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AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

By D. W. BROGAN



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NOT only the winning of the war, but the future of civilization depends upon some kind of collaboration between the United States and the British Empire, and the meeting in August 1941 of President and Prime Minister on the waters of the Atlantic, that both divides and joins America and Britain, symbolizes the supreme importance of this collaboration.

When two democratic groups go into partnership, the foundations must be laid on mutual understanding and knowledge of each other by the people of each group. Nowhere is this knowledge more necessary—or the lack of it more likely to lead to misunderstanding—than in the field of foreign policy. In this pamphlet Professor Brogan describes the traditional outlook of America on world affairs, the policy which she has followed in recent years, and the machinery by which that policy is carried out. He clears up many difficulties for the British reader—such as the real meaning (or meanings, for it has varied from time to time) of the Monroe Doctrine; the reason why America has time and again renounced all participation in European affairs, but is time and again drawn back into them; the nature of Pan-Americanism; the occasional striking apparent discrepancy between the high moral line taken in foreign affairs by American public opinion, and the much more 'realistic' attitude of the State Department. Particular attention is devoted to the development of policy since 1918 and the gradual weakening of the extreme isolationist position, and the most controversial subjects, such as the League of Nations, War Debts, and the Neutrality legislation, are dealt with with admirable detachment.

Professor Brogan is the author of *The U.S.A.: An Outline of the Country, its People and Institutions* in 'The World To-day' series.

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The United States and the World

IT is not a mere accident of language that in American speech 'frontier' means not the area bordering on neighbouring states, but an ever-changing internal area, the region won in any generation from the wilderness and the Indian and, in a more general way, the whole process of settling and civilizing the vast empty areas of the North American continent. Nor is it unimportant that of the two wars that have left an abiding mark on the American national memory, the first, which the British call 'the War of Independence', is known to the Americans as 'the Revolutionary War', while the second is known to all the world (except the South) as 'the American Civil War'.¹ Other wars have created military reputations or have provided political issues, but no war, not fought on the present territory of the United States, has left a permanent mark on American life, has really entered into the national tradition. This is true of the wars with Mexico and Spain and even of the American share in the World War of 1914-18. There is in the American attitude to these conflicts something of the spectator's attitude, something of the attitude, too, of the man who regrets a youthful folly. Few Americans feel the equivalent of Rupert Brooke's 'corner of a foreign field that is for ever England' and the main effort of American piety after the last war was not to create great war cemeteries in France, but to bring back to America the bodies of her dead.

For the greater part of its history, the United States has been able to ignore the power politics of less fortunate regions. It has no near neighbours who are in the least

¹ In the South it is known as 'the War Between the States'.

degree formidable to it. It is not only that until very modern times the United States had no need to fear any but naval power, but that no European power, no matter what its character and ambitions, could risk the immense extension of its ambitions across the Atlantic or Pacific, because no power was sufficiently secure at home to dare turn its back to Europe or Asia and bring into its own orbit any part of the New World. Without being conscious of it, the United States benefited from a balance of power that kept Europe disunited and left the United States potentially the strongest power in the world—and gave it time, if need be, to turn that potentiality into actual fact.

It was natural, then, for American statesmen, and still more for American public opinion, to regard foreign policy as something of a luxury. American diplomatic history, save for brief moments like the period of the Civil War, does not consist of elaborate manœuvres, of treaties and alliances, but of claims for compensation for injury to American citizens in Russia, China, Ireland, in disputes over the admission of pork to the German market, or Japanese to California. The American minister or ambassador was by definition a wall-flower. He watched the diplomatic dance, he did not join in it.

The composite character of the American population helped to make this attitude part of American political tradition. There were too many emotional links between various American and European groups to make it prudent for the United States to take a line in world politics which would lead to the reproduction, in America, of the age-old feuds of Europe, and for many a reasonable and generous American, one of the worst results of American intervention in the last war was the bitterness it bred between German-Americans and other Americans. To the average American, an active and continuous foreign policy has the same repellent quality as a rigorous and long-continued health regime has to a normally robust man.

The U.S. as Missionary of Freedom

Yet there are certain permanent characteristics of American foreign policy and of American public sentiment towards questions of foreign policy. Deeply engraved on the American mind is the belief that 'righteousness exalteth a nation' and if the sin that is 'a reproach to any people' is more easily imputed by Americans to other nations than to themselves, that is merely to say that Americans are human. But there always has been in the United States, ever since its foundation, a constantly vigilant minority, becoming from time to time a majority, that has criticized, opposed and altered the policy of the Union. In the long run, no policy that is merely self-regarding, merely prudential, has commanded continuous American support and whether the alleged victims of American oppression have been Indians a century ago or Nicaraguans in the last twenty years, the conscience of America has been aroused by men and women convinced that the United States owes the world a higher standard than the mere pursuit of the maximum advantages made possible by her position and her power.

This view of the United States as, in a special sense, a trustee for the hopes of mankind, a force making for progress and enlightenment, dates in part from the Puritan founders of New England, but more directly from the makers of the Republic. They, or the democratic section of them, were convinced that the new nation had a great role as a teacher by example. The old bad days of tyranny and darkness were over in the United States and the vision of America as the home of 'liberty enlightening the world was early cherished'—and not only in America but in Europe as well.

