

H-Diplo | ISSF

Roundtable, Volume V, No. 4 (2013)



A production of H-Diplo with the journals *Security Studies*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and the International Studies Association's Security Studies Section (ISSS).

<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF> | <http://www.issforum.org>

H-Diplo/ISSF Editors: **James McAllister** and **Diane Labrosse**

H-Diplo/ISSF Web and Production Editor: **George Fujii**

Commissioned for H-Diplo by **James McAllister**

Introduction by **James McAllister**

H-Diplo/ISSF Exchange on “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” [an H-Diplo | ISSF Roundtable]

Published by H-Diplo/ISSF on **17 May 2013** [Baldwin Comment append 20 May 2013]

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-5-4.pdf>

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Copyright © 2013 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online..... | 1 |
| Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College | 2 |
| “Dan Reiter and America’s Road to War in 1941” by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California, Los Angeles | 5 |
| “World War or No War,” by David Kaiser, Williams College | 41 |
| “Democracy, Deception, and IR Theory” by John Schuessler, Air War College | 45 |
| “Response to Trachtenberg, Schuessler, and Kaiser” by Dan Reiter, Emory University | 48 |
| Comment from David A. Baldwin, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University | 64 |

Copyright © 2013 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu

Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College

H-Diplo/ISSF is honored to present a special and very unique exchange on the issue of “Democracy, Deception and Entry into War.” The editors would particularly like to express their great appreciation to Marc Trachtenberg for allowing us to publish his extended essay “Dan Reiter and America’s Road to War in 1941,” as well as to David Kaiser, Dan Reiter, and John Schuessler for their thoughtful contributions to this important debate. One could not ask for a better demonstration of the benefits of productive exchange and debate among historians and political scientists.

The origins of the current debate can be traced to a lengthy chapter in Marc Trachtenberg’s 2006 book, *The Craft of International History*.¹ To illustrate the practical side of how graduate students in both history and political science could go about the task of studying international politics, Trachtenberg looked at how scholars had explained Franklin D. Roosevelt’s policies towards Germany and Japan in 1941. Noting that scholars still disagreed on many fundamental questions, Trachtenberg argued that FDR’s policies in 1941 toward Japan should be understood as a “backdoor” strategy for getting America involved in “the far more important problem of the European war” (122). Putting the words ‘backdoor’ and ‘Roosevelt’ in the same sentence understandably conjures up unfortunate associations with revisionist historians like Charles Beard and Charles Tansill, but it was obvious that Trachtenberg’s argument was by no means an effort to validate or endorse their larger moral and strategic assertions about Roosevelt and American entry into the Second World War. In his view, however, the “absurd and baseless” charge that Roosevelt arranged for American forces to be attacked at Pearl Harbor “does not mean that the more general argument about Roosevelt possibly using the East Asian situation as a way of bringing America into the European war is not worth taking seriously.”²

Trachtenberg’s arguments concerning FDR’s backdoor strategy and American entry into war were adopted and extended by John Schuessler in a 2010 article in the journal *International Security*.³ FDR’s dilemma was that he had promised the American people that he would stay out of the war while personally believing that America had no choice but to enter the war. For Schuessler, deception was the only way out of this dilemma and it was for this reason that FDR “maneuvered the country in the direction of open hostilities while assuring a wary public that the United States would remain at peace.”⁴ Where Beard and Tansill condemned the President for such maneuvering and deception, Schuessler argued

¹ Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006).

² *Ibid.*, 123.

³ John Schuessler, “The Deception Dividend: FDR’s Undeclared War,” *International Security* 34, no.4 (Spring 2010), 133-165.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

that Roosevelt's use of deception was quite consistent with American national interests. In his view, the realist Hans Morgenthau was exactly right in suggesting that a "tragic choice often confronts those responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs. They must either sacrifice what they consider good policy upon the altar of public opinion, or by devious means gain popular support for policies whose true nature they conceal from the public."⁵

The Trachtenberg-Schuessler argument about Roosevelt and American entry has not gone unchallenged. In a recent article in the journal *Security Studies*, Dan Reiter vehemently rejects the revival of backdoor arguments on both historical and theoretical grounds.⁶ In his view, the historical evidence supporting the backdoor thesis is no more compelling now than it was in the late 1940's or early 1950's. In contrast to Trachtenberg and Schuessler, Reiter argues that Roosevelt was not deceptive and acted in accordance within the constraints of American popular opinion. He pulled back from provoking Germany and "elected not to inflame public hostility to Germany in five different naval episodes."⁷ While Roosevelt's policies towards Japan were indeed belligerent, Reiter argues that their purpose was to deter and coerce Japan from expansionism rather than provoke it to war against the United States.⁸ For Reiter, an examination of Roosevelt's policies is of far greater importance than simply setting the historical record straight: in his view, the 1941 case provides strong support for liberal institutionalist theories of international relations and contradicts the Realist approach defended by Trachtenberg and Schuessler.

To expect that such major historical and theoretical questions will be resolved in this forum, of course, is quite unrealistic. As several of the participants note, there are still many historical and theoretical questions relevant to this debate that demand further research and theoretical refinement. It is also true, as David Kaiser points out, that there are many other factors outside of this debate that need to be considered in assessing American entry into the Second World War. But one cannot help but be encouraged by the productive and respectful tone of the current debate over Roosevelt, deception, and American entry into the Second World War; the areas of agreement and nuanced differences among the contributors are as important as the areas of dispute. This is certainly not a quality that marked earlier debates between Beard, Tansill and their many critics. Indeed, if there is one thing that all of the participants in this debate can seemingly agree on, it is a fundamental admiration for the qualities of Roosevelt's political leadership and astuteness in 1941.

⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶ Dan Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War," *Security Studies* 21, no.4 (November 2012), 594-623. For an earlier exchange between Reiter and Schuessler, see their letters published in *International Security* 35, no.2 (Fall 2010), 176-185.

⁷ Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War," 606.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 615-621.

Participants:

Marc Trachtenberg, an historian by training, is currently a professor of political science at UCLA. He got his Ph.D. at Berkeley in 1974, and then taught in the history department at the University of Pennsylvania for 26 years before moving back to California twelve years ago. He has written a number of books and articles dealing mainly with twentieth-century international politics, most notably *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*, which came out in 1999. His book *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* appeared in 2006 and his collection of essays, *The Cold War and After: History, Theory, and the Logic of International Politics*, was published last year.

Dan Reiter, Ph.D., is professor of political science at Emory University. He is the author of *How Wars End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), winner of the 2009-2010 American Political Science Association Conflict Processes Best Book Award. He is also author or coauthor of many books and articles on international relations and American foreign policy, including coauthor with Allan C. Stam of *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

James McAllister is Professor of Political Science at Williams College. He is the author of *No Exit: America and the German Problem* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) and several articles on various aspects of the Vietnam War.

David Kaiser, a historian, is the author of six books, including *Politics and War: European Conflict from Philip II to Hitler* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990) and *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000). He has taught at Harvard University, Carnegie Mellon University, the Naval War College, and Williams College, where he currently holds the Stanley Kaplan Chair in Leadership Studies.

John Schuessler, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Strategy at the Air War College. His principal research and teaching interests lie at the intersection of international relations theory, security studies, and diplomatic history. He is currently writing on why leaders in democracies have resorted to deception to sell wars to their publics. His article on the topic, "The Deception Dividend: FDR's Undeclared War," appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of *International Security*. He has also co-authored (with Sebastian Rosato) an article on "A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States" which appeared in the December 2011 issue of *Perspectives on Politics*.

“Dan Reiter and America’s Road to War in 1941” by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California, Los Angeles

Many scholars have argued that democratic institutions have a profound effect on the way democracies conduct themselves in the international arena, but few works in this area have generated as much interest as Dan Reiter’s and Allan Stam’s book *Democracies at War*.¹ The core argument there was very clear. Democracies tend to win the wars they fight, according to Reiter and Stam, because their leaders would lose power if they did not do what the voters wanted; the voters would punish leaders who take the country into a war it would lose, or even into a war that might “drag on for too long,” so those wars tend not to get fought.² “The will of the people,” Reiter and Stam argued, “restrains democratic leaders and helps prevent them from initiating foolhardy or risky wars”; the wars they do start, however, tend to be wars they can win, because they are inclined to “pick on relatively weaker target states.”³ And a big part of the reason why they are able to “select themselves” into wars where winning is relatively easy, the argument ran, is that they “produce better estimates of the probability of victory than their autocratic counterparts do.”⁴ Indeed, in democracies “the vigorous discussion of alternatives and open dissemination of information” make for better foreign policy in general, and even within the government, flawed policies are more likely to be exposed because toadyism is much less of a problem for democracies than it is for other sorts or regimes.⁵ But what goes on within governments is ultimately of secondary importance. Power lies essentially with the people, and a policy that looks toward war is viable only if the people support it: “Democratic decisions for war are determined and constrained by public consent,” and to “generate consent” the government has to make its case in the “open marketplace of ideas.”⁶ The ability of democratic governments to circumvent that process by controlling the flow of information is, in their view, quite limited. Indeed, as they themselves point out, their argument rests on the assumption that “consent cannot be easily manufactured by democratic leaders,” since if leaders could “manipulate public opinion into supporting military ventures, then of course public opinion would provide little constraint on democratic foreign policy.”⁷

¹ Dan Reiter and Alan Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 4-9; Dan Reiter and Alan Stam, “Understanding Victory: Why Political Institutions Matter,” *International Security* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2003), 168. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137580>

⁴ Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 23. For the notion of countries “selecting themselves into” wars, see *ibid.*, 10, 11, 138.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 144 (for the quotation), 146, 160, 162, 193.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

Does this argument stand up in the light of the evidence? Soon after the book came out in 2002, a number of scholars criticized some of the key points Reiter and Stam had made, and this led to a lively debate conducted mainly in the journal *International Security*. But those critics were not primarily interested in examining Reiter's and Stam's assumptions about democratic governments not being able to pursue policies that the public does not support or about the non-manipulability of public opinion. Their real concerns lay elsewhere. Although they sometimes alluded to the arguments advanced by Reiter and Stam about the "marketplace of ideas" and about the government not being able to mislead the public on major issues, they seemed more interested in examining certain other issues that Reiter and Stam had dealt with, most notably the question of the relationship between military effectiveness and regime type.⁸

So it was not until John Schuessler published his article "The Deception Dividend: FDR's Undeclared War" in *International Security* in 2010 that the whole question of a government's ability to do what it wants without first making sure the public approves of its policy became a focus of discussion. Schuessler's argument was framed in very moderate terms. He said he was not really challenging the basic Reiter and Stam "selection effects" argument, and that he was just interested in trying to understand what happens

⁸ See especially Michael C. Desch, "Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters," *International Security* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2002), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v027/27.2desch.pdf, and Michael C. Desch, *Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). A reply to Desch's article, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v028/28.1reiter.pdf, by Reiter and Stam and Desch's rejoinder, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v028/28.1desch.pdf, appeared in the Summer 2003 issue of that journal. Note also Risa A. Brooks, "Making Military Might: Why Do States Fail and Succeed? A Review Essay," *International Security* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2003), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v028/28.2brooks.pdf, and Stephen Biddle and Stephen Long, "Democracy and Military Effectiveness: A Deeper Look," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 4 (August 2004), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/4149807.pdf>. One of the most interesting contributions during this phase of the debate was also by far the shortest: Kenneth Waltz's letter to the editor, *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/04), 181, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v028/28.3waltz.pdf. If the claim made by Reiter and Stam about democracies being good at choosing victims they can defeat were true, Waltz wrote, this would tell "us something frightening about the behavior of democratic countries: namely, that they excel at fighting and winning unnecessary wars." Five years later another important article appeared: Alexander B. Downes, "How Smart and Tough Are Democracies?: Reassessing Theories of Democratic Victory in War," *International Security* 33, no. 4 (Spring 2009), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v033/33.4.downes.pdf. A reply by Reiter and Stam and Downes's rejoinder were published in the Fall 2009 issue of that journal under the title "Another Skirmish in the Battle over Democracies and War," http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v034/34.2.reiter.pdf. Many of these pieces were reprinted in Michael E. Brown et al., *Do Democracies Win Their Wars? An International Security Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). Up to that point, the issues we are interested in here (i.e., deception, secrecy, the manipulation of opinion, and so on) were not the focus of discussion. But in a July 2011 H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable (vol. 2, no. 12), <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-2-12.pdf>, Reiter, Desch, and Downes did pay more attention to those issues.

when the selection effect breaks down—that is, in what happens “when leaders are drawn toward wars where an easy victory is anything but assured” and many people would prefer not to go to war.⁹ His answer was that governments in those cases could resort to deception in order to get people to go along with a policy they would not have supported if the issue had been put to them in an honest and straightforward way. “Rather than press their case in the marketplace of ideas under such unfavorable circumstances,” he wrote, “leaders will be tempted to preempt debate by shifting blame for hostilities onto the adversary. The trick is to prepare domestic opinion for a possible, and even probable, war while providing firm assurances that it will come only as a last resort and only when the other side forces the issue.”¹⁰ A strategy of deception could thus allow a leader to bridge the gap between what is considered necessary for basic power political reasons and what the country as a whole is prepared to sanction.

To show that a strategy of that sort could sometimes work, Schuessler looked at U.S. policy in the period before Pearl Harbor. His analysis of American policy at that time, he said, supported his core argument. Although President Franklin D. Roosevelt “was sensitive to the domestic mood and waited until public consent was forthcoming to ask for an official declaration of war,” there was, he argued, “compelling evidence that Roosevelt settled on a war policy well before Pearl Harbor and that in the interim he engaged in a significant amount of deception, maneuvering the country in the direction of open hostilities while assuring a wary public that the United States would remain at peace.”¹¹

Schuessler was thus taking issue with the Reiter and Stam argument in some fairly fundamental ways, and Reiter responded first with a long letter to the editor of *International Security* and then with the *Security Studies* article we are concerned with here.¹² In that article, Reiter presents a detailed and systematic critique of the deception argument. His basic claim is that “elected leaders are deterred from deceiving because they recognize that if an attempt at deception is exposed, then they will suffer heavy domestic political costs.” Those attempts, he believes, are likely to be exposed because of the existence of certain institutions found in democratic countries: the “marketplace of ideas,” “a professional military and government bureaucracy,” and a political system in which two or more parties compete for power. And since “elected leaders are deterred from engaging

⁹ John Schuessler, “The Deception Dividend: FDR’s Undeclared War,” *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010), 133, 138, 142, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v034/34.4.schuessler.pdf.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 145; see also 149, 153.

