sometimes resulted in conflicts that deeply frayed the rope binding the two nations together. In late 1944, for instance, problems arising from the internal politics of Italy and Greece produced sharp and biting words between the Prime Minister and the President. Indeed, fear of public disagreement prompted Churchill to write to Roosevelt, in December: “In the very dangerous situation in which the war is now it will be most unfortunate if we have to reveal in public controversy the natural tensions which arise inevitably in the movement of so great an alliance.”<sup>44</sup>

But both men realized the value of cooperation, and both nations were blessed with key individuals who not only took a broad view, but who understood—instinctively—the benefits to be gained by open, democratic discussion of problems and goals; by mutual effort toward a single aim; and by the sharing of insights and resources. General Dwight Eisenhower on the American side, and Field Marshal Sir John Dill on the British side, embraced these views and stood as shining examples to those around them. They both worked, at every opportunity, to quell, calm, and resolve the many disputes—both large and small—that developed among their subordinates.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Matloff in Greenfield, *Command Decisions*, pp. 397-400.

<sup>44</sup> See Churchill to Roosevelt, December 6, 1944, reprinted in *Churchill and Roosevelt*, III, 438; also, generally, 436-437; Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 528-529. A substantial schism also opened up over the norms and conventions for postwar commercial airline flight. See *Churchill & Roosevelt*, III, pp. 442-443.

<sup>45</sup> Dill won Marshall's complete confidence; during his crucial wartime years in Washington as head of the standing British military mission there, he did more than any other single individual to foster and maintain good will between the British and the Americans. The correspondence between Dill and Marshall is a testament to their respect and admiration for one another. See the Marshall Papers, Box 64, Lexington, VA. See also Morison, *Strategy and Compromise*, 14-15; E.J. Kingston-McCloughrey, *The Direction of War* (New York: Praeger, 1955), p. 119.

If Allies can manage to combine their efforts in ways that are even partially satisfactory, then they can help one another overcome bias and/or cognitive blinders. They can also help one another arrive at solutions to problems, cover for one another's weaknesses and defeats; pool their intellectual and industrial capital in the furtherance of an aim; and draw, when necessary, on one another's reserves of psychological energy.<sup>46</sup> The tensions between the Americans and the British were, to a large degree, salutary and healthy tensions; indeed, they usually produced more options, discussion, commitment, and better outcomes than might have been the case otherwise. Churchill was right when he declared, famously, that the only thing worse than fighting with Allies is fighting without them.

*Resilience.* Describing 1942, the great *New York Times* journalist Hanson Baldwin wrote: "This has been a year of hope deferred, of tragedy, of the most acute danger this nation has ever faced, a year of great defeats and great victories, a year in which the United States has found its soul, mustered its strength, organized its armies, and commenced its long, hard forward March to victory."<sup>47</sup> This was the opening line of Baldwin's January 1943 essay in the prestigious journal, *Foreign Affairs*. But the description may have suited the year 1943 even more than 1942, since it was not until the autumn of 1943 and the early winter of 1944 that the Americans really put themselves into a position to imagine the contours of victory. By the end of that year, the Atlantic submarine threat had been largely defeated, Allied bombers had delivered some powerful blows against the German homeland, and progress had been made in the Pacific theater. But neither these advances nor those that would follow later in the war would have been possible if the Allied military organizations—and the structures supporting them—had not proven to be resilient.

In a provocative essay titled, "Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?" historian Walter McDougall explains his definition of sound grand strategy as "an equation of ends and means so sturdy that it triumphs despite serial setbacks at the level of strategy, operations, and campaigns. The classic example is Allied grand strategy during World War II."<sup>48</sup> His phrase "serial setbacks" is an apt description for the string of events that included the fall of the Philippines, the tactical and operational mis-steps at the Kasserine Pass, the Pacific theater torpedo failures, the chaotic airborne landing at Sicily, the miscalculations of the amphibious assault on Tarawa, and the costly USAAF air offensive of 1943—to name just a few.