It was this belief that America was the great exemplar of liberty, of democracy, that is the basis of Lincoln's most famous speech. If the Union fails, so ran his brief argument at Gettysburg, the possibility of the survival of

a nation 'conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal' will be held to be disproved. For democracy, the belief in equality, is the American political religion. He who in Europe or in Britain makes these matters of little moment, talks of mere 'idiosyncrasies' of political behaviour, cuts himself off from the living waters of American life. For that life is based on Jefferson's belief that the day had come when it was evident in America that 'the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favoured few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others.'

No 'Entangling Alliances'

This view of the United States as a missionary of freedom is, at first sight, incompatible with another equally strong American tradition, the doctrine preached by Washington in his Farewell Address. 'The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible.'¹ But the circumstances of the age explain Washington's attitude well enough. He was concerned to warn his countrymen against the dangers of their taking sides, passionately, in the great controversies over the French Revolution. His warning was as much addressed to the dangers of what we call a 'Fifth Column' as against too active a foreign policy. But it was undoubtedly a warning against too great concern with the then remote continent of Europe which had 'a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation'. That the United States was not strong enough, or united enough, to play a part in European politics was the judgment of all the Founding Fathers. She grew stronger, but she did not, in this field, neces-

¹ It is almost universally believed that Washington warned his countrymen against 'entangling alliances'. That phrase is Jefferson's.

sarily grow much more united. And Europe, torn with dynastic and national feuds, was not a theatre in which America could act naturally or with ease. American opinion was puzzled and angered by the apparently endless tale of blood, and grateful that 3,000 miles and sound political institutions separated her from the incorrigible continent.

American Sympathy with Democracy

Yet this political reserve was not incompatible with sympathy with democratic movements. Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, Irish, Armenians, Chinese—all the peoples whom American ways of thought identified with the good fight—got sympathy and aid and comfort from Americans, if not from the United States. It was not only the realization of how deep was the gulf between the imperial German government and the United States that made it possible for Wilson to lead the American people into the war in 1917, but the collapse of the Tsardom, the symbol for most Americans of dynastic tyranny and corruption.

On the plane of sentiment, American public opinion and American policy have swung from realization of her geographical remoteness and ignorance to passionate sympathy with those who spoke or seemed to speak her political language. If the pendulum has usually swung back to an isolationist policy, which, it is asserted, is sanctified by the advice of Washington, it has done so because Americans have been pained and disillusioned to discover that a community of ideals is not enough, that there must be a community of interest and of continuing effort. For as Chesterton pointed out after the last war, 'The world will never be made safe for democracy; it is a dangerous trade.' *Eternal* vigilance is the price of liberty and, like other peoples, the Americans are tempted to lie back and regard as permanently won the victory that each generation must win over again, the victory of liberty and

law. When it has become plain that the battle has to be fought again, the American people has remembered its charter, the Declaration of Independence, which declares for all men, not merely for Americans, the right to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'.

The Machinery of American Foreign Policy

The American constitution, too, imposes special obstacles to diplomacy. In the words of the Constitution the President has 'power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two-thirds of the Senators present concur'. The framers of the Constitution in 1787 thought it possible that the Senate would act as a kind of Privy Council, that it would both propose treaties to the President and advise him during the course of negotiations; but although both have been done, in normal practice the Senate's control over foreign policy becomes operative only when the President has negotiated a treaty and demands its ratification.¹ That is, the division of power between an executive, the President (whom Congress cannot get rid of) and the legislature, Congress (which the President cannot dissolve), is carried over to the field of foreign affairs. The Constitution, by forbidding cabinet officers to sit in Congress, has made it necessary to find other means of collaboration. Therefore the Secretary of State² has constantly to deal with the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and especially with its Chairman.

This provision of the American constitution can be defended to-day for the same reasons that caused its adoption in 1787. To grant unlimited power of treaty-making to the President would be to abandon a large part

¹ The consent of the Senate is also required for the appointment of ambassadors, ministers, etc., but this power is seldom used to control policy.

² The American Foreign Office is known as the Department of State. Although its work is almost exclusively diplomatic, it has a few formal functions in domestic affairs.

of the legislative power to him, for treaties, like ordinary federal statutes, are part of 'the supreme law of the land'. It was so evident that such a grant was contrary to the separation of powers of the federal constitution, that it was originally proposed to exclude the President from treaty-making altogether. But so much diplomatic business must, in fact, be executive in character, that this plan was recognized as equally impracticable; the conjunction of the Senate and the President in treaty-making was thus inevitable.¹

More difficult to justify is the requirement of a special, two-thirds majority for the ratification of treaties. As each State has the same representation in the Senate, regardless of its size and population, the one-third plus one that may veto a treaty may represent a great deal less than a third of the American people. Quite a small minority can block an international policy desired by a large majority. Yet the two-thirds rule can be justified. It reflects the fact that the United States is very large, very diversified and that a foreign policy that has not a very wide backing, fairly distributed over the whole union, is dangerous.

Yet American constitutional rules make American diplomatic action very difficult. A President negotiating a treaty may bear in mind the probable reactions of the Senate; he may consult leading Senators; he may use them as negotiators; but he can never be sure that the most carefully drafted treaty will not be so altered in the Senate that he will be unprepared to act on it, or the foreign nation will refuse to accept the senatorial amendments, or the Senate will itself refuse to ratify the treaty in any version. As amendments can be made by simple majorities, it is possible for a succession of amendments to

¹ When treaties involve the expenditure of money, in addition to senatorial ratification of the treaty it is necessary to have a Bill voting the money passed by a majority of each House. In such cases, it is difficult to prevent the merits of the Treaty itself being debated in the House of Representatives, without whose action the Treaty would in effect remain a dead letter.

be passed which produce a final version of the treaty so inconsistent or so unworkable that the necessary two-thirds majority cannot be found.