¹² For Reiter’s letter and Schuessler’s reply, see *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 176-85, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v035/35.2.reiter.pdf. Reiter’s new article, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” was published in *Security Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>.

in deception,” he argues, “they cannot circumvent public opinion constraints.”¹³ Those general arguments are supported by a detailed discussion of U.S. policy in the pre-Pearl Harbor period.

In developing that argument, Reiter was not just trying to refute the basic claims Schuessler had made. He also referred to various arguments I had made about U.S. policy in 1941, and which Schuessler in fact had drawn on.¹⁴ Both Schuessler and I had claimed, he wrote, that Roosevelt “wanted American entry into war in 1941, saw the public as hesitant, and secretly provoked Germany and Japan, hoping to circumvent the constraints of public opinion and cause war between the United States and these two powers.” With regard to Germany, we had claimed “that Roosevelt engaged in secretly provocative naval policies in the Atlantic, hoping to spark a naval clash between America and Germany, providing the American public with a casus belli.” With regard to Japan, we had claimed that “Roosevelt restricted the sale of oil to Japan in July 1941, knowing that such an action would trigger a Japanese attack.” But in neither case did he find much evidence to support those arguments. “Roosevelt’s policies toward Germany,” he believes, “were public, popular, and restrained” and Roosevelt’s policies toward Japan “were public, popular, and belligerent, and aimed to deter rather than provoke.”¹⁵

What is to be made of Reiter’s argument in this article? One can begin by looking at some of his more general claims. He is willing to admit that “leaders might be motivated to

¹³ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 595; see also 601-603.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>

¹⁴ Those arguments were laid out in Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 4, <http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/chap4.pdf>. I had also discussed these issues in my article “Preventive War and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies*, 16:1 (January-March 2007), 22-29, <http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/pw%28SecStud%29.pdf>, and in a piece I wrote for H-Diplo/ISSF on the Schuessler article in 2010 (ISSF article review no. 3), <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR3.pdf>. A number of messages dealing with the issues raised in the Schuessler article and in my H-Diplo/ISSF review were posted in H-Diplo in April 2010 (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=H-Diplo&user=&pw=&month=1004>). See especially Dan Reiter April 15 post ([link](#)); John Schuessler April 20 post ([link](#)); Warren Kimball April 13 post ([link](#)); my April 20 reply (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-diplo&month=1004&week=c&msg=UkzLqap8gTpr1yqiSEnCzA&user=&pw=>); Alonzo Hamby April 26 post (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=1004&week=d&msg=oSPo0Su0CcRo0cF%2bkx%2bnqg&user=&pw=>); and my April 28 reply (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=1004&week=e&msg=GZdxbhidOF5%2bVGCLAh1zeQ&user=&pw=>). <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=1004&week=e&msg=GZdxbhidOF5%2bVGCLAh1zeQ&user=&pw=> should note that the chapter in the methods book is not a normal historical analysis. The goal there was basically to give some sense for the process involving both reasoning and empirical work through which an historical interpretation takes shape.

¹⁵ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 595-97,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>; see also 621-22.

deceive,” but thinks they are “deterred from engaging in deception” because they know there is a good chance their deceptions would be exposed and they would “suffer heavy political losses.”¹⁶ But one has to look at both sides of the ledger. One has to look not just at the potential price, but also at the potential benefit; the decision about whether to adopt deceptive tactics would depend on how they stack up against each other. And potential costs might be more limited than Reiter would have us believe. Indeed, it is precisely because leaders know they might have to pay a big price at home if they get caught misleading the public that they have a great incentive to take measures that reduce the risk that they will get caught (or the price they would pay if they do get caught). They can, for example, limit the number of people who understand what the real policy is.¹⁷ And in fact a U.S. president can conceivably keep his real thinking to himself. Roosevelt especially tended to keep his own counsel, and, as many scholars point out, this is one of the reasons why it is so hard to know for sure exactly what he was up to.¹⁸

In any event, one cannot simply assume that “members of the opposition have access to information about secret foreign policy actions.”¹⁹ They may have access to some information, but rarely do they know everything—and key information is kept from them in large part because the government knows they may leak it. And one cannot simply assume that in democracies the civilian bureaucracy and the armed services are “more likely to be staffed by competent professionals” more loyal to the nation than to the particular government they serve, and thus are more likely than their equivalents in non-democratic regimes to speak out when they disapprove of the policies the government is pursuing.²⁰ For one thing, in what sense are bureaucracies and military establishments more “professional” in democratic states than in similar countries with a different sort of political regime? In what sense, for example, was the French military more “professional”

¹⁶ Ibid., 595, 601.

¹⁷ One of the main purposes of the security classification system is to keep the public from seeing what the government is actually up to. It is not just to keep adversaries from getting hold of the information contained in classified documents. This is proven by the fact that the records of major U.S.-Soviet meetings, like John Kennedy’s meeting with Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna in June 1961, are generally kept secret for many years. The Soviets knew what was said, so the reason for the secrecy was obviously that the U.S. government did not want its own people to learn what their president had told the Soviet leader.

¹⁸ Roosevelt, as Warren Kimball notes, “proved consistently reluctant to discuss long-range policy in any but the vaguest and broadest terms even with his Cabinet and advisers”—but of course that doesn’t necessarily mean that he didn’t have a strategy. FDR’s lack of openness, however, is one of the reasons why Kimball, like many historians, finds it so hard to nail down, in any really conclusive way, exactly what FDR’s policy was. See Warren Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease 1939-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 12-13, 165, 231. The point has important methodological implications. It implies that the absence of hard, ‘smoking gun’-type evidence does not necessarily mean that much, and that in interpreting Roosevelt’s policy one has to place greater emphasis on indirect reasoning than one would perhaps like.

¹⁹ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 601.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>

²⁰ Ibid., 602.

before 1914 than its German equivalent? Beyond that, do top civilian officials and high military officers in democracies think it is all right to leak to the press or publicly criticize government policy? Is that what they would mean by professionalism? And finally, one cannot simply assume that the best ideas prevail when issues are debated in public. As George Kennan once noted, “the truth is sometimes a poor competitor in the market place of ideas—complicated, unsatisfying, full of dilemmas, always vulnerable to misinterpretation and abuse.”²¹

But I don’t want to dwell on general issues of this sort. The whole argument here really turns on more concrete historical questions. So what are we to make of what Reiter says about America’s road to war in 1941?

Roosevelt and Germany in 1941

Reiter begins his section on “Roosevelt and Germany in 1941” by paraphrasing one of the basic claims Schuessler and I had made. “Some have argued,” he writes, “that Roosevelt attempted to provoke Germany secretly in 1941 through secretly belligerent naval policies in the Atlantic.” But the evidence, he says, “does not support this claim.” He agrees that Roosevelt wanted to take the country into the war, but says that public opinion placed a limit on how far he could go.²² Roosevelt could not pursue a policy that went beyond what the public would support—a secret naval policy aimed at provoking Hitler—“because of his fear of the domestic political consequences of exposed deception”; “the fear of public reaction to exposed deception deterred him from taking secretly provocative action.”²³ The president, he writes, “understood the importance of remaining transparent and aboveboard”; Roosevelt “described major shifts in US policy publicly”; and the public essentially understood what the Navy was doing.²⁴ Constrained by public opinion, and unable to evade those constraints by pursuing a policy in secret which he knew the public would not support, he therefore pursued a relatively moderate course of action in the Atlantic. “No major naval policies,” he says, “were adopted in secret.”²⁵ The Navy was kept on a short leash. “Though the repeal of the Neutrality Act permitted Roosevelt to send armed US convoys escorted by US Navy vessels across the Atlantic,” Reiter says, “he hesitated even through late November, instead sending unarmed convoys to Britain and Russia.”²⁶ The president thus “constrained rather than increased the provocativeness of US policy,” since he understood that he could not secretly pursue a policy aimed at provoking a

²¹ George Kennan, *American Diplomacy 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 62.

²² Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 607-610.

²³ *Ibid.*, 610, 612; see also 606.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 608, 610.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 613.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 612.

naval incident with Germany, if that policy “exceeded what the public was willing to accept.”²⁷

Schuessler and I would agree with much of this—with the idea that Roosevelt wanted to take the country into the war, and with the point that the president had to worry about public opinion and did not have a free hand to pursue whatever policy he wanted. As Schuessler himself wrote, “Roosevelt was certainly constrained by public opinion in the lead-up to World War II. Otherwise, he would have had no reason to resort to all the maneuverings he did to get the United States into the war.”²⁸ We recognize that the constraints were real, but we think (and this is where we disagree with Reiter) that Roosevelt, to a certain extent, was able to maneuver around them—that he was able to pursue tougher and more provocative policies toward Germany than the public would have sanctioned if the issue had been put to them in an honest and straightforward way. He was able to pursue a policy that the public was not privy to, and said and did things which would have surprised and perhaps even shocked people if they had known about them at the time. And in making that argument we were thinking mostly of the undeclared naval war in the Atlantic and about what the President was secretly saying about it: Roosevelt, in our view, *did* “increase the provocativeness of U.S. policy” in that area in late 1941. He *did* want to provoke Germany into going to war with America—a policy which, however, thanks to Adolf Hitler, did not fully achieve its objectives.

There is only way to get at these issues, and that is to look at what was actually going on in the Atlantic at the time. The basic story here is fairly clear. In the early part of the war, American policy had been fairly passive. The assumption was that Britain and France would be able to hold the line against Germany, so the fall of France in June 1940 came as a shock. It was at that point that Roosevelt made the very fundamental decision, as David Reynolds says, “to back Britain as America’s front line”; the policy he pursued from that point on, which culminated in something “close to an undeclared naval war with Germany” in the fall of 1941, “rolled inexorably from the basic decision” he had made at that time.²⁹ But the President could not move too quickly along that road. Most Americans wanted to keep out of the war and Roosevelt certainly had to take their views into account. This was particularly true in the run-up to the presidential election of November 1940. The Republicans, as Robert Dallek notes, had decided to scare people “with warnings that Roosevelt’s reelection would mean wooden crosses for their sons and brothers and sweethearts”; those charges were effective, and it seemed that the president might lose

²⁷ Ibid., 606, 614.

²⁸ Schuessler letter to the editor, *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 185.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v035/35.2.reiter.pdf

²⁹ David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32; see also 52, 146-47. Other scholars who have studied this period closely make much the same point. See, for example, Andreas Hillgruber, “Der Faktor Amerika in Hitlers Strategie 1938-1941,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (supplement to *Das Parlament*), May 11, 1966, 508-509.

unless he could “demonstrate his commitment to peace.” The result was his famous declaration in his October 30 Boston speech, which Schuessler referred to in his article: “I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.”³⁰ But his real thinking was evolving in a very different direction.

Indeed, even as Roosevelt was promising the country that he would not take it into war, one of his top military advisors, Admiral Harold Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), was working on an important memorandum about strategy, commonly called the ‘Plan Dog’ memorandum. Stark’s basic argument was that America had a vital interest in making sure that Britain survived, that the survival of that country was by no means guaranteed, and that in the absence of “active American military assistance,” Britain might well collapse. Britain, Stark thought, “requires from us very great help in the Atlantic, and possibly even on the continents of Europe or Africa, if she is to be enabled to survive,” and by that Stark meant not just naval assistance. To win the war, a “land offensive against the Axis powers” was essential, and Britain alone could not mount a successful one. The Americans, he wrote, “in addition to sending naval assistance, would also need to send large air and land forces to Europe or Africa, or both, and to participate strongly in this land offensive.”³¹ Stark, it is important to note, was not just laying out a strategy for how the war should be fought if the United States entered it. He was also making an argument about how important it was for America to get involved, indeed ultimately in a fairly massive way. His views could scarcely have been clearer: “It has long been my opinion,” he wrote on October 8, 1941, “that Germany cannot be defeated unless the United States is wholeheartedly in the war and makes a strong military and naval effort wherever strategy dictates.”³²

The important thing to note for our purposes is that the President by no means rejected that way of thinking. It seems, in fact, that Roosevelt, very secretly, made it clear to Stark that he and the Admiral were on the same wavelength on these issues. Roosevelt asked Stark to coordinate the plan with the Army and the State Department, but when the CNO wrote the Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, about this, he would not put down in writing what Roosevelt had said; he told Marshall that he was holding the president’s

³⁰ See Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 249-50.

³¹ Stark memorandum for Secretary of the Navy Knox, November 12, 1940, 4, 17, 24, available online on the FDR Library website, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box4/a48b01.html>. On Plan Dog, see especially 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), 29-34.

³² Stark memorandum for the Secretary of States, October 8, 1941, in U.S. Congress, *Hearings before Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack* (Washington: GPO, 1945-46), part 16, 2217, <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>; henceforth cited in the form “PHA, pt. 16, 2217.”

comments “very tight.”³³ Stark would scarcely have needed to do that if Roosevelt had been evasive or non-committal or if he had simply endorsed the ‘Germany first’ strategy, the strategy for actually fighting the war if the United States got involved, which the Plan Dog memorandum had recommended. If Stark needed to be so secretive, this could only be because what the President had told him was extremely sensitive, and issues related to how the war would be fought if America came in did not fall in that category.³⁴ And Stark’s impression in January 1941 that “we were heading straight for this war” and his comment that personally he did “not see how we could avoid, either having it thrust upon us or of our deliberately going in, many months longer” also suggest that he had reached the conclusion that the president was going to do whatever it took to keep Britain from going under; Stark would not have gotten that impression if Roosevelt had been determined to keep America out of the war.³⁵ In short, one gets the sense that while Roosevelt might not have been totally open with Stark, the two men basically saw things the same way, and that their major difference can be explained by the famous aphorism about where you stand depending on where you sit: as President, Roosevelt naturally placed much greater weight on domestic political considerations than the Chief of Naval Operations did.