Resiliency in wartime rests on many of the factors detailed earlier. It simply cannot exist if the relationship between the political leadership and the

<sup>46</sup> An example of the latter is FDR's rather more upbeat reply (of 9 December 1944) to the bleak assessment of the war Churchill penned and sent on 6 December 1944. See *Churchill & Roosevelt*, III, pp. 434-436; and pp. 446-449.

<sup>47</sup> Hanson Baldwin, "America at War: The First Year," *Foreign Affairs*, (January 1943, pp. 197-210 (quoted material on p. 197).

<sup>48</sup> Walter A. McDougall, "Can the United States do Grand Strategy?" *Orbis*, Spring 2010.

fighting forces is corrosive or mistrustful, if popular support for the war is wanting, or if scientific, technological, and bureaucratic resources cannot be mustered to identify and fix problems. All the many institutions contributing to that amorphous entity called “the war effort” must be capable of absorbing information, analyzing it, and adjusting behavior to allow for recovery and provide for success in the wake of failure. These institutions must be learning organizations, capable of rapid response to an adaptive enemy. Illustrating the point laconically in a comment about Japanese grand strategy, Samuel Eliot Morison wrote, “The one thing wrong in Japanese calculation was America’s power of recuperation after her Pacific Fleet had been destroyed.”<sup>49</sup>

One could select any of a thousand examples from the war to illustrate American resiliency, but a single one will suffice here: the development of the long range escort fighter. Concerned that the Americans would suffer the same setbacks that the British had faced early in their strategic bombing effort, Churchill urged, in September 1942, that the Americans join the night bombing campaign against German cities. Representatives of the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF), not yet independent from their parent service, remained wholly committed to their own plan to wage daylight, high altitude “precision” attacks on German industry by groups of self-defending bombers. They remained, as well, committed to the idea that it was necessary to win a counterforce battle against the Luftwaffe.<sup>50</sup>

American doubts about British “area bombing” were as deep as the British doubts about the American wish for an early second front. The Yanks, therefore, opted to pass on Churchill’s offer. However by late 1943, when it had become clear that the idea of the “self-defending bomber” rested on deeply flawed assumptions, USAAF leaders found a way to bounce back.<sup>51</sup> Rather than move to the cover of night to bomb cities (as the RAF had done earlier in the war), the Americans re-thought protection for their bombers. A safe and well-developed industrial base back home gave the Americans the capacity to build large numbers of escort fighters, now equipped with auxiliary tanks (that could carry fuel for long escort missions and then be jettisoned to preserve the aerodynamic integrity of the aircraft). In the winter and spring of

<sup>49</sup> Morison, *Strategy and Compromise*, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> See Webster and Frankland, vol. I, pp. 353-363; Stephen L. McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, “The American Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany in World War II,” in R. Cargill Hall, ed., *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998), pp. 183-254; Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, pp. 210-213.

<sup>51</sup> The relatively modest program of the American bombers had concealed the truth through 1942 and 1943. When the Americans began to bomb deep into Germany on a repeated basis, they found themselves to be as vulnerable as the British had been earlier in the war. This fact was driven home forcefully by the two missions to Schweinfurt, of August and October 1943; in both instances, American losses were unsustainably high. On these two raids, see Craven and Cate, II, pp. 681-683, and p. 704. Also, Robert Mrazek, *To Kingdom Come: An Epic Saga of Survival in the Air War over Germany* (New York: Penguin, forthcoming 2012).

1944 these fighters commenced a long and fierce battle with the Luftwaffe that would, in the end, open the skies not only to an Anglo-American invasion of Western France, but also to a far more intense Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) than had been possible up to that point.<sup>52</sup>

The fierce but successful battle that the Americans waged against the Luftwaffe made the Normandy invasion a feasible operation, and did much to mitigate the ferocity of the fighting that Anglo-American troops would later face in France, the Low Countries, and Germany itself. Indeed, the American insistence on fighting and defeating the Luftwaffe would prove to be one of the more enlightened commitments of the Allied war effort.