Then, as in all congressional business, the role of the relevant committee is of great importance. It is in the Committee of Foreign Relations that the treaty is first debated and amended or rejected. That committee may be filled with Senators of the party opposed to the President or by dissident members of his own party. Its members have not the pressure of responsibility for action that drives Presidents to seek to do something; reasons for not doing anything are not hard to come by. On the other hand, most members of this committee go on to it because they are interested in foreign affairs; membership has prestige value but is not of immediate political importance in domestic affairs. Normally weight in the Committee goes by length of service, which ensures that the leading members have had a long experience of diplomatic business. On the other hand, mere seniority may bring to the chairmanship of the Committee a Senator who is unfit for his job, or bitterly hostile to the President.

Lastly, the constitutional control of foreign affairs by the Senate encourages debate on all issues of foreign policy. Petitions, delegations, public-opinion polls, even interruptions from the gallery, even picketing of Senators whose views are disliked by any organized group, ensure that Senators will not forget that they are representatives of the people, not irresponsible legislators. The barrage of appeal and counter-appeal may intimidate some Senators and baffle others and it ensures that foreign policy is discussed in an atmosphere of heat which, in some cases, almost more than outweighs the advantage that it is discussed in the light.

Areas of Special Interest : The Pacific

It is natural that we should think of American foreign policy in terms of European conflict, but, in fact,

American policy has been far more concerned with what in America is called 'the Orient' and with the rest of the American continents than it has been concerned with Europe.

American interest in the Pacific dates from the early days of the Republic, when the American merchant and sailor found in China one of their most profitable fields of action. Soon there was added the great missionary interest which, in political and emotional power, came to eclipse any purely commercial connection. By making over its share of the indemnity imposed on China after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 to a fund for educating Chinese in America, the United States further tightened the bonds between herself and the new China. The Chinese Revolution of 1912 was in great part the work of American-trained Chinese and still more has the personnel of the Kuomintang party been under American influence. For China, millions of Americans feel a moral responsibility and a moral interest they do not feel for any other country.

Although it was an American squadron that forced open the gates of Japan in 1853 and although there have always been important business connections with Japan, American opinion has never been as sympathetic to the island Empire as to the great continental agglomeration. The only Oriental state to become a great power, Japan was in a position to deal with the United States on equal terms. Despite the limitations accepted at the Washington Conference of 1921, the Japanese Navy in its home waters was a match for the American Navy. It was both because of reliance on the permanence of British control of the Atlantic and because of a realization that it was probably in the Pacific that American physical power might have to support moral influence, that the main American fleet was moved to the Pacific bases and that Honolulu became the chief American fortress. Yet American opinion was far behind naval opinion in its

appreciation of the realities of power politics in the Pacific. It was in agreement with the policy of ending American control of the Philippines, acquired in 1898 from Spain. It opposed the fortification of Guam: and it was content with a defence policy based on Hawaii, a policy that gave Japan, strategically, a free hand in the Asiatic half of the Pacific.

When, despite its treaty obligations, Japan took advantage of this free hand to seize Manchuria in 1931, American public opinion was indignant, but its reaction was confused. Mr. Hoover's Secretary of State, Mr. Stimson,¹ was anxious to oppose, with all the means in his power, the Japanese aggression. But it was not very clear (given American public opinion) what means were in his power. And informed American opinion was less angered by British hesitation to launch out on a bold policy in which the Hoover administration might not be able to follow, than distressed by the forensic skill and, indeed, by something that might almost be called warmth, with which the then British Foreign Secretary² put the Japanese case. As the Manchuria 'incident' has developed into the 'China incident', that is, into a first-class war, American opinion has become increasingly hostile to Japan, prepared to support lavish economic aid for China, but still holding off from any steps that might make a move from moral and economic to military support inevitable or even likely.

Yet American interest in China is deep and genuine. There was probably more real indignation over the bestialities that followed Japanese victories in China than over formally more provocative acts like the bombing of the American gunboat *Panay* in the Yangtse (1937). As the European situation has got more critical, the implications of the Axis for American security have become

¹ Now Mr Roosevelt's Secretary of War.

² Lord (then Sir John) Simon.

clearer; the nuisance value to Germany of Japanese threats has been noted and resented; and the decision to build a 'two-ocean' navy reveals the death of the illusion that, in the contemporary world, moral example or aid are enough in themselves.

Latin America and the Monroe Doctrine

Even more involved in American emotions, historical traditions and economic and strategic interests, is the rest of the American continents. Canada can be dismissed in a few words. It is hardly regarded as a foreign country, though the odd illusion that it is 'owned' by Britain still survives. All but a few cranks admit that the protection of Canada is a fundamental interest of the United States. Less easy to define or illustrate is the attitude of the United States to Latin-America, that mass of traditions, policies, precedents, interests covered by the magic term 'the Monroe Doctrine'.

According to American legend, an apparently respectable citizen was about to be lynched despite his frenzied protests. He was rescued by the Sheriff who asked what was his offence. 'He said that he didn't believe in the Monroe Doctrine'. 'It's untrue. I love the Monroe Doctrine; I admire the Monroe Doctrine; I'd die for the Monroe Doctrine. All I said was that I didn't know what it was.'