Roosevelt’s role in getting staff talks with the British going is another important indicator. Stark’s one explicit recommendation in the Plan Dog memorandum was that “as a preliminary to possible entry of the United States into the conflict, the United States Army and Navy at once undertake secret staff talks on technical matters” with their British, Canadian, and Dutch counterparts.”³⁶ And in fact the staff conversations began in January 1941 and led two months later to an important agreement called ABC-1 on coordinated

³³ See James Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 202, 296 n.12.

³⁴ Even the British were told that Roosevelt supported the “Germany first” idea; the fact that he favored that notion was not so sensitive that it could not be alluded to in writing. There is other evidence that shows that the president accepted at least some aspects of Stark’s thinking. See *ibid.*, 219. Note also Stark to Kimmel, February 10 and April 19, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2147, 2164, <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>.

³⁵ Stark to Kimmel, January 13, 1941, PHA, part 16, 2144, <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>. Stark continued to express views of this sort in March and April, but he was not the only top naval officer who had the sense at this time that war was coming. Admiral King, the new commander of what was first called the Patrol Force and was then renamed the Atlantic Fleet, wrote his officers in January that “we are preparing for—and are now close to—those active operations (commonly called war) which require the exercise and the utilization of the full powers and capabilities of every officer in command status.” King, a tough commander, hard on his men and determined to do whatever was necessary to prepare them for actual combat, was under no illusions about what his appointment to that post meant. “When they get into trouble,” he said at the time, “they send for the sons of bitches.” See Patrick Abbazia, *Mr. Roosevelt’s Navy: The Private War of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, 1939-1942* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 134, 136, 142, and 144-45, and Jerome O’Connor, “FDR’s Undeclared War,” *Naval History* 18, no. 1 (February 2004), http://www.historyarticles.com/new_page_10.htm.

³⁶ Plan Dog memorandum (see n. 31 above), 26.

measures to be taken once America came into the war; in practice, however, ABC-1 also played a certain role in governing policy at the operational level during the pre-Pearl Harbor period.³⁷ For years it was thought that in convening the talks, Stark had acted on his own initiative—Stark, in fact, told a Congressional committee that he had acted on his own—and it was only when the British records were opened in 1972 that scholars were able to see that it was the President himself who had authorized the talks.³⁸ The talks themselves were secret— few Americans even knew about them until the war was over—and Stark actually warned at the time that it “might well be disastrous” if the press found out what was going on.³⁹ “In this estimate,” as James Leutze writes in his important study of the subject, “he was no doubt correct.” The administration was trying at the time to get the Lend-Lease bill through Congress; its opponents doubted that Roosevelt was sincere when he said he wanted to keep the country out of the war. And Roosevelt’s credibility, Leutze points out, “would have been seriously undermined had it been learned that a few blocks from the Capitol British and American officers were making plans for a coalition war.” The gap between what the administration was saying in public and what it was actually doing in the staff talks was quite extraordinary:

While the debate over the bill proceeded in Congress and in the press, the ABC Conference was being conducted in camera at the Navy Department. Time after time the administration contended that Lend-Lease was essential to keep England fighting and America out of the war. On the floor of the Congress and in press conferences, commitments and plans to convoy or send American troops out of the hemisphere were denied repeatedly by

³⁷ On these matters, see Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, chaps. 14 and 15, and Abbazia, *Roosevelt’s Navy*, 139-42. For the text of ABC-1, see PHA, pt. 15, 1485-1550, <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac15unit/pearlharborattac15unit.pdf>. For the role ABC-1 played prior to Pearl Harbor, see esp. Douglas Norton, “The Open Secret: The U.S. Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic, April-December 1941,” *Naval War College Review* 26 (Jan.-Feb. 1974), 65 and 82 n.11, <http://www.usnwc.edu/NavalWarCollegeReviewArchives/1970s/1974%20January-February.pdf>.

“Perhaps the most significant provision” of ABC-1, Norton writes, “was the understanding, as Fleet Admiral King’s memoirs later put it, “. . . that, without declaration of war, the United States Navy would assume responsibility for protecting transatlantic convoys at the ‘earliest practicable date.’” Norton cites two other sources which suggest much the same thing. See also Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 253, and, for documentary evidence, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, *Administrative History of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet in World War II*, vol. 2, *Commander Task Force Twenty-Four*, U.S. Naval Administrative Histories of World War II series, vol. 139 (Washington: Naval History Division, 1946), chap. 3, 56, 63, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Admin-Hist/139-CTF24/CTF24-3.html>. See also Ghormley to British Chiefs of Staff Committee, July 4, 1941, with three-page attachment, and note for Prime Minister, July 8, 1941, both in PREM 3/460/2 at the British National Archives, Kew, and also in *Churchill at War: The Prime Minister’s Office Papers, 1940-1945* (Berkshire, England: Primary Source Media, 1998), microfilm publication, reel 159 (available through interlibrary loan from the Center for Research Libraries).

³⁸ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 203-205. This was subsequently confirmed by evidence from U.S. sources. See Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 35.

³⁹ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 216, 222-23.

administration spokesmen. But at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue the military representatives of that same administration were conducting the first prewar staff conferences in American history and laying plans for convoying, building bases in the British Isles, and replacing British Tommys in Iceland with American GIs.⁴⁰

The point about escorting convoys was of central importance because the warships doing the escorting might be attacked by, or might have to attack, German naval vessels (especially submarines) threatening the convoys. In January, Roosevelt said at a news conference (in Leutze's paraphrase) that he had "no plans to escort supplies to England," but the very "next day he stated—this time, privately—that escorting was probably necessary."⁴¹ Torn between his desire to help the British and his sense for what the American people would accept, he went back and forth on this issue. In mid-March, for example, it seemed that the President was prepared to move ahead quickly: he "directed that the Atlantic Fleet be brought to wartime readiness." A series of measures were to be taken in line with that order; as Stark told the Commander of the Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Ernest King, "this step is, in effect, a war mobilization."⁴² By March 20, plans to escort convoys in the western Atlantic had been worked out. But Roosevelt was not sure that public opinion would support that move or whether Congress, if asked, would give him the authority to do it, so in mid-April he backed off.⁴³

Then in June he decided to send American Marines to Iceland, a move explained to the public as a defensive act, designed to prevent the Germans from stationing forces there that could threaten America. But the U.S. garrison on the island had to be supplied and the supply convoys had to be protected, and Roosevelt was apparently now ready to escort not

⁴⁰ Ibid., 217-18, 223. Leutze's views on the deception question were quite strong. "As has been shown in the previous pages," he wrote in his conclusion, there was "ample evidence to suggest that the president did engage in an elaborate subterfuge that verged on conspiracy. The conspiracy was to conceal from the Congress and the public the true nature of American strategic policy regarding the war and America's role in that conflict." Ibid., 249. This strikes me as a little extreme. The real goal was to present things in such a way that what America was doing would command as much support at home as possible. For this reason, Roosevelt sought to play up the purely national and purely defensive aspects of the measures he was taking, and play down the fact that what was being done was based, to a certain extent, on the talks with the British. See especially Roosevelt to Churchill, April 11, 1941, in Warren Kimball, ed., *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 166. Roosevelt was writing to tell Churchill about certain steps the United States was taking relating to the "present so-called security zone" which would now cover a vast part of the Atlantic, and wrote: "It is important for domestic political reasons which you will readily understand that this action be taken by us unilaterally and not after diplomatic conversations between you and us." For more evidence about the U.S. tactic of playing down, even in internal documents, the extent of its cooperation with the British, see n. 48 below.

⁴¹ See Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 239; Kimball, *Most Unsordid Act*, 180; and Abbazia, *Roosevelt's Navy*, 134.

⁴² Abbazia, *Roosevelt's Navy*, 144-45.

⁴³ Ibid., 153-54.

just American but also British and other allied merchant ships, simply by allowing them to join the convoys the U.S. Navy would now be escorting.⁴⁴ The President, according Patrick Abbazia, the author of the most important book on the undeclared naval war, probably sensed “that the need to bring supplies to the occupation force in Iceland might provide a convenient and plausible rationale for escorting Allied merchant convoys in the western Atlantic.” And to protect the convoys, fairly aggressive action might be called for. As Roosevelt himself noted, the U.S. supply convoys needed to be able to protect themselves from “threat of attack”; “under conditions of modern sea warfare,” he pointed out, the term “threat of attack” could apply to forces “reasonably long distances” away from the convoys. It followed, as he put it, that the “very presence of a German submarine or raider on or near the line of communications constitutes ‘threat of attack,’” and “should be dealt with by action looking to the elimination” of such a threat. Admiral King implemented these instructions by authorizing the forces under his command to attack German naval vessels that threatened the convoys (using a fairly broad definition as to what constituted a threat).⁴⁵ Germany had attacked the Soviet Union in late June; it seemed that the time for action in the Atlantic had come. Stark told the President that the United States should “start escorting immediately” and should protect “the Western Atlantic on a large scale”; “such action,” he recognized, “would almost certainly involve us in the war.” That, however, would in his view be a good thing, since “every day of delay in our getting into the war” was dangerous, and “much more delay might be fatal to Britain’s survival.”⁴⁶

But in early July Roosevelt again drew back and canceled the escort plans, apparently because he was worried about the situation in the Far East. It was only in late July that he decided to take the plunge and authorize the escort operations in the Atlantic.⁴⁷ Reiter points out quite correctly that Roosevelt made sure that a phrase allowing British and other ships to join the U.S.-protected convoys was deleted from the final version of the key document here. What he does not note is that that deletion had no practical effect, since more or less informal arrangements were worked out to allow British and other allied ships to effectively join the convoys; in deleting that phrase, Roosevelt, as was his practice, was just covering his tracks.⁴⁸ The new policy was not to be publicized. Stark told his

⁴⁴ Ibid., 214; and B. Mitchell Simpson, *Admiral Harold R. Stark: Architect of Victory, 1939-1945* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 89.

⁴⁵ Abbazia, *Roosevelt’s Navy*, 197-98, 204-205, 214.

⁴⁶ Stark to Cooke, July 31, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2175.

⁴⁷ Abbazia, *Roosevelt’s Navy*, 215.

⁴⁸ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 609, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>, citing Jürgen Rohwer, “Die USA und die Schlacht im Atlantik 1941,” in Jürgen Rohwer and Eberhard Jäckel, eds., *Kriegswende Dezember 1941* (Koblenz: Bernard and Graefe, 1984), 92 (the passage is actually on 94). For the story of what was done in practice, see Theodore Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay 1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 144-45; Simpson, *Stark*, 89; Abbazia, *Roosevelt’s Navy*, 214; Stetson Conn and Byron Fairfield, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1960), 133, http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/004/4-1/CMH_Pub_4-1.pdf; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of*

associates (and the British) that “the whole thing must be kept as quiet as possible.’ To this end, he urged that arrangements be made orally whenever possible.”⁴⁹ Some of Roosevelt’s main advisors, most notably Secretary of War Henry Stimson, wanted him to be more forthright and make it clear to the nation what had been decided and why the government felt compelled to move ahead in this way, but the President “was definitely unwilling to lay the situation before the country so frankly.”⁵⁰ Reiter asserted categorically that “no major naval policies were adopted in secret,” but this was not quite true.⁵¹ As one scholar put it, “Roosevelt refused to make a public announcement of this tidal shift in American maritime strategy.”⁵² And when the ‘shoot first’ policy was announced after the Greer incident, it was presented in a very different context.

The new policy was explained to the British at the Atlantic Conference, held in Placentia Bay off the coast of Argentia, Newfoundland, in early August; the two sides worked out arrangements there for the “American escort of British as well as American merchant ships as far as Iceland”; the new system was apparently “put into operation on August 20.”⁵³

United States Naval Operations in World War II, vol. 1, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984; orig. pub. 1947), 78-79; *Commander Task Force Twenty-Four* history (see n. 37), 60, 62, 65. This was not the only time even internal documents had to be altered for political reasons. On July 29, for example, Stark told King that a document had to be written to obscure the fact that it had been based on discussions with the British and the Canadians. See *Commander Task Force Twenty-Four* history, 68, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Admin-Hist/139-CTF24/CTF24-3.html>. Even as late as December 5, 1941, the Americans felt that for domestic political reasons they needed to play down the fact that they were working closely with the British (and the Dutch). See the document quoted in Peter Lowe, “Great Britain and the Coming of the Pacific War, 1939-1941,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 24 (1974), 60, www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3678931?uid=3739560&uid=2&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21102292054607.

⁴⁹ Simpson, *Stark*, 9. Note also the reference to how some of the arrangements were to be carried out “in utmost secrecy” in Wilson, *First Summit*, 144.

⁵⁰ William Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War, 1940-1941* (New York: Harper, 1953), 576-77.

⁵¹ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 613, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>. See Dallek, *Roosevelt*, 286, for Roosevelt’s resistance to making a “frank statement” on the escorting policy.

⁵² Robert W. Love, Jr., *History of the U.S. Navy, 1775-1941* (Harrisburg PA: Stackpole Books, 1992), 643.

⁵³ Churchill’s report to the War Cabinet on the Atlantic Conference, WP (41)202, August 20, 1941, 7, Cab 66/8, British National Archives, Kew (<http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-66-18.pdf>, frame 231). This passage in Churchill’s report was basically drafted by the Naval Staff, so it cannot be considered a concoction by the Prime Minister; see “Report on ‘Riviera,’” memo to Mr. Martin, n.d., Prem 3/485/7, British National Archives, Kew, and republished in *Churchill at War*, reel 167. Note also Langer and Gleason, *Undeclared War*, 665; Wilson, *First Summit*, 141-45; and Waldo Heinrichs “President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Intervention in the Battle of the Atlantic, 1941,” *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 4 (October 1986), 330-31, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1986.tb00463.x/pdf>. As Heinrichs points out, “the Argentia conference was the great divide.” “The measured activity of the Atlantic Fleet before the

(The formal orders, with implementation instructions, were issued a little later.⁵⁴) According to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, Roosevelt explained what he was up to—that is, what the real point of the policy was. The President, Churchill told his Cabinet colleagues when he got back to England, “was obviously determined” that the United States should come into the war. But he was “skating on pretty thin ice” with the Congress, and felt that “if he were to put the issue of peace and war to Congress, they would debate it for three months.” He therefore had to proceed in a more indirect way: “The President said that he would wage war, but not declare it, and that he would become more and more provocative. If the Germans did not like it, they could attack American forces.” Roosevelt had ordered the American Navy to “attack any U-boat which showed itself, even if it were 200 or 300 miles away from the convoy,” and “Admiral Stark intended to carry out this order literally.” “Everything was to be done to force an ‘incident.’”⁵⁵ In that way, the United States might very well be able to enter the war.