This example of resiliency also reinforces the idea of alliance cooperation in war. In 1943, the hard and costly work of the Red Army and of Bomber Command gave the Americans the luxury of getting it wrong at first in the air war, and then rebounding. Once on its feet, the U.S. air effort later helped to pull British chestnuts out of the fire when German night fighters began taking a fearsome toll on Bomber Command. And there is, here, an interesting plot within a plot since it was the British who had first requested the plane that became the stellar North American P-51 escort fighter. In addition, it was the switch from an American Allison engine to a British Rolls-Royce engine that transformed the airplane from sub-optimal to superior. Adaptive organizational structures, optimism, pragmatism, alliance interaction, and the intermingled efforts of scientists, operations analysts, and businessmen were all part of the story.

*Grand Strategy and the Inevitable Trials of War.* In the United States, the meaning of the Normandy assault was well understood even as it took place. On Tuesday 6 June, *The New York Times* headline trumpeted the news: ALLIED ARMIES LAND IN FRANCE IN THE HAVRE-CHERBOURG AREA; GREAT INVASION IS UNDER WAY. It was a rite of passage for the Americans that would, over time, insinuate itself deeper and deeper into public memory and national identity. Just as in the Pacific, Americans learned that they could organize and lead armies against formidable foes. Once the beachhead was secured, the Anglo-American-Canadian troops found that they could take and hold ground (albeit slowly, at first) against the masters of Blitzkrieg.

But 1944 would bring some daunting setbacks as well. Indeed, the year was a roller coaster that tried the nerves of all those who lived through it. On the first of January 1945, *Time* magazine would proclaim, retrospectively: "It was the shifting fortunes of war in Europe that swing the U.S. alternately into optimism and pessimism, and always the pendulum swung too far. When the Allies won and held their first foothold in Normandy, the war seemed all but over. When the first attempts to break out of the peninsula failed, gloom settled in. When the breakout came and the Germans were routed, it was in the bag. When the Allies pulled up in September, back came the gloom. When Generals

<sup>52</sup> American attrition of the Luftwaffe helped to ease the heavy pressure then being placed on British bombers by German night fighters.



Bradley and Devers resumed the offensive in November, there were Congressmen in Washington who said it might be all over in 30 days. Rundstedt's amazing winter offensive brought the thickest gloom of the year."<sup>53</sup>

Over the summer of 1944, in the wake of the Normandy breakout, the liberation of Paris, and the great battle at the Falaise Gap, the British and American newspapers trumpeted the progress in breathless prose. Both soldiers and civilians began openly speculating about a German collapse.<sup>54</sup> But then, just as it began to look as if the war in Europe was accelerating toward Allied triumph, things began to turn. In June, V1 rockets, the predecessors of modern cruise missiles, had begun falling on Britain; and these were followed in September by even more sinister V2 rockets, the predecessors of intercontinental ballistic missiles. This daunting double blow inclined many to believe that Hitler was unleashing the first of several "secret weapons" that the wizard scientists of the Third Reich had managed to produce. The appearance of the Messerschmitt 262 fighter jet (with top speeds double that of the best American fighters) only added fuel to this speculative fire. Battlefield setbacks in the autumn, paired with weather that eroded the effectiveness of the strategic bombing campaign, gave further headaches to commanders who had felt they were close to defeating the Third Reich. Thus, when Hitler launched a counteroffensive (a development that only months prior had seemed impossible to Allied planners), the demoralizing impact was powerful. And the pessimism resulting from it would have an important effect on the Anglo-American campaign in the early part of 1945.

Worst case intelligence assessments in January 1945 envisioned the European war dragging on into the summer and autumn of 1945, and perhaps even into 1946, if the Russian winter offensive stalled badly. Such a scenario was very hard for the war weary and exhausted British to contemplate. And it was just as daunting to the Americans, who were painfully aware that they had another difficult battle waiting for them on the other side of the world. Thus, the Anglo-Americans did a sort of psychological *volte face*, going from over-confidence in the summer of 1944 to under-confidence in the mid-winter of 1944-1945.