Indeed, the Monroe Doctrine has not merely meant different things at different times; it has never meant to the average citizen anything very concrete; it has been rather an attitude than a policy; while, for the rulers of America, it has been a useful phrase, respectable and emotionally potent, which could be used to cover up a realistic and utilitarian policy whose utility the man in the street might not have been able to appreciate, had the policy not been guaranteed by its identification with the mysterious dogma.

Historically, the message of President Monroe of

2 December 1823 was directed against schemes deemed dangerous to the interests and sentiments of the American government. It was directed against a revival of European projects of expansion on the north American continent; here the immediately dangerous power was Russia, which was advancing down the Pacific coast to California from Alaska. The United States had a good reason to dislike claim-staking of this kind, for not wishing any part of the American continents ' . . . [to] be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers'. In North America, at least, the United States was resolved to be the dominant power and to be the universal legatee for all collapsing empires. In less than a generation after Russia had been politely requested to stay out of California, the United States had conquered and annexed that remote dependency of the young Mexican Republic. The Monroe Doctrine was in no sense a self-denying ordinance, although the valid claims of existing European powers in the Americas were excepted from the Doctrine's ban.

The message of President Monroe was an announcement to all whom it might concern that the United States had an interest in the *status quo*, including in that *status* the independence of the newly-established States of Latin America. But it did not, in its first form, guarantee these States against aggression from the United States. The first generation, at least, of the Doctrine was also the age of 'Manifest Destiny', the belief that as the strongest, most energetic, most progressive power in America, the United States would be only anticipating the inevitable march of history if she abolished such anomalies as the survival of British rule in Canada and Spanish rule in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Nor was this all. As Mexico passed through revolution after revolution, it came to be widely accepted that American power 'and therefore rights' could and should be extended to cover all North America down to Darien, as it was taken as in the nature of things

that when the time came to build a canal across the isthmus of Panama, the United States would do it.

Yet it must be pointed out that the United States resisted several tempting opportunities to annex Cuba; that when she occupied Cuba she carried out her promise to make the island independent; and that her rule in Puerto Rico has been financially generous and as humane and tolerant as the permanently unsatisfactory economic condition of that over-crowded island permits. The United States did make war on Mexico in 1846, but she imposed terms of peace far less rigorous than the prostrate Mexicans could have been forced to accept, and one result of that moderation is that to this day the greatest of American western rivers, the Colorado, enters the sea through Mexican territory, which is highly inconvenient to the United States. In the long run, it was the United States which built the Panama Canal, but she was generous to the heirs of the French pioneers, and if she insisted on being freed from the shackles of the old treaties that tied her hands, President Wilson was able to induce Congress to repeal legislation giving American shipping preferential rights in the canal built by American money and American skill.

The second aspect of the Monroe Doctrine was vaguer, more ideological. Alarmed by hints conveyed by the British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, the American government protested against designs attributed to conservative European powers, 'the Holy Alliance', of restoring Spanish rule in the revolted States of South America by means of a French expeditionary force. The United States in 1823 was not powerful enough to have prevented a French fleet and army being transported to Buenos Aires, a region more remote from New York than from Cherbourg. But there was no serious intention of sending such an expedition, and it was natural that a strong United States should, in later generations, have exaggerated the effect of this declaration of sentiment into a potent affirmation of policy.

This historical exaggeration soon acquired independent historical force. It became an accepted maxim of American policy that the independence of the Latin-American States and their territorial integrity was a major interest of the United States, which had a right—and a duty—to protect them against aggression from European enemies, but not from each other or from the United States.

This policy could have been attacked on narrowly prudential grounds. The southern nations of South America were remote in space, in institutions, in culture and in sentiment from the United States. It was a mere accident of nomenclature that they and the United States were located on two continents, each of which bore the name America, and which were physically joined by a narrow isthmus. Nor did economic interest furnish links that history and geography had neglected to provide. In all but mere geographical nomenclature, Argentina had more links with Britain than with the United States. The mental habit of looking at maps designed to be read from north to south, rather than looking at maps designed to be read from east to west, reinforced a political attitude that was, until the twentieth century, prophetic rather than actual. In objecting to British or French or Spanish aggression in Mexico or in the Caribbean, the United States was acting as a great power normally does. In talking as if her interest in the quarrels between Peru and Chile or the diplomatic difficulties of Venezuela and Britain were interests of the same kind as those arising from Mexican or Cuban revolutions, the United States was acting romantically. Yet it should be remembered, that had there not been this romantic sense of Pan-American duty, of the relation of a big brother to weak and foolish youngsters, there would not only have been less well-meaning interference in the remoter parts of South America, but, probably, less willingness to recognize that what went on in such close neighbours as Cuba and

Mexico *was* the business of the United States. The Monroe Doctrine was a window, a stained-glass and deceptive window, through which the United States looked out on the world. But without the Doctrine, she might not have looked out at all.