How is Churchill’s account to be taken? If he was reporting what Roosevelt had said accurately, and if the President’s comments reflected his real thinking, then this document would be something of a ‘smoking gun.’ This clearly was not the sort of line Roosevelt could take in public, and if it represented his real view, then that would show how averse he was to arguing out the great issue of war and peace in the ‘marketplace of ideas,’ and that he felt compelled instead to proceed in a more devious way. So it is scarcely surprising that Reiter plays down the importance of this piece of evidence. Indeed, he feels that Roosevelt probably did not actually say what Churchill had told the Cabinet he had said, and that Churchill was just trying to “persuade doubters in his own government that Roosevelt was serious about bringing the United States into the war.”⁵⁶ But that argument, to my mind, is not very persuasive. Roosevelt, after all, had often spoken about waging an undeclared way and about provoking ‘incidents’ on the high seas. Reiter tends to minimize the significance of those comments, but it is hard to see why they should not be taken “as serious indications” of what was going on in the President’s mind or why they should not

Argentia conference,” he notes, “gave way to a rush for position afterward.” There is some disagreement in the literature about exactly when particular decisions were made and when precisely orders were issued and were to take effect. But the general picture is clear. In addition to the Heinrichs article just cited, see Abbazia, *Roosevelt’s Navy*, 216, 220; Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 285; Norton, “Open Secret,” 73, <http://www.usnwc.edu/NavalWarCollegeReviewArchives/1970s/1974%20January-February.pdf>; O’Connor, “FDR’s Undeclared War”; and Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 216 and 352 n.99. Note also the collection of British documents relating to this issue: “Conference between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States: Telegrams exchanged between this country and the Prime Minister, or those forming part of the delegation accompanying him, 8-17 August 1941,” WP(41)203, August 18, 1941, frames 243-63, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-66-18.pdf>, esp. docs. 1, 7, and 11.

⁵⁴ See Norton, “Open Secret,” 73, 75, and O’Connor, “FDR’s Undeclared War.”

⁵⁵ W.M. 84 (41), August 19, 1941, CAB 65/19, “Most Secret” typewritten attachment, frames 208-210. <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-65-19.pdf>

⁵⁶ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 613. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>

be taken into account when one is trying to figure out how genuine Churchill's account was.⁵⁷ But the main reason for taking Churchill's account at face value is that Roosevelt *did* become "more and more provocative," that he *did* begin an undeclared naval war shortly after the Atlantic Conference, that direct orders to the U.S. fleet to attack German naval vessels *were* issued not long after the conference was over, and that the president *did* use one incident that took place as a direct result of what the U.S. Navy was doing—the Greer incident—as the occasion for announcing the 'shoot first' policy.⁵⁸ The description of his policy that Roosevelt gave Churchill was actually quite accurate. Indeed, he was far more open with Churchill than he was with his own people at the time.⁵⁹

Reiter, of course, takes a different view, so to see whether the United States did become "more and more provocative" in the North Atlantic (Churchill's paraphrase of what Roosevelt had said) or whether the President "constrained rather than increased the provocativeness of US policy" (as Reiter claims) it is important to look in some detail at what the Navy was doing in the Atlantic and at the sorts of orders that were issued. As late as July 3, policy was still relatively mild: American forces were to be on their guard but were to avoid "untoward incidents"; to that end—that is, to avoid the sorts of problems that could develop at night when it was hard to distinguish between British and American ships—U.S. warships were to "show navigational lights and normal deck and other outboard lights."⁶⁰ On July 15, the fleet was still to remain prepared to "repel hostile attack," but was now ordered to "operate as under war conditions, including complete darkening of ships when at sea"—suggesting that it was less important now to avoid "incidents" than it had been. On July 28, U.S. forces were told to "destroy hostile forces which threaten shipping of U.S. and Iceland flag," although what constituted a threat was still not clearly defined; U.S. naval units were simply told to trail German vessels and "broadcast in plain language their movements," presumably to help the British move in to destroy them.⁶¹ A month later, after Argentia, the Americans were ready to take stronger measures. On August 22, Stark wrote the Pacific commander Admiral Husband Kimmel with regard to the Atlantic: "Thank God we should have things in full swing before long and with plans fairly complete. It has changed so many times—but now I think we at last

⁵⁷ Ibid., 612. For various references to provoking an incident (and not just on Roosevelt's part) and about fighting a war without declaring one, see Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 225, 258; Abbazia, *Roosevelt's Navy*, 3-5, 62, 152, 154, 156, 185, 216; David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (London: Europa Publications, 1981), 347 n.38.

⁵⁸ See Norton, "Open Secret," 73, 75, and Rohwer, "USA und die Schlacht im Atlantik," 97.

⁵⁹ This is in line with John Mearsheimer's argument in his book *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13, to the effect that leaders are evidently "more inclined to lie to their own people than to rival states," and that this is particularly true "for democracies like the United States."

⁶⁰ Commander Task Force Twenty-Four history (see n. 37), 57.
<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Admin-Hist/139-CTF24/CTF24-3.html>

⁶¹ Ibid., 62, 67.

have something fairly definite—may-be.”⁶² On August 25, Stark told King that his forces were “to destroy surface raiders which attacked shipping along the sealanes between North America and Iceland or which approached these lanes sufficiently close to threaten such shipping.” On September 3, King’s authority was expanded; his forces could now target all “hostile forces,” so submarines threatening those sealanes could also be attacked.⁶³ On September 5, the fleet was told to “destroy potentially hostile surface raiders and submarines which attack or threaten. Threat exists when such potentially hostile vessels are found within one hundred miles of U.S. flag shipping or anywhere within proclaimed neutrality zone.” On September 12, the mission was defined even more broadly: the fleet was to “destroy potentially hostile forces which are encountered within the Western Atlantic Area.”⁶⁴ The U.S. Navy, as one writer put it, was setting “the bar ever lower for all-out war at sea with Germany.”⁶⁵

So the United States was certainly becoming more active in the North Atlantic in this period, and—to again quote Abbazia—the Greer incident, which took place on September 4, simply provided the President “with a convenient opportunity to announce what had already been decided, that the U.S. Navy would soon commence escort operations in the western Atlantic.”⁶⁶ The basic order about escorting (Admiral King’s Operations Plan 7-41) had gone out on September 1, just before the *Greer* was attacked. And American destroyers attacked real or imagined German submarines with depth charges at least 80 times in the pre-Pearl Harbor period.⁶⁷

But there were few major incidents, and not a single U-boat was actually sunk by American forces prior to Pearl Harbor. This does not mean, however, that the Americans were not serious about the naval war—that they could easily have opted for a more aggressive policy in the Atlantic but chose not to for political reasons. There were in fact a number of reasons why there were not more incidents, and one of the main ones was that Hitler had

⁶² Stark to Kimmel, August 22, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2181.

<http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>

⁶³ Norton, “Open Secret,” 73.

⁶⁴ Commander Task Force Twenty-Four history (see n. 37), 67.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Admin-Hist/139-CTF24/CTF24-3.html>

⁶⁵ O’Connor, “FDR’s Undeclared War,” http://www.historyarticles.com/new_page_10.htm. On these matters in general, see also Rohwer, “Die USA und die Schlacht im Atlantik,” esp. 94, and Simpson, *Stark*, esp. 93.

⁶⁶ Abbazia, *Roosevelt’s Navy*, 229.

⁶⁷ Rohwer, “Die USA und die Schlacht im Atlantik,” 97. See also Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King* (New York: Norton, 1952), 344, and Stark to Kimmel, September 22, 1941, PHA, 16:2209, <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>, both cited in Norton, “Open Secret,” 75 and 83 (n. 55 and n. 56).

ordered his Navy to avoid attacks on American vessels.⁶⁸ The principal goal of the naval operations, moreover, was to make sure that the ships got through, and it made sense, given that the German codes had been decyphered and that the naval authorities could listen in on German naval communications, to re-route the convoys so as to avoid the German submarines.

And there is a third factor that needs to be taken into account: the U.S. Navy at the time was simply not strong enough to pursue a really aggressive strategy. Reiter says that “Roosevelt did not unleash the US Navy in a brazen bid to provoke a naval incident,” but the Atlantic Fleet was still too weak to be “unleashed” in this way.⁶⁹ Top Navy officers were frustrated by this situation, but for the moment there was little that could be done about it. Admiral King, for example, as Robert Love notes, “disliked the British strategy of evasive routing and hoped to defend the convoys with escort groups so powerful that they could defeat the strongest U-boat concentrations, but he did not have enough ships to do that.” “Owing to the shortage of escorts in 1941,” Love concludes, “very aggressive patrolling much beyond the perimeter of the convoy and the relentless pursuit of contacts—both highly desirable tactics—were just not possible.”⁷⁰ Admiral Stark felt much the same way. As he wrote in November: “We are at our wit’s end in the Atlantic with the butter spread extremely thin and the job continuously increasing in toughness.”⁷¹

Even so, the Americans had not decided, as a matter of principle, to avoid major confrontations with German ships. As the distinguished naval historian Jürgen Rohwer has pointed out, when the Americans learned that a major German naval vessel—probably the battleship *Tirpitz*, they thought—would soon try to break out into the Atlantic from its base in Norway, a U.S. task force, consisting of two cruisers, two battleships and a number of destroyers, was sent out on November 5 to intercept and destroy the German ship. As it turned out, the Germans had intended to deploy not the *Tirpitz* but the pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer*. That vessel, however, was prevented from leaving its base because of

⁶⁸ See Holger Herwig, “Prelude to Weltblitzkrieg: Germany’s Naval Policy toward the United States of America, 1939-41,” *Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 4 (December 1971). Abbazia also deals with this issue in *Roosevelt’s Navy*. There is not much controversy on this issue. The key documents were seized at the end of the war and published in translation in 1947: Germany, Navy High Command, *Fuehrer Conferences on Matters dealing with the German Navy*, 7 vols. in 9 (Washington: Navy Department, 1947).

⁶⁹ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 612, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>. The weakness of the Atlantic Fleet—the limited number of ships, the lack of operational readiness, and so on—is one of the main themes in Abbazia’s book. See also Heinrichs, “Roosevelt’s Intervention in the Battle of the Atlantic,” esp. 316-18, 326-27. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1986.tb00463.x/pdf>

⁷⁰ Love, *History of the U.S. Navy*, 651.

⁷¹ Stark to Kimmel, November 25, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2224. <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>

mechanical problems. Rohwer speculates that had those problems not developed, a battle might have resulted which could have forced Hitler to declare war on the United States.⁷²

How does all this bear on the main issues we are concerned with here? It is important to recognize, first of all, that in one major respect Reiter is right. We are not dealing here with a case of deception pure and simple. The public might not have understood in great detail just how the “undeclared war” was being fought. “The Navy is already in the war of the Atlantic,” Stark wrote on November 7, “but the country doesn’t seem to realize it.”⁷³ But people certainly understood, if only from Roosevelt’s speech at the time of the Greer incident, that the United States had adopted a ‘shoot first’ policy and that something serious was going on in the Atlantic. And the public also had the sense the President was trying to take the country into the war. Reiter’s comment in his *International Security* exchange with Schuessler that Roosevelt’s “pre-Pearl Harbor speeches were quite bellicose” is clearly correct.⁷⁴ Schuessler had claimed at a number of points in his article that the President “maneuvered the country in the direction of open hostilities while assuring a wary public that the United States would remain at peace,” but while that was certainly true of the period around November 1940 when Roosevelt was running for re-election, and was also true of the period in early 1941 when Lend-Lease was being debated, it was not true of the period immediately before Pearl Harbor.⁷⁵ At that time, whatever his disingenuousness, and no matter how devious his tactics sometimes were, people basically understood what he was trying to do, and they were willing to go along with it.

⁷² Jürgen Rohwer, “The Operational Use of ‘ULTRA’ in the Battle of the Atlantic,” in Christopher Andrew and Jeremy Noakes, eds., *Intelligence and International Relations, 1900-1945* (Exeter: Exeter University Publications, 1987), 284, <http://goo.gl/twh6W>. Rohwer has repeatedly argued along these lines. See Rohwer, “Die USA und die Schlacht im Atlantik 1941,” 101; Jürgen Rohwer, “ULTRA and the Battle of the Atlantic: The German View,” in *Changing Interpretations in Naval History*, ed. Robert W. Love (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1980); and Jürgen Rohwer, “Der Einfluss der alliierten Funkaufklärung auf den Verlauf des Zweiten Weltkrieges,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 27, no. 3 (July 1979), 355, http://www.ifz-muenchen.de/heftarchiv/1979_3.pdf. On this incident, see also the early account in Morison, *Battle of the Atlantic*, 82. This story, incidentally, has a certain bearing on the argument sometimes made to the effect that thanks to the ULTRA intercepts, Roosevelt knew what Hitler was telling his naval commanders, that he thus knew how far he could go without provoking a war with Germany, and that he went that far but no further, because he did not want to take the U.S. into the war. The Americans obviously could not have known in advance how Hitler would react if they sunk either the *Tirpitz* or the *Admiral Scheer*. On this general issue, note especially the uncertainty reflected in Stark’s comment on July 31 that “whether or not we will get an ‘incident’ because of the protection we are giving Iceland and the shipping which we must send in support of Iceland and our troops, I do not know. Only Hitler can answer.” Stark to Cooke, July 31, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2175. <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>

⁷³ Stark to Hart, November 7, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2456.
<http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>

⁷⁴ Reiter letter to the editor of *International Security*, 177.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v035/35.2.reiter.pdf

⁷⁵ Schuessler, “Deception Dividend,” 145, 149, 153.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ins/summary/v034/34.4.schuessler.html>