By mid 1944, the British were essentially out of men, and the United States was facing a grave manpower shortage, as well. The consequence of the high priority given to sea and air power was now coming home to roost. And the only remedy to the crisis, it seemed, was to reach for the one tool that was by then in abundance: air power. In late January 1945, therefore, the British and Americans began removing all remaining constraints on their bomber

<sup>53</sup> "World Battlefronts," *Time*, January 1, 1945, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> In fact this speculation became so widespread and—in the wake of the Battle of the Bulge—so embarrassing that a decree against it was instituted by the War Department. See letter from Brig. General Lauris Norstad to Maj. Gen. Curtis LeMay, April 17, 1945, Box B11, Papers of Gen. Curtis LeMay, Library of Congress Manuscript Room, Washington, DC.

offensive. They instituted a new bomber directive that called for attacks on cities where westward German refugee flows were causing bottlenecks, making it difficult for German troops and supplies to advance eastward toward the rapidly-advancing Soviet army. This would facilitate the success of the Russian winter offensive, which would, in turn, raise the likelihood of forcing a complete Third Reich surrender in the summer of 1945. The result was a powerful series of attacks on cities situated just to the west of the Russian Front, including Chemnitz, Magdeburg, and Dresden. The February air campaign was brutal, not least because the Anglo-American air forces were by then so large and dominant in the skies over Germany.<sup>55</sup>

At the very same time as this crescendo was occurring in Europe, the war in the Far East was becoming particularly intense. The island hopping campaign was nearing the Japanese home islands, and the land and sea battles were now at their most intense and ferocious. A concerted American effort to employ precision bombing against Japanese industry had failed, and by January 1945 an impatient General Henry “Hap” Arnold, Chief of the U.S. Army Air Forces, had pulled the serving commander of the 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force out of the theater and replaced him with the young and energetic Maj. Gen. Curtis LeMay. LeMay was told, in no uncertain terms, to find a way to make bombing work in the Japanese theater. His response was to pull the armament off of his B-29s and fly them in low-level incendiary raids against Japanese cities. The city of Tokyo was attacked on the night of March 9, and over 100,000 civilians died (more than would die in either of the two atomic attacks, yet to come). Incendiary attacks on over 60 Japanese cities followed in a campaign that was designed (along with sea blockade) to obviate the need for an expected but highly dreaded American landing on Japanese shores. When atomic bombs became available in the summer of 1945, they were integrated into this campaign.<sup>56</sup>

Psychological roller coasters are not uncommon in warfare, and a setback on the heels of an apparent triumph can cause a reaction wholly disproportionate to the event itself. Even the seasoned warriors of the 1940s—children of the Great Depression, who were no strangers to hardship and strife—found themselves unnerved and edgy by the winter of 1944-1945. They reacted in ways that were entirely human, and tragic. War weariness, and the brutalizing effect of a long war turned the endgame into a frenzy of violence—not only by those who feared losing, but also by those who feared they might not win quickly enough.

Even in the best of circumstances, making and implementing grand strategy is profoundly challenging. In wartime, it is one of the most complex

<sup>55</sup> For a full account of all these developments, see Tami Davis Biddle, “Dresden 1945: Reality, History, and Memory,” *The Journal of Military History*, 72/2 (April 2008), pp. 413-449.

<sup>56</sup> An excellent account can be found in William W. Ralph, “Improvised Destruction: Arnold, LeMay, and the Firebombing of Japan,” *War in History*, October 2006, pp. 495-522.

and vexing of all human endeavors. Opportunities for error abound. Indeed, error must be expected—and mitigated through mechanisms that serve to enable recovery and reconstitution in the midst of high stress. There is no formula that will lead, inevitably, to success. And there is no formula that will serve in every circumstance to keep fear, demoralization, and over-reaction at bay. Wars are, by their very nature, tragic and brutal.

Because of all this, the path will always be perilous. But, as the Americans found out during World War II, a few fundamentals are indispensable: 1) to maintain a good, sound relationship between the soldiers fighting the war and the civilians guiding it; 2) to leverage successful, existing institutions to the hilt; 3) to work to keep the domestic population in overall support of the war effort, and take advantage of the enemy's mistakes; 4) to cooperate with allies, working to make the sum of the parts more powerful than the individual parts themselves; 5) to build resilience into all plans, and make sure that all institutions involved in the war effort are capable of learning, adapting, and evolving to cope with unforeseen circumstances, and to solve unanticipated problems.