With the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 and the outbreak of the first Great War, the Monroe Doctrine acquired a new realistic character. The canal brought the Pacific nations closer to the seat of power in the United States, the Atlantic seaboard. The war, by destroying German and crippling British business activity in South America, gave an opportunity to American business, which it took. The political course of the war made the United States, for a time, the most courted and feared of the great powers and made her permanently one of the two great naval powers, and the dominating naval power in the western Atlantic and the Pacific. Compared with any of her American neighbours, even with Brazil, the United States was a colossus, and the long tradition that made her, in the eyes of the American people, especially the guardian of the weaker American nations, ensured that, at a time when any activity in foreign affairs was condemned by American public opinion, the magic formula 'Monroe Doctrine' would justify activities that, without the cover of the formula, could not have been attempted at all.

The 'Good-Neighbour' Policy

In the decades following the armistice of 1918, United States policy evolved from the friendly but patronizing attitude of an overwhelmingly powerful uncle, into what was to be called by President Franklin D. Roosevelt the 'good-neighbour' policy. Latin-American opinion had been roused to suspicion and hostility at the beginning of the century largely by the activities of President Theodore Roosevelt, above all by the support given to the Panama Revolution of 1903, a revolution that freed the United

States from the necessity of coming to terms with Colombia in order to build the Panama Canal, a convenience paid for in the suspicion and ironical scepticism that was aroused in Latin-America. Intervention in Central American and Caribbean republics to 'restore order' added to the *malaise*. President Wilson had disclaimed all annexationist intentions, and although years of Mexican revolution and counter-revolution gave the United States many legitimate grievances and many opportunities of armed intervention, Latin-America remembered General Pershing's pursuit into Mexico of the 'patriot' or bandit Pancho Villa, who had raided an American town (1916) and the less defensible occupation of Vera Cruz (1914), which was a means of bringing pressure to bear against the Mexican dictator, Huerta, whose methods of attaining power had shocked President Wilson. What was—given the immense preponderance in power of the United States and the provocations offered by various Mexican warring factions—extraordinary moderation, was not seen as such by proud and fearful Latin-Americans. 'Dollar diplomacy', the forcible collection of the external debts of ill-governed and bankrupt little republics, continued to make for bad blood. Yet American opinion, in this as in every other sphere of foreign relations, was increasingly pacific and negative. The Coolidge administration (1923–29) came to terms with Mexico; the Hoover administration (1929–33) carried farther the liquidation of all direct political commitments; and the Roosevelt administration both gave up the special rights it had in Cuba¹ (which had been freed by American arms) and abandoned the high moralistic position of the Wilson administration which had refused to recognize governments which came into power by a revolution.

The way was psychologically prepared for a more genuine 'Pan-American' policy than had been possible in

¹ Generally known, from the Senator who sponsored the limitations on Cuban sovereignty, as 'the Platt amendment'.

the past. A series of conferences, at Montevideo (1933), Lima (1938), special conference of foreign ministers at Panama (1939) and Havana (1940) sought to tighten the political and economic relations between the American powers; and the last two, held in the shadow of the new world war, tried to develop a common defence policy. But even as late as 1939, the Panama Conference was content with declaring that American waters (roughly 300 miles from the shore) were to be freed from belligerent activity. But there was no corresponding willingness to take action to enforce this declaration, and in fact there took place almost at once, in these waters, the first serious naval action of the war, the destruction of the *Graf Spee*.

In this policy there was implicit the belief that, whatever the course of war in Europe, the territorial and strategic *status quo* in the Americas was not in danger. The Roosevelt administration and American public opinion did not, indeed, display indifference to the results of the war, but it was possible to believe before May, 1940, that 'river stay away from my door' was a practical policy.

European Possessions in the Western Hemisphere

The collapse of France made a long neglected aspect of the Monroe Doctrine suddenly come to the front. Were the spoils of France to include French possessions in the western hemisphere? The American chargé d'affaires informed the German government that the U.S.A. 'would not recognize any transfer of a geographical region of the Western Hemisphere from one non-American power to another non-American power'. The German reply was not comforting; it pointed out that the Monroe Doctrine so interpreted 'would amount to conferring upon some European countries the right to possess territories in the Western Hemisphere and not to other European countries'. The American reply, in effect, agreed that this

was so; the Monroe Doctrine accepted the *status quo* of 1823, but that was all. It opposed any change in the existing territorial system of the western hemisphere as far as it affected the territories of European powers and it was designed to 'make impossible any further extension to this hemisphere of any non-American system of government imposed from without'. Germany would not be allowed to step into the shoes of France, first because European powers were regarded as mere life-tenants of their American holdings, with no powers of transfer and no non-American heirs, and because the potential heir of France, in this case, was not merely geographically but politically alien to America. Both the territorial and the ideological sides of the Doctrine barred German acquisitions in the Americas.

A generation before, the United States might have undertaken to impose this ban by her own strength alone. But although now stronger, absolutely at least, she preferred to develop the 'good-neighbour' policy, and to associate in a common policy all the American republics. So the Act of Havana (29 July 1940) provided that 'when American islands or areas at present held by non-American nations are in danger of becoming the subject-matter of exchange of territories or sovereignty, the American republics, having in mind the security of the continent and the opinion of the inhabitants of such islands or areas, may establish regions of provisional administration'. There were provisions for the establishment of an 'emergency committee' to decide on action, but with a prudent regard for the speed of events it was laid down that 'if necessity for emergency action be deemed so urgent as to make it impossible to await action of the committee, any of the American republics, individually or jointly with others, shall have the right to act in a manner required for its defence or the defence of the continent'. And as an indication of the abandonment by the United States of any aggressive tendencies she may

have had in the past, it was laid down that as 'the peoples of this continent have a right to self-determination, such territories shall either be organized into autonomous territories, should they appear capable of constituting or maintaining themselves in such a state, or be reinstated to the former situation'.