This is essentially Warren Kimball's argument, and I think he, more than anyone else, has put his finger on what was going on. The public, as Kimball sees it, did not want the unvarnished truth. People "understood quite well what was at stake," he writes, "but refused to ratify the hard decisions."⁷⁶ What they wanted to hear "was not what they knew was the truth, but what they wished were the truth. In a sense, they wanted to be lied to. Public opinion, expressed in polls and Congress, saw Hitler as an ever-increasing threat, and someone had to deal with that." That "someone" was the President. It was his job to "make unpleasant choices and take the blame." But people had no real right, in Kimball's view, to complain about the way he did things. "Whatever the tactics Roosevelt used—from disingenuousness to lies—Congress (and thus the public) had ample opportunities to say 'no!'" But they chose not to go that route. "The entry of the United States into the Second World War, however halting and whatever Franklin Roosevelt's deceptions and disingenuousness, came about because the American people—as represented by their Congress assembled—agreed to and accepted (no one ever desires) war."⁷⁷

But this does not mean that public opinion mattered in quite the way Reiter says it did. To be sure, Roosevelt was constrained by public opinion, but those constraints were not absolutely rigid, and to a certain extent he could work his way around them. The particular tactics he adopted—"tailoring" the truth, framing what was going on in particular ways, emphasizing some things and concealing or ignoring others, and so on—could make a real difference in terms of outcomes. Roosevelt did a lot more than just work "within the marketplace of ideas to influence public opinion through persuasion and public speeches"; he also tried to influence what would happen in other, less direct, ways.⁷⁸ Instead of presenting his policies openly and forthrightly, he preferred sometimes, for example, to just let the truth seep out. A message he sent to Churchill in April 1941 is a good example. In that message, he outlined a series of naval measures he proposed to take, having to do mainly with the patrolling of the North Atlantic. He thought it was advisable, he wrote the British leader, "that when this new policy is adopted here no statement be issued on your end." It was not certain that he himself would make a "specific announcement"; he might decide, he wrote, to issue the "necessary naval operations orders and let time bring out the existence of the new patrol area."⁷⁹ The assumption apparently was that it was much

⁷⁶ Warren Kimball, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and World War II," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (March 2004), 98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/27552565.pdf>

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-99, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/27552565.pdf>. Note also Kimball's H-Diplo post of September 22, 1990, which I had cited in my review article on the Schuessler piece (see n. 14 above). Kimball's views on this issue are of particular interest: not only is he an exceptionally talented historian, but he has been wrestling with this problem for over forty years. See Kimball, *Most Unsordid Act*, esp. 13, 194, 238-41.

⁷⁸ Reiter letter to the editor of *International Security*, 176. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v035/35.2.reiter.pdf

⁷⁹ Roosevelt to Churchill, April 11, 1941, quoted in Langer and Gleason, *Undeclared War*, 435. For another example, see Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 208.

easier for people to accept a reality which they gradually became aware of than to have to make a choice.

Reiter himself gives another very nice example of the way Roosevelt did things. After giving his misleading September 11 speech on the *Greer* incident—the speech in which the ‘shoot first’ policy was announced—the President, Reiter shows, actually authorized Stark to tell the Congress what had really happened.⁸⁰ In the speech, as is well known, the president had failed to mention that the *Greer* (in accordance with existing policy) had been tracking the German submarine and helping a British patrol bomber which had dropped some depth charges on the U-boat. Instead he suggested that the attack on the *Greer* had been unprovoked and emphasized the defensive aspects of his policy: “We have sought no shooting war with Hitler. We do not seek it now”; “The aggression is not ours. Ours is solely defense.” He also failed to reveal—and this is a much more important point for our purposes here—that the U.S. government had decided on, and had issued orders to implement, a ‘shoot first’ policy even before the *Greer* was torpedoed. The purely defensive and reactive part of the policy was emphasized, but at the same time the president did explain why the survival of Britain was essential to American security and why it was important to deal with the Nazi danger before the United States was directly attacked. He did make the argument that “the time for active defense is now”—that the mere presence of German submarines “in any waters which America deems vital for its defense constitutes an attack,” and that if German vessels entered that vast area, they would do so “at their own peril.”⁸¹ A week later, Admiral Stark, on Roosevelt’s instructions, as Reiter notes, gave Congress a more detailed account of what had happened, and in particular of the destroyer’s role in provoking the German attack.⁸² It was as though the president wanted to have it both ways. He wanted people to learn, in a relatively low-key way, about how active American policy was, but at the same time he wanted people to be able to view U.S. policy as essentially defensive in nature—to think of the new policy as a reaction to a German outrage and not as something the U.S. government was doing as a basic act of

⁸⁰ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 611, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>. One can now easily listen to the speech as Roosevelt delivered it. A recording is available online at <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3323>.

⁸¹ Roosevelt fireside chat to the nation, September 11, 1941, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: 1941*, 384-92. <http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.presidents/ppafdr0010&id=422&collection=presidents&index=presidents/ppafdr>

⁸² The finding that FDR instructed Stark to tell the real story is an important archival discovery on Reiter’s part, but it is in some ways at odds with the main thrust of his argument. He presents it as “an example of how the political opposition can reveal deception” and also says that it shows how “the non-cooperation of military officers can be a grave threat to deception efforts.” But Stark was perfectly capable of misleading Congress on these matters when it was in Roosevelt’s interest for him to do so, and, given that the president “encouraged” him to tell the truth, one can scarcely that it was the CNO’s “non-cooperation” that undermined FDR’s attempt to mislead the public. See Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 611, 623, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>; and, for Stark misleading the Congress about the staff talks that led to ABC-1, see Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 203-204.

policy. And it is a measure of Roosevelt's political genius that he was actually able to have it both ways—that the public was able to 'tune in' to what he was saying on both levels, that he was able to tell the people both what they wanted to hear (even if, in their hearts, they knew it was only a half-truth) and what they needed to hear.

What Roosevelt was doing was not deception exactly, but he was scarcely defending his policy openly and honestly in the 'marketplace of ideas.' Kimball's discussion of the way the government managed the lend-lease debate is a good example. The administration, he writes, was "forced by tactical considerations to keep the actual subject matter of the debate as narrow as possible."⁸³ Key officials simply refused to be drawn into a discussion of broad issues of foreign policy. When asked, for example, if it wouldn't make sense to just "go into the war," Secretary of War Stimson replied: "I am not going to pursue this line of argument. We are not concerned with it in this bill."⁸⁴ "Examples of the Administration's indirection and evasion in answering broad and speculative questions," Kimball writes, "are innumerable."⁸⁵ Even on the specific issue of whether protecting convoys would be necessary "if Lend-Lease were to be effective," both Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox were evasive. They were both convinced that it would be, but to concede that point, Kimball notes, "might well defeat the Lend-Lease Act itself"—especially since Knox admitted in his testimony that escorting convoys would lead to war. So they simply finessed the issue by focusing on secondary points.⁸⁶

So the whole idea that democratic institutions place sharp limits on how far the government can go in pursuing a policy that the public does not actively support is not really borne out by a study of Roosevelt policy toward Germany in 1941. It was not, of course, that the government, by adopting deceptive or evasive tactics, could do whatever it wanted, but the particular way it chose to proceed in 1941—the way it controlled the flow of information, the way it influenced the way the information that did come out was framed, and especially the way it at key points concealed its own basic thinking from the public—played a far more important role in this story than Reiter seems willing to recognize. The government was able to pursue a much more active policy than the American people, acting through Congress, would have supported if the arguments had been put to them in a more straightforward and honest way.

Roosevelt and the Road to War with Japan

Roosevelt was perhaps disappointed by the course that events took in late 1941. Hitler was not provoked into declaring war, and the naval incidents that did occur did not do

⁸³ Kimball, *Most Unsordid Act*, 165 (for the quotation), 178-80, 183.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 180-81.

much to mobilize opinion at home. The public would accept an undeclared naval war, but without a direct attack on U.S. territory it seemed the country would not make the massive effort required to win the European war and bring down the Nazi regime. That certainly was the conclusion well-informed British observers came to at the time. As Reiter points out, Lord Beaverbrook had felt even in August that the United States would not come in unless it itself were attacked, and Lord Halifax, the British ambassador in Washington, reported in November that the “present process of going gradually into war” would not produce the “outburst of public anger” which alone could bring about a full-scale U.S. intervention in the war.⁸⁷

American leaders undoubtedly saw things the same way, and it was for that reason that the president and his top advisors did not view the Pearl Harbor attack as a total disaster. When news of the attack was received, they met “in not too tense an atmosphere,” since, as Roosevelt’s closest advisor, Harry Hopkins, wrote that very evening, “all of us believed that in the last analysis the enemy was Hitler and that he could not be defeated without force of arms; that sooner or later we were bound to be in the war and that Japan had given us an opportunity.”⁸⁸ Looking back a couple of years later, Roosevelt himself felt that “if the Japanese had not attacked the United States, he doubted very much if it would have been possible to send any American forces to Europe.”⁸⁹

Could Roosevelt’s policy toward Japan have been designed, at least to some extent, to achieve that result? The President probably sensed very early on that the strategy of provoking a German declaration of war might not work; if he was determined to bring the United States into the war in the very near future, then he might need a second string in his bow; the situation with Japan might be useful in this context. The British were certainly thinking in those terms. As early as October 2, 1940, Churchill “questioned the statement that it was not in our interests that the United States should be involved in the war in the Pacific.” Peter Lowe, the author of the most important study of British policy in the run-up

⁸⁷ See Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 612, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>. Reiter was misled by his source, Wilson’s *First Summit*, into thinking that this was an exact quotation, but one can see by checking Wilson’s own source, Sherwood’s *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (368), that Beaverbrook’s views were simply being paraphrased. For Beaverbrook’s report of his impressions while in America and the discussion this led to, see the “Most Secret” typewritten annex to the War Cabinet minutes for August 25, 1941, W.M. 86 (41), in Cab 65/19 (<http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-65-19.pdf>, frames 240-48). For the Ambassador’s views, see Halifax to Eden, November 11, 1941, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, part III, series C, vol. 1 (University Publications of America, 1997), 460 (160 in the *Foreign Office Confidential Print*, no. 16191).

⁸⁸ Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1950), 431.

⁸⁹ Roosevelt-Stalin meeting, Nov. 29, 1943, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS]: *The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran 1943*, 531, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=turn&entity=FRUS.FRUS1943CairoTehran.p0633&id=FRUS.FRUS1943CairoTehran&isize=M>.

to the Pacific War, quotes that sentence and comments that Churchill “was interested solely in the moment when the United States would become a full ally, believing that intervention in the Pacific would lead to participation in the European war.”⁹⁰ Other British leaders also seemed to be thinking in ‘back door’ terms. If, however, they were capable of making that calculation (and thus pursuing a policy that made a Pacific War more probable), is it inconceivable that someone like Roosevelt, who shared their basic goal of bringing the United States into the war, might also have been thinking in those terms? But if the president was using the situation with Japan to bring America into the European war, that conclusion would have a direct bearing on the issue we are concerned with here, since this policy, if it did exist, was certainly not openly pursued.⁹¹

Most people, however, find it hard to believe that Roosevelt could have pursued a ‘back door’ policy. They tend to conflate that idea with the notion that the president knew in advance that the Japanese would attack Pearl Harbor, but kept that information from the commanders in Hawaii, in the hope that a devastating attack would bring an enraged, vengeful and united country into the war. That claim I view as absurd and baseless, but I think the general idea that Roosevelt was taking advantage of the situation with Japan to bring the United States into the European war deserves to be taken much more seriously. I think, in fact, that this is the most plausible interpretation of Roosevelt’s policy toward Japan in 1941 one can come up with, and the chapter on 1941 in my methods book outlined the sort of thinking that led to that interpretation. Schuessler accepts much of that argument, and Reiter takes issue with it in his article.

The ‘back door’ argument, as I developed it, had two parts. The first claim was that Roosevelt deliberately put the country on a collision course with Japan. The second claim had to do with why he did this: his goal in doing so, I argued, was to bring the United States into the European war. The idea that the policy was deliberate was itself based on two points: first, that Roosevelt was in control of U.S. policy, and that it was he who had decided to impose the embargo; and second, that in doing so he understood what the implications of the embargo were—namely, that it would in all probability lead Japan to seize the oil fields in the Dutch East Indies, and that this would lead to war with America and Britain. With regard to that first point, many scholars used to accept the argument that

⁹⁰ See Lowe, “Great Britain and the Coming of the Pacific War, 1939-1941,” 51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3678931?origin=JSTOR-pdf>. For the document itself, see War Cabinet conclusions, October 2, 1940, W.M. 264 (40) 5, Cab 65/9 (<http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-65-9.pdf>; see frame 210).

⁹¹ One of Beaverbrook’s comments in the August 25 meeting referred to in n. 87 above suggests that he also might well have been thinking in ‘back door’ terms. He thought “it was important,” he said, “that some steps should be taken to resolve the present deadlock [resulting from the political situation in the United States]. In his view we should not hesitate to take drastic action to resolve the present *impasse*.” In an October 10 letter to Churchill, Halifax referred to Roosevelt’s unwillingness to go all the way, but then added that “no doubt things might change overnight if the right things were to happen”; that comment also has a certain resonance in the context of the back door theory. Quoted in Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 219. Reynolds himself, incidentally, although not totally consistent on this point, tends to interpret Britain’s Japan policy in ‘back door’ terms. See *ibid.*, esp. 246, 249.

Roosevelt had lost control of policy, that policy had been hijacked by people like Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, that neither the President nor Secretary of State Cordell Hull even knew for weeks a full embargo was in place, and that by the time they found out what was going on, it was too late to do anything about it, in large part because resuming oil deliveries at that point would look like appeasement. In 1988, however, Waldo Heinrichs argued compellingly on the basis of new evidence he had uncovered that Roosevelt, acting through Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, with whom he was very close, had authorized the embargo; that interpretation is confirmed by British sources. Reiter does not seem to question this point about Roosevelt making the key decision here. He in fact drives another nail into the coffin of the old argument about the President not being aware until much later that the measures taken in late July were tantamount to a virtually total cut-off of trade by showing that from the outset newspapers “bluntly described” that move as a full embargo.⁹² If it was being reported that way in the papers, how could Roosevelt not have known about it?

What this means is that we need to concentrate on the second point: did Roosevelt approve the embargo, knowing full well what the consequences would be if that policy was maintained intact? It seems very clear that the President and his associates understood quite well what the implications of the embargo were. Up to the time it was imposed, he pointed out a number of times, both in public and in private, that an embargo would drive the Japanese down to the Indies and that that would mean war. This, he argued during that period, was the key reason for not imposing it. Reiter himself quotes one of those comments, made right before the tough economic measures were adopted in late July, and quotes it in a way that shows that he thinks it reflects the president’s real views. There was a reason, Roosevelt said, why America had so far allowed the oil deliveries to continue: if the oil had been cut off, Japan “probably would have gone down to the Dutch East Indies a year ago, and you would have had war.”⁹³ This view was widely held in the government at the time. Welles, for example, thought that tough economic sanctions would “provoke Japan to war” with America “before long.”⁹⁴ Stark had opposed the embargo for that very

⁹² See Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 619, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>; Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 141, 246-47; Trachtenberg, *Craft of International History*, 96-100. I should note, however, that Reiter at one point seems to accept the argument about Roosevelt reluctantly accepting a full embargo only in September, as though he had not understood how complete the embargo would be when the sanctions were put into effect in July. See Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 616.

⁹³ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 619, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>. For the full text, see “Extemporaneous Remarks to the Volunteer Participation Committee of the Office of Civilian Defense,” July 24, 1941, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 1941, 280, <http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.presidents/ppafdr0010&id=315&collection=presidents&index=presidents/ppafdr>. See also Trachtenberg, *Craft of International History*, 96.

⁹⁴ Casey to Menzies and Stewart, July 9, 1941, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-49* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1982), 5:6.

reason.⁹⁵ And Admiral Richmond Turner, the Navy's Director of War Plans, thought from the time it was imposed in late July that the embargo, if it were maintained, would make war between Japan and the United States certain.⁹⁶

Reiter, however, thinks that "Roosevelt wanted to avoid war" with Japan, and that the goal of the tough policy he pursued in the fall of 1941 was "to deter and not provoke."⁹⁷ But there's a basic puzzle here: if Roosevelt wanted to avoid war with Japan, why would he adopt a policy which he knew would 'probably' lead to such a war? To get at the issue, the first step is to look at what Roosevelt and his top associates were saying, and Reiter begins his section on this issue by quoting Welles as telling his British counterpart at Argentia that the President's "chief objective in the Pacific for the time being was the avoidance of war with Japan" and goes on to point out that the president told Churchill at Argentia that "every effort should be made to prevent the outbreak of war with Japan."⁹⁸ Perhaps the phrase "for the time being" in Welles's comment is the real key to U.S. policy at this point. Welles himself, in the discussion Reiter alludes to, referred to the importance of "dragging out" the talks between the United States and Japan "in order to put off a show-down (if such was inevitable) until the time that such a show-down was from our standpoint more propitious." And Welles insisted that while the talks were going on, there "should not be the slightest relaxation by the United States Government of any of the economic or financial measures of sanction which it had now imposed upon Japan"—even though, as noted above, he understood that the sanctions would lead to war "before long."⁹⁹ The President (at least in the U.S. record of his meeting with Churchill) seemed to take a more moderate line, but if he had said anything about the importance of avoiding (and not just postponing) war with Japan, the British did not consider it worth noting in their own record of the meeting. In the British document, the President simply refers to the need to postpone the outbreak of war with Japan for a brief period. He also tells Churchill that he fully intends to maintain the "economic measures in full force"—a point not mentioned in the American document. But even in the U.S. record, Roosevelt made it clear that one of his main goals in conducting talks with Japan was just to postpone the outbreak of hostilities "for at least

⁹⁵ See, for example, Stark to Hart, July 24, 1941, PHA, pt. 16, 2173, <http://archive.org/download/pearlharborattac16unit/pearlharborattac16unit.pdf>.

⁹⁶ George Dyer, *The Amphibians Came to Conquer: The Story of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner*, vol. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1971), 177-80; see also 158-59, 192.

⁹⁷ Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War," 597, 616, 617, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 617.

⁹⁹ Welles-Cadogan meeting, August 9, 1941, FRUS 1941, 1:347-48. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=goto&id=FRUS.FRUS1941v01&isize=M&submit=Go+to+page&page=347>

thirty days”—suggesting that he was not seriously interested in making a real effort to avoid war in the Pacific.¹⁰⁰

The issue here turns, however, not on what was said but on what was done, and in their dealings with Japan at the time, U.S. leaders took a very hard line. The Americans were insisting that Japan pull out of China, and after four years of fighting this was a demand the Japanese naturally found hard to accept—and top U.S. officials understood that this was the case. Japan’s leaders, as Welles noted in November, needed to provide “some justification to their own people after four years of national effort and sacrifice” in China. He therefore “could not believe” that the Japanese would “agree to evacuate China completely,” but “nothing less,” he pointed out, would “satisfy [the] United States.”¹⁰¹ It was this policy that put America on a collision course with Japan. Given America’s position on the China issue, there could be no agreement with Japan that would allow the oil deliveries to resume; without oil, Japan’s military effort in China would grind to a halt; but if Japan tried to break the stranglehold by seizing the oil-producing areas in the Indies, that action would lead to war with the western powers. This was a very dangerous situation, and a government that was determined to avoid war with Japan would scarcely have allowed it to develop.

The point about China is of fundamental importance. It meant that the United States was not just trying to contain Japan or to deter that country from trying to take over new areas, but wanted to force Japan out of areas it already occupied. If the goal had been containment, the chances of avoiding war would have been much greater. The Japanese were deeply concerned about the prospect of war with America, and, bogged down in China

¹⁰⁰ Roosevelt-Churchill meeting, August 11, 1941, FRUS 1941, 1: 360, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=turn&entity=FRUS.FRUS1941v01.p0372&id=FRUS.FRUS1941v01&size=M>. For the British notes of that meeting, see “Record of Conversations between the Prime Minister and the President, August 11th, 1941,” Prem 3/485/5, British National Archives, Kew; also in *Churchill at War*, reel 167 (see n. 37). The president suggests there that the Soviets “should be informed that these negotiations with the Japanese were being entered upon in order to secure a delay”; the aim was to get the USSR to play along with the plan. Note also a passage in Churchill’s report to the War Cabinet on the Atlantic Conference, WP(41)202, 5, Cab 66/8, British National Archives, Kew (<http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-66-18.pdf>, frame 229), in which Churchill says that Roosevelt “was under no illusion as to the value or the sincerity” of the Japanese proposals, but thought “it would be useful to pursue a discussion of them, if only for the sake of gaining, say, a month’s time.” The point about Roosevelt declaring that the sanctions would be maintained “in full force” appears in both British documents. The passage in question also appears in an extract from the British record of August 11 Roosevelt-Churchill meeting in FO 371/27909, British National Archives, Kew, and republished in *British Foreign Office Japan Correspondence 1941-1945* (Scholarly Resources Microfilm publication), series for 1941, reel 7. The British certainly came away from Argentina with the distinct impression that FDR’s goal was simply to postpone the outbreak of hostilities: “The President’s policy,” a well-informed Foreign Office official wrote shortly after Churchill returned from Argentina, “is to keep the Japanese in play for the next 30-90 days so as to gain time.” Ashley Clarke minute, August 20, 1941, FO 371/27909, in same reel.

¹⁰¹ Casey to Department of External Affairs, November 14, 1941, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-49*, 5:197.

as they were, naturally wanted to do what they could to avoid an armed conflict with the strongest country in the world.

One is struck, in fact, by the lengths the Japanese were prepared to go in order to accommodate to American power. On June 21 the Americans demanded that Japan's pro-German Foreign Minister, Matsuoka Yōsuke, be dropped from the government; less than a month later, Matsuoka was forced out. There were, of course, other factors that contributed to Matsuoka's fall; still, his ouster following that U.S. demand was quite revealing. Matsuoka himself thought that the Prime Minister, Prince Konoye Fumimaro, by forcing him out of the government, was "kowtowing" to the Americans; his dismissal, he said, was tantamount to a declaration that Japan had now chosen to break with the Axis and pursue a pro-western policy.¹⁰² And indeed Matsuoka's successor as foreign minister, Admiral Toyoda Teijirō, did change Japanese policy. He and Konoye now sought to mend fences with the Americans. They made it clear that Japan was willing to forego further expansion, both in the south and in the north (against Russia).¹⁰³ Konoye then made a major effort to meet with Roosevelt to try to settle the conflict, telling the U.S. ambassador Joseph Grew "with unquestioned sincerity" (in Grew's view) that "he was prepared at that meeting to accept the American terms whatever they might be." The U.S. government turned down the offer, and Grew thought a golden opportunity had been lost.¹⁰⁴ That American refusal led to the fall of the Konoye government, which was replaced by a new cabinet headed by General Tojo Hideki. But even then the Japanese, spurred on by their new foreign minister Togo Shigenori, tried hard to avoid war with America. Their key proposal during this period was for a kind of *modus vivendi*—basically a plan to restore the status quo that had existed before the Japanese had moved into southern Indochina in late July and the sanctions had been imposed. They were willing to withdraw from the area they had occupied at that point in exchange for a resumption of oil deliveries. There were, to be sure, some problems with certain provisions in the plan relating to China, but people

¹⁰² David Lu, *Agony of Choice: Matsuoka Yosuke and the Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1880-1946* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 237-39. See also Tsunoda Jun, *The Final Confrontation: Japan's Negotiations with the United States, 1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), vol. 5 of James Morley, ed., *Japan's Road to the Pacific War*, 100-101, 143-50.

¹⁰³ The key document is the Japanese Government Statement handed to Roosevelt on August 28, 1941, *FRUS: Japan* 2:575, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=goto&id=FRUS.FRUS193141v02&isize=M&submit=Go+to+page&page=575>. On these matters, see Trachtenberg, *Craft of International History*, esp. 93 n.38.

¹⁰⁴ Grew to Roosevelt, August 14, 1942 (unsent), 4, and 8, Joseph Grew Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, <http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/trachtenberg/methbk/grew.pdf>. Grew later gave a detailed account of this episode, full of long extracts from documents produced in the period. See Joseph Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904-1945*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), 2:1301-75, an analysis which, coming as it did from an exceptionally well-informed observer and a pillar of the U.S. national security establishment, deserves to be taken more seriously than it usually is.

close to these issues at the time, and later scholars as well, thought those obstacles were by no means insurmountable. But again the proposal was turned down.¹⁰⁵

What all this suggests is that the goal could not have been the containment of Japan; that goal could almost certainly have been easily achieved without war. But so many people have said the U.S. aim, in imposing the sanctions, was to deter Japan from making further advances (and in particular from moving north against the Soviet Union) that it makes sense to see what sort of evidence is given to back up that interpretation. In the present case, it makes sense to examine the evidence Reiter provides to support his claim that the purpose of what he refers to as Roosevelt's "belligerent" policies toward Japan in this period was "to deter rather than provoke."¹⁰⁶

So let's look at the first three documents he cites to support that point—or, more specifically, to support the point that although "before sanctions were imposed Roosevelt sometimes worried that sanctions might cause Japan to attack, he and other members of his administration also sometimes argued that sanctions might deter Japan."¹⁰⁷ The first document is a July 8 telegram from the British ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, reporting a conversation Halifax had had with the president. Roosevelt raised the question of whether a full embargo "would work as a deterrent, or whether it would precipitate the Japanese into the Netherlands East Indies, which neither the United States nor Great Britain wanted." He therefore wondered whether it would be a "good thing" to place Japan "under all possible economic pressure." There is nothing in this document that shows Roosevelt thought that an embargo would indeed "work as a deterrent"; if anything, he seemed to think it would have the opposite effect.¹⁰⁸

Reiter goes on to cite two letters, dated June 23 and June 25, from Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to the president. There are in fact three letters from Ickes to Roosevelt dated June 23 in the file Reiter cites, and two of them deal with the embargo issue. In the first, Ickes argued that an embargo would not provoke a Japanese move into the Indies because Japan at the moment was preoccupied with what was going on in Russia—a view the President, as one can see from the reply he sent Ickes the same day (included in that file), simply did not share. Ickes, moreover, went on to suggest in his letter that if an embargo did lead to an armed conflict with Japan, that might be a good thing, because it would bring America into the European war. "There might develop from the embargoing of oil to Japan," he wrote, "such a situation as would make it, not only possible but easy, to get into

¹⁰⁵ See Trachtenberg, *Craft of International History*, 106, 114-15, 117, 121.

¹⁰⁶ Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War," 597, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 615; the three documents are cited in the footnote appended to that sentence (n. 87).

¹⁰⁸ Halifax to Eden, July 8, 1941, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, part III, series E, vol. 4, 329.

this war in an effective way.” In the second June 23 letter, he also seemed to be suggesting that even if using the embargo was not in theory the best way to get involved in the war, it might make sense to go this route anyway, since delay could lead to disaster. “It may be difficult to get into this war the right way,” he told the president, “but if we do not do it now, we will be, when our turn comes, without an ally anywhere in the world.” This is as close to a ‘back door to war’ argument as you can find in the documentary evidence; and nowhere in either letter did Ickes argue that “sanctions might deter Japan.” Nor did Ickes claim in the June 25 letter that sanctions would “deter” Japan from moving into the Indies; his view was that it would not make a difference one way or the other.¹⁰⁹

Other examples could be cited, but the only point here is that the evidence supporting the claim that Roosevelt was interested only in containing Japan is quite thin, and it really does seem that he was putting the United States on a collision course with that country with his eyes open. But this is profoundly puzzling. Why would he do so when his real goal was to defeat Hitler? Why would he want to get involved in a war with Japan when it obviously made more sense to concentrate America’s efforts on dealing with Nazi Germany? And why did his policy change when it did—in late July, a month after the Nazi invasion of the USSR? Up to that point, he had opposed sanctions with the argument that they would drive the Japanese down to the Indies and that would mean war in the Pacific, but now he was accepting a full embargo. Up to that point, the United States did not like what Japan was doing in China, but was not going to go to war with it to force it out of that country. Now the China issue was the real bone of contention between the two countries. Why such a dramatic shift in policy at this particular point?