Destroyers exchanged for Bases

This self-denying ordinance was not enough for some ardent spirits who demanded the immediate seizure of European possessions in the West Indies as payment of the defaulted war debts or on general grounds of safety first. The American government and public opinion refused to imitate Hitler. But the dangers implicit in the situation were not wholly met by a declared readiness to prevent the seizure of Martinique. For the effective defence of the western hemisphere necessitated the use of the outer bastions of the continents. Fortunately for the United States, all these bastions were in the hands of nations either at war with Germany (Britain and Holland), or occupied by Germany and helpless (like Denmark and France).¹ These powers could not resist American demands and, in the case of Britain and Holland, had not the slightest wish to do so.

The acceptance from Britain of the right to build bases in British territory in return for the transfer of fifty American destroyers was a legitimate development of American policy. The fortification of West Indian bases was to the advantage of the United States and so was the transfer of the destroyers, for they increased British power of resistance and so, at the lowest estimate, gave the United States time to prepare her new defensive positions. But it was significant that the transfer was made by presidential action, without consultation of either house of

¹ I have treated Greenland as politically part of the West Indies and ignored the legally worthless protests of the Copenhagen Government against the agreement made in Washington in 1941 by the Danish minister.

Congress. Critics of the transfer who confined their criticism to this point, revealed their pedantry rather than their wisdom, for no one doubted that the American people wanted the transfer or that if it were put up to Congress, the will of the people would only be carried out after a long and dangerous delay. More substantial was the criticism which insisted that the transfer was an unneutral act. By American precedent it was. If it was a breach of neutrality for the British government to allow a private shipbuilding firm surreptitiously to build a warship for the South in the Civil War, what was it for the American government openly to transfer fifty of its own warships? But it was realised that neutrality in the old sense was gone; without any formal breach with Germany, the United States was aiding Germany's enemies. Whether this was or was not a belligerent act would depend, not on American, but on German policy—and German policy would ignore American actions as long as it suited German interests and German needs.

It is generally realized in the United States that until the 'two-ocean' navy is built (which will not be before 1946), the power of the United States to implement the Monroe Doctrine is limited. It is also realized that fleet-building is a game that two can play at, and that Hitler, in undisturbed command of the resources of Europe, could, with his Japanese partner, outbuild the United States. The Roosevelt administration and the majority of the American people accept this truth and draw the conclusion that Hitler must not be allowed to get undisturbed command of the resources of Europe, above all of Britain. They support, that is, the extension of aid to Britain to carry on the war against Hitlerism as at worst the buying of time and at best the buying of relief from this nightmare. But although most isolationists deny the danger, some are more candid and consistent. They admit that, faced with a victorious Axis, the United States could not help China, or the Dutch East Indies, or even the great

republics of South America. The United States would be forced to retire within her new island barriers, make the great economic readjustments necessary and, armed to the teeth, make of North America a new ark, waiting if necessary for generations before it would be possible to send out the dove of peace and get something back other than a heavy bomber.

The United States and the World Crisis

In their attitude to the developing crisis in Europe, the American people revealed their belief that history could and did repeat itself, but that it could be prevented from doing so by skilful legislation. Over all American foreign policy, from 1920 to 1933, lay the shadow of the national disillusionment with the results of the war fought to 'make the world safe for democracy'. Being human, the American people did not assess very objectively the share their own refusal to enter the League of Nations had in this break-down. They were easily made victims of the same type of German propaganda against the territorial settlement that had so great a success with the sentimental and ignorant of all classes in Britain. They were also impressed by the more reasonable criticism that was directed against the economic results of the Peace of Versailles—and, at the same time, reluctant to see that by putting a stop to immigration, by going back to a system of high tariffs and by insisting on the payment of Europe's debts, the United States was contributing at least as much to the economic misery and so to the political instability of Europe as the peace-makers of Versailles had done.

Not only did the United States refuse to enter the League, she refused (or the Senate refused to permit her) to join the World Court, despite the recommendations of every President from Harding to Roosevelt. Not until the Roosevelt administration came to office in 1933 did she even risk joining the International Labour Office.

The War Debts

One of the chief links uniting America to the post-war Europe was that of the war debts. Altogether, the United States lent its associates nearly \$13,000,000,000, a sum whose psychological importance may be grasped when it is remembered that it is more than thirteen times the total American national debt when the United States entered the war in 1917. No attempt was ever made to collect the whole sum, or to exact interest rates on an actuarial basis. Congress authorized the negotiation of separate debt settlements with the various countries involved, settlements based on ability to pay, a statesman-like move which had, from the point of view of Britain, the awkward consequence that she had to pay interest on 80% of her debt, while, at the other extreme, Italy had only to pay on 25% of her debt. Nor was this all, Britain was a debtor of the United States but a creditor of the other Allies and, of course, a creditor of Germany for reparations. To British public opinion it seemed plain that all these debts were linked, politically and economically, if not legally. This point of view was put forward in the unfortunately worded Balfour Note of 1922 which tentatively offered to forgive British debtors provided that we were forgiven our debts. The Balfour note was angrily received in America as an attempt to impose the odium of debt-collecting on the United States. The American attitude, summed up in the famous words of President Coolidge, 'they hired the money, didn't they?' was taken in Britain to show American ignorance of the true nature of international trade and international debt and, especially, the difference between debts arising from genuine commercial transactions and those arising from so completely uneconomic an enterprise as war.