The test of any historical interpretation of U.S. policy in late 1941 is its ability to answer questions of that sort, and this brings us to the whole issue of the ‘back door’ theory. Was it in order to bring the United States into the European war that Roosevelt deliberately put America on a collision course with Japan? Reiter, of course, does not think so. He argues that even though Roosevelt was pursuing what he calls a “belligerent” policy, his “hard line” had broad public support. “The public recognized,” he writes, “that the July oil sanctions were tantamount to an embargo, meaning there was no deception.” The policy was not secret, and the country actually supported it, knowing that it involved a certain risk of war. As Reiter argued in his *International Security* exchange with Schuessler, “whether or not Roosevelt actually sought war, his hard-line policy against Japan was popular. He was not out of step with public opinion by engaging in potentially provocative foreign policies, and therefore not engaged in deception.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ickes to Roosevelt, June 23, 1943 (two letters) and June 25, 1943, President’s Secretary’s Files, Interior, box 55, FDR Library, <http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/trachtenberg/methbk/ickes.pdf>. I am grateful to William Baehr, an archivist at the Library, for sending me copies of these documents. ‘Back door’ arguments of the sort Ickes made are very rare, although there are a few cases where American officials seem to allude to the possibility that the U.S. might want to pursue, or actually might be pursuing, a ‘back door’ strategy, albeit in very guarded ways.

¹¹⁰ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 597, 616-17, 620, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>; Reiter letter to the editor of *International Security* (see n. 12), 181, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v035/35.2.reiter.pdf.

But even if Reiter is right about what the public knew and was willing to accept, that would not mean that people understood what Roosevelt's strategy was and supported his policy knowing where it would lead. The polls Reiter cites, for example, do not show that people understood that the embargo would probably lead to war and approved it anyway. They mainly show that the public was in favor of a containment policy—of saying to Japan, in effect, that further expansion would mean war. They do not show that people approved of the much more extreme policy of insisting that Japan withdraw from China or, in effect, face war with the United States; it is not even clear from the evidence Reiter presents that they understood that the U.S. government was making that demand.¹¹¹ Reiter's argument here, in other words, does not get at the heart of the 'back door' interpretation: if Roosevelt was essentially using popular American bellicosity *vis-à-vis* Japan to get the United States involved in the European war, then showing that the American people were bellicose on the Japan issue would not discredit the 'back door' theory. But if that theory is valid, then certainly the President Roosevelt was not being straight with the American public on an absolutely central issue of policy.

The fundamental issues here relate to the basic concept of an 'open marketplace of ideas.' Did people understand what the embargo meant? Did they understand that the administration was interested in a lot more than just containing Japan? Did they see how extreme U.S. policy on the China issue had become—that the Americans were, in effect, demanding a total capitulation on Japan's part—and how sharply the policy diverged from what the policy had been before the sanctions were imposed in late July? Did they understand the connection between the Japan issue and the European war, and did they think it made sense to get involved in a war with Japan when the real problem lay in Europe? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do know they are studiable, and it would be very interesting to see what an analysis of the open sources from the period—newspapers, magazines, Congressional debates, and so on—would turn up.

But although these are all interesting issues, the main point to note here is that Reiter has not really shown that the 'back door' interpretation is baseless. He himself argues that Roosevelt wanted to intervene in the European war but was held back by public opinion at home.¹¹² He himself notes that the public favored a hard line toward Japan and believes that the American people were not averse to going to war with that country.¹¹³ He is also

¹¹¹ Note especially the four polls from the period on the question "Should the United States take steps to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means risking a war with Japan" on the Roper Center website, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html. Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War", cites an August 1941 poll that showed two-thirds of the respondents favoring going "to war now against Japan," noting, however, that "other polls provided mixed results" (621). This is a bit of an understatement. The poll Reiter refers to is very much an outlier, and another poll conducted by the same organization at much the same time showed that only 22% of the respondents would vote to go to war with Japan now, and 71% favored staying out [USGALLUP.41-244.QT12 on the Roper Center website].

¹¹² Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War," 607-14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 597, 620-21.

aware of the fact that “if defeating Germany was Roosevelt’s top priority”—and he thinks it was—then it made little sense, in principle, to get involved in a second war with Japan if it was at all avoidable.¹¹⁴ Taken as a whole, doesn’t all this suggest that the President might have been thinking, very secretly, in back door terms?

To refute that interpretation, one has to provide an alternative and more plausible answer to the key question here: why, if in principle a second war with Japan was to be avoided, did the president choose nonetheless to pursue what Reiter himself refers to as a “belligerent” policy in East Asia?¹¹⁵ There has to be some explanation, and the ‘back door’ theory is one way of making sense of all this. But to get at the issue, you also have to look at whatever alternative explanations you can come up with and weigh them against each other in the light of the evidence. And that evidence has to be largely circumstantial, if only because leaders who use deceptive tactics have a great interest in covering their tracks—a point which, in fact, follows from Reiter’s basic premise about the price that would be paid if the deception were revealed. But if the leadership had a certain interest in suppressing evidence which, if revealed, would show that it was deliberately misleading the public, you cannot study the problem in the usual direct way. You have to use a more indirect approach. You have to figure out what the alternative explanations are and then make a judgment about which one is the most plausible. You can consider, for example, the idea that Roosevelt had no real strategy—that he was just playing things by ear, that he had no clear sense for where he wanted to go or how he proposed to get there—and then decide what to make of it. Given the extraordinary importance of the issues he was dealing with, isn’t it likely that he had developed at least a general sense for how he proposed to achieve his most fundamental goals, even if he believed he had to remain quite flexible in terms of how that policy would in practice be implemented? A judgment of this sort would not just be based on a study of Roosevelt’s policy toward Japan in 1941. It would also be based on something more fundamental: on your sense for what Roosevelt was like as a statesman, and indeed on your general sense for how international politics works.

The Bottom Line

So what’s to be taken away from this exercise? Much of Reiter’s argument rests on certain general premises about how foreign policy is made in democratic states. In his view, public opinion plays an absolutely fundamental role: as he and Stam put it in their book, “for better or worse, democratic foreign policy is driven by public desires.” To be sure, they admit, the leaders of democratic powers can engage in covert operations, use deceptive tactics, and “sidestep public debate,” but only when “the anticipated scale of an operation is sufficiently small.” When it is a question, however, of getting involved in a real war they cannot proceed in that way. They are “deterred from engaging in deception” in those cases because they understand that if an attempt at deception is exposed, “they will suffer heavy domestic political costs.” And that’s why, in Reiter’s view, the public really is in the driver’s

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 618.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 597.

seat: “Because elected leaders are deterred from engaging in deception,” he writes, “they cannot circumvent public opinion constraints.”¹¹⁶

Reiter makes a second argument about why openness is so important. Consensus-building is part of the process whereby a government prepares a society for war, and that process helps produce good policy. “An advantage that democracies enjoy,” he and Stam wrote, “is that the process by which the leadership seeks to gather and to generate consent necessarily involves public debate and engages the marketplace of ideas; this helps dismiss poorly considered ideas and bolster better ones.”¹¹⁷ The whole concept of a ‘marketplace of ideas’ plays a prominent role in Reiter’s new article as well, and by that metaphor he seems to have a number of things in mind: the notion that different groups (including the administration) put forth their ideas in an honest and straightforward way, that the public ‘buys’ the best arguments, that bad ideas are weeded out, and that the arguments that prevail in that competition essentially determine policy. And his claim, in dealing with U.S. policy in 1941, is that Roosevelt worked within that framework “to influence public opinion through persuasion and speeches.”¹¹⁸

My own view is of course rather different. I certainly would never argue that public opinion counted for nothing—that by resorting a strategy of deception, a president can do whatever he wants, no matter how the public feels about an issue. But I do think that the ability of the political leadership to shape the course of events is much greater than Reiter would have us believe. In the 1941 case, this was due in part to the enormous prestige of the presidency and of Roosevelt personally. The results of a public opinion poll conducted in late November are quite revealing in this regard. In that poll, when people were asked whether they would vote “to go into the war now” against Germany and Italy or “stay out of the war,” 44% said they would vote to go in and 48% said they would vote to stay out. But when they were asked in the same poll whether they would be “in favor of this country’s going into the war against Germany” if “our present leaders and military advisors say that the only way to defeat Germany is for this country to go into the war,” 70% said yes, and only 24% said no.¹¹⁹ What John Mueller calls the “follower effect” was quite dramatic in this case.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 144-46, 159, 162; Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” 595. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.734229>

¹¹⁷ Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 160.

¹¹⁸ Reiter letter to the editor, 176. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v035/35.2.reiter.pdf

¹¹⁹ Office of Public Opinion Research Morale Survey, Nov, 1941. Retrieved from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut [USOPOR.41-810MORALE.Q01C and USOPOR.41-810MORALE.Q28]. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html

¹²⁰ Mueller gives another example of this phenomenon: see John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973), 74, 90.

But this was only part of the story. Roosevelt's ability to influence the way things turned out also had a lot to do with the specific tactics he used—his ability to frame what was going on in certain ways, to emphasize some things and play down others, and more generally to control the flow of information and to dominate the political discussion. The way the President did things really did make a difference in terms of political outcomes—and not just in terms of his ability to draw America into the war, but perhaps even more in terms of his ability to bring it in as a country united behind its leader and willing to do whatever it took to defeat its enemies. Consensus-building was of fundamental importance—but a consensus could be built not just through honest debate but also in more indirect ways: by emphasizing the more purely defensive, reactive, and 'hemispheric' aspects of American policy, by making it seem that the United States was acting unilaterally in defense of its own national interests, by playing down (while by no means ignoring) considerations relating to the balance of power in Europe, and so on. The country could more easily come together behind the president if the issues were framed that way and if evidence to the contrary was suppressed or minimized. And in proceeding that way Roosevelt was astonishingly successful: America went to war in December 1941 as a united country, willing to make a massive effort abroad, and it is hard to see how he could have achieved that result if he had been more forthright and had not used the kinds of tactics he had.

Roosevelt was no dictator, and although the concept of an 'open marketplace of ideas' does not come close to capturing what was going on in 1941, it is important to recognize that these great issues were debated vigorously at the time, and that those discussions did play a certain role in the story. But that process did not quite work the way one might think; it was not as though strong anti-interventionist arguments simply strengthened the forces against involvement in the war. They could, in fact, have had exactly the opposite effect. The opponents of Lend-Lease, for example, wanted people to see that if one accepted the administration's premises, the real conclusion to be drawn was that America should enter the war—that if one bought the administration's argument, it would in fact be "cowardly" not to intervene militarily. The goal, of course, was to discredit the Roosevelt policy by showing where those premises led. But it is quite conceivable that those arguments helped crystallize the issue in people's minds—that if they really did believe that "England [was] fighting our battle" then they should do the decent thing and put their own bodies on the line.¹²¹ Who knows? The point is simply that public debate can in principle work in some perhaps unexpected ways.

What, finally, does the whole story of America's road to war in 1941 tell us about the general issue we're concerned with here? We're interested in the question of whether the political leadership in a democracy can pursue a policy that the public would not endorse, if the issue were put to them in a straightforward way. We're interested in the question of whether its ability to pursue such a policy can make a real difference in terms of political outcomes—with whether the government of a democracy can take the country into a war

¹²¹ See Kimball, *Most Unsordid Act*, 178.

that the country would not choose to go into if it had to make that choice in a more forthright way. How do the 1941 cases bear on these issues? Was Roosevelt's behavior at the time typical of the way democratic governments behave? How generalizable are our findings here?

We can begin with the case of U.S. policy toward Japan in late 1941. Let's suppose the 'back door' argument is valid. I think it's the most plausible interpretation of U.S. policy at the time that one can come up with, but other people obviously do not share that view, and for that reason alone a lot more work should be, and can be, done on this issue.¹²² But for now let's just assume it's valid. That basic finding would be very interesting in its own terms, but it really would not tell us much about the larger issue at hand. That degree of deviousness is probably very rare in international political life—or at least that's the impression I've gotten after studying these issues for almost half a century now. And I think part of the reason why people find the 'back door' theory so hard to take seriously is that this kind of thing is so uncommon in great power politics.

The way in which Roosevelt managed U.S. policy toward Germany at this time is probably more typical of the way things generally work. I think, for example, of a comment Lord Salisbury made in a June 1876 to Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli: Salisbury took it for granted that it was important to "hide to the eyes of our own people . . . the nakedness of the sword upon which we really rely" in ruling India.¹²³ I think of the way the British government played up the importance of the violation of Belgian neutrality in explaining why Britain should enter the European war in 1914, even though broader considerations relating to the balance of power on the continent and Britain's relations with France and Russia played a more important role in shaping policy. I think of the way the French government in 1914 contrived to make it seem to its own people that French policy was purely defensive; the real policy the French government had pursued during the crisis was kept from the public for years afterward.¹²⁴ Various U.S. cases from the post-World War II period are also relevant here. One thinks, for example, of the way Roosevelt misled the country about what had been agreed to at Yalta, or about the way the country was misled in 1946 about what had been decided at Potsdam the previous year.¹²⁵ There are, in fact,

¹²² I think, for example, one could put oneself in Roosevelt's shoes, and go through all the information he was receiving on a day-to-day basis—including information he was getting from the MAGIC intercepts of the Japanese diplomatic traffic—and try to see what inferences could reasonably be drawn from that information, and thus what general picture, especially about the Japanese, could have been taking shape in his mind. A Collingwood-like exercise of that sort could, I think, lead to some interesting results.

¹²³ Salisbury to Disraeli, June 7, 1876, quoted in Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966), 563, <http://goo.gl/BEpLP>.

¹²⁴ See a review article I did on Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik in der Julikrise 1914: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ausbruchs des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), 7-8. That article appeared in the H-Diplo/ISSF essay series, no. 3, published by H-Diplo on November 26, 2010, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/3-Trachtenberg.pdf>.