The war debt settlement, based as it was on sixty-two yearly payments, was as unrealistic as any other part of the post-war settlement could be said to be. It assumed a

political and economic fixity which the extraordinary changes in the price-level, if nothing else, made it impossible to believe in. Indeed, while the last war-debt agreements were being made, the United States was indirectly sponsoring the first of the revisions of the economic terms of Versailles, called, after the American ambassador in London, the Dawes Plan. Five years later another and 'final' readjustment was again made which bore the name of its chief American sponsor, the Young Plan. Nor was this all. Although the average American did not understand what was happening, American capital was financing the recovery of Europe or, more specifically, the recovery of Germany, which borrowed in the United States all the money she paid as reparations and a good deal more. Other countries borrowed too.

In effect, the payments made by Europe, whether for war or commercial debts, were transformed into new loans to Europe until the boom and smash of 1929, by cutting off supplies from America, brought about the economic collapse of Germany. This became evident, and President Hoover took the bold step in 1931 of offering a suspension of the current year's war-debt payments for a suspension of the reparations payments for the same period. This lifebelt was grasped at with eagerness by Britain and Germany, with less enthusiasm by France, and all European powers knew that reparations payments, once suspended, would never be resumed. This truth was admitted by the European creditors of Germany, but with an election coming no American President or presidential candidate could admit the corollary, evident to all Europeans, that it was politically impossible for the late associates of the United States to go on paying interest on the war debts while the late enemy of the United States was excused all reparations payments.

Under various disguises, the European debtors of the United States ceased to pay, and American opinion was further confirmed in its judgement that power politics was

a game in which it was bound to be swindled. The last chance of restoring the old economic order in Europe, the Economic Conference of 1933, was destroyed by the refusal of the new Roosevelt administration to consent to a general currency stabilization, and, with that refusal, the last tie binding America to Europe's troubles seemed to have been cut. The Johnson Act of 1934, forbidding the raising of public or private loans in the United States by the defaulting war debt powers, was intended not only as a rebuke, but as a proof that, at last, the United States had got free from the results of 'entangling alliances'.

America and Hitler

But the world in which this policy was realistic was already dead. Herr Hitler came into office two months before Mr. Roosevelt. From the beginning American opinion saw the Hitler regime as it was. It was not misled (as British opinion was) by the testimony of doubtless well-meaning persons who were able to see the bright side of the darkness that had descended on Germany. The basic German doctrine of race loyalty was seen to be profoundly dangerous for a country so mixed in origin as America. If people of German or Italian origin owed a special loyalty and duty to the country of their birth or ancestry, the internal security of the United States was threatened. Nor was the true character of the Nazi regime easily hidden from a people that had its own gangsters. At the most, the American 'appeasers' argued that it was foolish to ignore the fact that Hitler was there and seemed likely to stay; a prudent business man in Chicago in 1930 had to deal with Al Capone; no nation could afford to keep too tender a conscience. Yet even this view was not widely popular and its exponents found their motives misunderstood—or understood.

American opinion was bitterly hostile to Hitler, but at first not willing to do much about it. For, to the American, the case was simple. Largely thanks to American

aid, the western powers had secured overwhelming military superiority over Germany as a result of the first world war. Now that Germany was palpably threatening to renew the war, why not act while there was yet time?

As it became more and more evident that the western powers would not act while there was yet time, American opinion became pre-occupied with the problem of how to keep America out of the war that was coming. Mr. Roosevelt tried to prevent or delay, by diplomatic pressure, the outbreak of war; Congress tried by legislation to prevent America getting into war if it came.

As is usual in human affairs, the motives for this policy were mixed. Much was due to the human reluctance to endure the risks and losses of another war. Although by European standards, American losses in the last world war had been slight, they had occurred far from home and for a cause which the results of the war seemed to show had been betrayed. The world had not been made safe for democracy.

Isolationism and Neutrality Legislation

Propagandists, most of them honest and zealous, some of them emotionally or personally linked with the German cause or with the minority which had opposed entrance into the last war, helped to spread the view not only that America and the world had gained nothing from the last war, but that the ostensible motives for American intervention were not the real ones. A Senate committee investigating the munitions industry not only discredited the 'Merchants of Death' who were still active, but attempted to show that it was as a result of the activities of the munitions industry between 1914 and 1917 that America had been led to the disastrous step of intervention in a quarrel which was none of hers. It was the contention of Senator Nye that one of the main causes of American intervention was the creation of a great vested interest in Allied victory. The great crime of the Wilson

administration had been to allow American industry to become geared up to the Allied war machine. If the United States had not entered the war in 1917, so the argument ran, the Allies would have been unable to continue their purchases and there would have been an immediate and catastrophic slump. That this consideration had any effect on Wilson's policy in the critical months before the final breach with Germany is not only not proved but, as far as a negative can be proved, is disproved. But it should be noted that side by side with a warm and, sometimes, sentimental appreciation of moral ideas, there is present in the American mind a kind of moral diffidence. To admit that the United States entered the last war for non-material interests would be to admit that the United States is often not narrowly realist in her attitudes, and many Americans would rather appear as dupes or cynics than as crusaders. Finally, it was to the interest of those parties and sections which wished to cause America to withdraw from European commitments to belittle the moral claims of the cause for which the United States fought in 1917 and 1918.

A practical consequence of this 'hard-boiled' view of the cause of American intervention in 1917 was the adoption of legislative policies that were designed to prevent America being dragged into a new war by the same forces that, it was asserted, had dragged her into the last world war.

If law laid down in advance that America should not supply belligerents with munitions, European powers would not be encouraged to fight by the thought that they could draw on America, and America would be saved, in advance, from the temptation of the fairy gold of munitions profits. Legislation beginning in 1935 and given final form in 1937 imposed an embargo on the export of munitions when war broke out. Combined with the Johnson Act of 1934, which forbade public or private loans to countries defaulting on their war debts to the

United States, this legislation was designed to keep America out of war as far as destroying financial interest in the success of one belligerent could do so. It ignored, of course, the serious financial interest that the United States might have in the victory of one belligerent rather than the other, quite apart from war loans or munitions contracts.

It was not this consideration, however, that shook American faith in this legislation. The Spanish Civil War provided the first test and, although the original legislation did not deal with civil wars, the Roosevelt administration, following a British lead, induced Congress to amend the law to apply the embargo to Spain. This was an administration triumph that later plagued the victors, but it was significant that some of the warmest supporters of the general arms embargo did not wish it applied to Spain. More serious was the growing realization that a great crisis was coming in Europe or had, in fact, begun. The mass of American opinion was in favour of 'standing up to Hitler', was opposed to appeasement, was highly critical of the Munich policy, and yet it was realized that the readiness of the western powers to stand up to Hitler was likely to be greatly increased if they could be sure that they could rely on their superior naval and financial strength to draw supplies, especially aircraft, from the United States.

The Roosevelt administration made a determined effort in the summer of 1939 to secure the repeal of the embargo but unsuccessfully. Many Senators preferred to believe Senator Borah when he asserted that his information, which was better than that of the President, showed that there would be no war.

The 'Cash and Carry' Policy

When war came, the President imposed the embargo and again appealed to Congress for an alteration of the law. After a lengthy and bitter debate, the Administra-

tion scored a victory, but not an unconditional victory. The new neutrality law was designed, said a wit, 'to keep the United States out of the war of 1914'. It allowed the export of arms but on rigorous conditions. Before they could be delivered to the European purchaser, every American claim on them must have been extinguished. This was the so-called 'cash and carry' policy. Munitions had to be paid for in cash (and the purchasing governments under the Johnson act could not borrow). More than that, no American ship could sail with any kind of cargo to ports in the belligerent countries and the President was authorized to extend the prohibited zone by naming 'combat areas'. Technically neutral ports close to the actual belligerents were thus debarred to American shipping. On the other hand, some technically belligerent ports in America, Africa and Asia were not debarred to American ships though they were not to carry munitions to them.¹

American ships, since they would be kept out of areas where fighting was going on, would be safe from attack. American citizens in general were debarred from travelling on belligerent ships. So, it was asserted, American ships and American citizens would not be sunk or drowned and the 'incidents' that had given a moral covering to the economic commitments of the munition industry of 1914-1917 could not occur.

Against this was set the new freedom to export munitions in belligerent vessels, a change in the law of the United States which certain legal purists held was profoundly unneutral. But this charge had no great effect on the American public mind, for in 1939, unlike 1914, the vast majority of the American people made up their minds at once. Germany was the aggressor. A German defeat was to the interest of the United States and the world. In 1914, President Wilson had asked the American people to

¹ Certain Canadian ports were excluded from this relaxation of the ban.

be neutral in thought as well as in action. President Roosevelt made no such appeal in 1939; neither he nor the majority of the American people concealed their preferences or their hopes.

Yet some illusions survived the outbreak of the war. Its early character enabled the isolationists who had declared that there would be no war, to declare that this was a 'phoney' war. The invasion of Norway, followed by the invasion of Holland, was a great shock to many Americans, who had believed that neutrality was a happy state to which any nation could attain by wishing for it. It had long been asserted that in the last war, Holland and Norway had shown that, by a rigid neutrality, it was possible to stay out of war. Each new aggression by Hitler, down to and including the invasion of Russia, drove deeper home the truth that neutrality was a state that lasted as long as it suited Germany and not a day longer.

Support to the Democracies

But even more important than the destruction of the legal house of cards of neutrality was the collapse of the strategic house of cards of American immunity. The majority of the American people not only wanted the Allies to win, but expected them to win. The collapse of France suddenly brought them face to face with the disturbing possibility of a Hitlerized Europe. It was under the threat of this event that they accepted peacetime conscription, that they disregarded the protests of the purists against the transfer of destroyers to Great Britain in return for the right to fortify bases on British West Indian islands, that public opinion forced Mr. Wendell Willkie on the Republican party as its presidential candidate, and that breaking one of the most sacred of American political traditions, President Roosevelt was elected for a third term.

Once re-elected, President Roosevelt cut loose from the

timid legalities of the neutrality legislation and in his 'lease-and-lend' policy accepted the fact that the defence of Britain was the defence of America. Industrial production was speeded up, greater and greater power over the national life was taken, more and more the American people revealed its willingness to take whatever measures were necessary to defeat Hitlerism. They still shrink from war, but they realize that the decision as to war and peace is not necessarily in their hands, that at any time war may be thrust on them by the ruler of Germany. And they realize that now, as much as in the crisis of the Civil War, on their action it depends whether 'government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth'.