¹²⁵ He was, however, probably not trying to mislead the American people for domestic political reasons. Instead, his aim might well have been to generate certain public expectations about what Soviet

many cases of official deception—the case of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s Congressional testimony about the Jupiter missiles in February 1963 (rare because it involved outright lying) and the case of the U.S. decision in 1965 to go to war in Vietnam immediately come to mind.¹²⁶ Indeed, one does get the sense that this sort of thing is a normal feature of international political life—that, as John Mearsheimer argued in his book *Why Leaders Lie*, governments tend to be more honest with other governments (including rival powers) than with their own publics. This is particularly true in the case of democracies: as I said in my review of the Schuessler article, “it is precisely because public opinion is so important that leaders feel under so much pressure to pander to it by framing their policies in a way that their own societies will find palatable.”¹²⁷

And why is this kind of thing so common? Geopolitical considerations play a fundamental role in shaping policy, but when policy is presented to the public, governments have to take domestic political considerations into account and therefore need to engage in a certain amount of posturing. They have to emphasize the sorts of considerations that will appeal to people at home and get them to support, or at least accept, what their leaders are doing. That gap between appearance and reality is very natural; the real thinking is rarely revealed in a totally unvarnished way; key evidence about what is going on is often suppressed. Thus Grew pointed out that “the American public was totally unaware of the details of the proposals, efforts and assurances of Prince Konoye,” or of what he himself was reporting at the time, and that the public was therefore “hardly in a position” to judge what the policy should be.¹²⁸ What goes on behind closed doors, or indeed even just inside the head of the individual at the top of the system, is normally of fundamental importance; historical work in this area, in fact, is based on the premise that there is a good deal to be learned by looking at sources that were secret at the time and were only released many

policy would be (based on what the USSR had supposedly agreed to at Yalta) as a way of putting pressure on the Soviets to pursue a policy more in line with what the Americans wanted. For this argument, see Fraser Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 310-330, esp. 316; and Fraser Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 86-92. On Potsdam (and the way it was portrayed), see Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), chaps. 1 and 2.

¹²⁶ For McNamara’s testimony, see Marc Trachtenberg, “The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *International Security* 10, no. 1 (Summer, 1985), 144, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0162-2889%28198522%2910%3A1%20%3C137%3AIONWI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>. On Vietnam, see Alexander Downes, “The Myth of Choosy Democracies: Examining the Selection Effects Theory of Democratic Victory in War,” in the H-Diplo/ISSF roundtable cited in n. 8 above, 80-93, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-2-12.pdf>. Eric Alterman, *When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and its Consequences* (New York: Penguin, 2004), discusses these and other cases; H-Diplo published a roundtable on this book in July 2006.

¹²⁷ Trachtenberg review of Schuessler’s “Deception Dividend,” H-Diplo/ISSF article review no. 3, 6, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR3.pdf>

¹²⁸ Grew, *Turbulent Era*, 2:1341.

years later—and that that sort of study can utterly transform our understanding of a period. The policy making process, in other words, is a lot less open and less transparent than many scholars would have us believe.

These are all major issues, and it's important for us to discuss them in a serious way. That's why I'm so pleased that H-Diplo/ISSF decided to organize a forum on the Reiter article. Debates of this sort are the lifeblood of the profession. There's of course a lot more to be said about all these questions we're dealing with here, the historical issues as well as the theoretical ones, but the kind of discussion we're engaging in here really can play a fundamental role as we grapple with these problems and try to get some sense for how to get to the bottom of them. The truth may be elusive, but the whole process of trying to get at it can be of enormous value, no matter where it leads.

“World War or No War,” by David Kaiser, Williams College

I have been asked by James McAllister to comment on this controversy because I am in the concluding stages of writing a book on the U.S. response to the world war in 1940-1. That book, which should be out in between ten and eighteen months, will address many of the historical issues raised by the controversy here, which I obviously cannot help but be interested in. May I say at the outset that with respect to the broader point at issue I agree far more with Marc Trachtenberg than with Dan Reiter. Democracies as well as authoritarian regimes often make decisions on war and peace that the public is surely not demanding, and sometimes use deception to try to rally support. I scratched my head when Reiter, discussing Lyndon Johnson’s behavior in 1964, referred to “naval clashes”¹ between North Vietnam and the United States in the Tonkin Gulf, since it is established beyond doubt by Ed Moise and others that there was only one such clash and that the United States retaliated for something that never happened. I was also quite surprised that there was no mention of the Bush II Administration’s sale of the invasion of Iraq based upon weapons of mass destruction which did not exist. Having said that, I want to make some general points about the situation in 1940-1 as I have come to understand it, which suggest that both these scholars have misleadingly framed the situation and ignored some very important elements in it which cast the Roosevelt Administration’s policies in a very different light. In particular, it was not possible, in my opinion, for that Administration to make a separate decision to go to war in Europe and not in the Far East.

It seems to me there are two big problems at work in this discussion, problems that dozens of books and articles on the topic share. First, we know how the story turned out—that the United States entered the war in December 1941 as an ally of Britain and the Soviet Union and that that coalition won the war. That was hardly the scenario that weighed most heavily on Americans’ minds in 1940-1, as my book will make very clear. In addition, since 1950, when North Korea attacked territory that was technically still under U.S. sovereignty, we have become accustomed to the United States deciding to intervene, or not, in places such as Vietnam, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, and many others, with full freedom of action either to go in or stay out. Consciously or unconsciously, the authors treat the crisis of 1940-1 as something the United States was free to get involved in or not. That is not in the least how the Roosevelt Administration saw the situation, nor in my opinion does it accord with the facts.

As a matter of fact, beginning with the collapse of France in May-June 1940, the most likely outcome by far in the minds of American policy makers was the defeat of Britain by Nazi Germany, followed by a German advance into the Atlantic, certainly to within aircraft range of the United States and very possibly into the Western Hemisphere itself. Should the Germans destroy or, worse, secure the British and French Navies, the U.S. would face a vastly superior coalition at sea. More importantly, the main goal of American defense preparations at least until the middle of 1941 was not helping Britain defeat the Nazis, or

¹ Dan Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry Into War,” *Security Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2012): , p. 605.

even saving Britain from German conquest. It was the defense of the western hemisphere. That was how Franklin D. Roosevelt justified the destroyers for bases deal in September 1940, the occupation of Iceland in June 1941, and the decision to shoot Axis ships on sight in the western Atlantic—and in my opinion, he was telling the absolute truth. To protect the western hemisphere the United States had to use its Navy and seize forward positions in the Atlantic, to include not only Iceland, but Greenland, the Azores, and many more. Even the German attack on the Soviet Union did not change the situation nearly as much as one might think, since the War Department in particular did not expect the Soviets to last out the year, and they anticipated (correctly) that Hitler would move heavily against the British in the Middle East and into North Africa and the Atlantic as soon as the Soviets were defeated. They might even mount a successful invasion of Britain. It is true, of course, that in the second half of 1941 U.S. authorities were laying out the requirements for the defeat of the Axis, but that was only one possible outcome of the war and they could not remotely be sure that it would be achieved.

And that leads me to my second point: the assumption that FDR, at least by January 1941, wanted to enter the war in Europe as soon as possible is in my opinion very questionable. I agree with Trachtenberg that Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark's Plan Dog memorandum was a plea to enter the war immediately to save the British, but that strategy was not adopted in the winter of 1940-1. (I will have more evidence about this in the book.) As late as April 1941—after the ABC-1 talks—the War Department was undecided regarding the wisdom of entering the war right away, and the Navy was showing even less eagerness. The United States was not going to be able to mount any significant overseas operations until late 1942 at the earliest, and thus, entering the war in mid-1941 carried enormous risks and not too many benefits. I am not at all convinced that public opinion was the most important factor restraining Roosevelt during the first eight months or so of 1941.

I do agree that by the fall of 1941 Roosevelt was ready to enter the war against Germany, and that he counted on shooting incidents in the Atlantic to bring about that result. There were other reasons for wanting to enter the war as soon as possible which do not come up in these articles, and which I will not take up here either. But now we come to the biggest problem with both of these contributions. Both seem to assume that it was entirely up to the United States to decide whether it would fight Germany and Italy alone, or Germany, Italy and Japan. That was not, however, the case, and the American policy makers understood that very well.

The words "tripartite pact" appear nowhere in Trachtenberg's critique, and I do not think they appear in Dan Reiter's article either. But as it happens, in September 1940, Germany, Italy and Japan had formally agreed and announced that if a presently neutral power attacked one of them, they would all join in war against that power. Clearly the pact was aimed at the United States, and if the signatories meant what they said, then the U.S. would also face war in the Pacific as soon as it entered the European war. We know now that the war began in the Pacific, but the US expected its involvement to begin in the Atlantic. That was indeed the context for the U.S.-Japanese talks from the spring of 1941 up until Pearl Harbor, and the talks—together with Magic intercepts—left very little doubt that the

Japanese would indeed fulfill their obligations and go to war if the U.S. went to war against Germany. Again and again Secretary of State Cordell Hull—who obviously expected, and wanted, the U.S. in the European war as soon as possible—told the Japanese that the United States could not afford to wait for Hitler to attack us, and that it would have to adopt a broad concept of self-defense that might bring it into the European war on its own initiative. If the Japanese accepted the idea that the U.S. was entering the war in self-defense whatever the precise circumstances, they would not have to join Germany under the Tripartite Pact. But the Japanese instead made it clear that they would *not* accept this U.S. view, and that they were determined to maintain their obligations under the Tripartite Pact. And Magic intercepts conveyed these intentions directly from the Japanese foreign ministry to Roosevelt, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, and Hull again and again and again.

Marc Trachtenberg's contribution seems to argue that the United States forced Japan into the war by instituting the oil embargo. I cannot research the Japanese primary sources myself, but the works of Michael Barnhart, the translations of Japanese scholarship edited by James Morley, and the translations of imperial conferences by Nobutaka Ike have given me a very different impression.² In fact, in early July 1941, the Japanese had decided that they were definitely going to create the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere, involving the occupation of both French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, and regardless of the risk of war with Britain and the United States that might result. Meanwhile, they were determined not to accept and implement Hull's Four Points for peace in the Far East, because they regarded them as a return to the Nine-Power Treaty which they had abandoned beginning in 1931 in favor of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. In addition, the best secondary work—like Ambassador Grew's reporting—does not in the least support Marc Trachtenberg's imputation that Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka fell from power in part because of U.S. pressure. He seems to have fallen because he was unable to convince his colleagues to attack the Soviet Union, which the Army thought was too risky, in preference to the southward advance.

Now it is true that Premier Fumimaro Konoye, from August to mid-October 1941, was seeking a face-to-face meeting with Roosevelt in an effort to get the embargo lifted in exchange for unspecified concessions, and he hinted that he would try to find a way around the obligations of the Tripartite Pact. Yet it also seems pretty clear that he could never have made such a deal, and indeed, he fell in mid-October precisely because both the Army and Navy believed that he was already giving away too much. They especially opposed any temporary agreement that would force them to delay their war preparations, which after September 2 got underway in earnest, without winning any long-term benefits.

This is the context in which the American decision to impose the oil embargo has to be understood. (Marc Trachtenberg is quite right, by the way, to correct the legend that

² Michael Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War* (Ithaca, 1987); James William Morley, ed., *The Fateful Choice* (New York, 1980), and *Japan's Road to the Pacific War* (New York, 1994); and Nobutaka Ike, ed., *Japan's Decision for War* (Stanford, 1967).

unfortunately has grown up that Roosevelt did not understand that a full embargo was being implemented.) There were two triggers for the oil embargo: the German attack on the USSR, which Roosevelt feared the Japanese might join, and the Japanese occupation of southern Indochina. The latter was seen in Washington as the first step in a further program of Japanese expansion and that perception was absolutely correct. Given that by the second half of 1941 the U.S. expected to be at war with Germany within the next year, and given that the Japanese appeared to be determined to join Germany in a war against the U.S., the embargo did not really increase the risk of war with Japan very much. Like the warning not to attack the USSR that Roosevelt addressed to the Japanese government before putting the embargo on, it was designed to deter the Japanese from going north, as well as to reduce their military potential. It did not, however, force them to go south—they had already decided to do so. And at no time from then on were the Japanese Army and Navy willing to give up either Japan's hard-won position in China or repudiate the Tripartite Pact in order to resume normal trade with the United States. 'Containment' of Japan was not an option by the fall of 1941 because the Japanese had decided upon the southern advance. To have avoided war with Japan the U.S. would have had at the very least to have given the Japanese the free hand in Asia that they wanted, and even then, the Japanese might well have made war on the U.S. as soon as it became involved in war with Germany. Nor was there any chance that Japan might attack the Dutch East Indies and/or the British Empire while leaving the United States alone. The Japanese Navy had definitely rejected that idea.

Last, how deceptive was Roosevelt? While he may not always have spoken in detail about the strategies he intended to pursue and when he intended to pursue them—largely, in my opinion, because he did not know himself—he and his leading cabinet officers were unmistakably clear about the nature of the threat they perceived and their goals in dealing with it. Roosevelt, Stimson, Knox and Hull all spoke again and again of a worldwide epidemic of lawlessness that threatened the United States. More specifically, in the Atlantic Charter in August Roosevelt committed the United States to “the destruction of the Nazi tyranny,” even though the U.S. was not yet in the war. As a brilliant undergraduate recently showed in a paper for me, by late 1941, Gallup and other polls showed that while a majority of the American people did not yet *favor* entering the war immediately, a majority *expected* the United States to enter it, and that evidently did not lead them to try to stop it. It is true that Roosevelt, Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall and Stark would have liked to have achieved that goal without war with Japan. Marshall and Stark definitely asked for steps to *delay* war with Japan, if at all possible, early in November 1941. But all of them had realized that it would almost certainly be impossible to avoid war with Japan as well as Germany, and all of them were willing to fight them both. They did not, like future American generations, have the luxury of picking their wars.

“Democracy, Deception, and IR Theory” by John Schuessler, Air War College¹

Marc Trachtenberg, in his contribution to this roundtable, nicely summarizes the debate over whether democracies have an edge in international affairs and the role that the World War II case has played in that debate. He also does a thorough job of rebutting Dan Reiter’s claim, advanced in a recent *Security Studies* article, that Franklin Roosevelt enlisted public support for entry into World War II through the tried-and-true mechanism of the marketplace of ideas rather than through deception, as I have argued in the pages of *International Security*.² Needless to say, I side with Trachtenberg on how to interpret the 1941 case: in his words, “America went to war in December 1941 as a united country, willing to make a massive effort abroad, and it is hard to see how FDR could have achieved that result if he had been more forthright and had not used the kinds of tactics he had.”³ Given that Trachtenberg and David Kaiser do justice to the historical issues at stake, I wanted to briefly comment on some of the theoretical ones. *What is the relationship between democracy and deception?*

First, how should we think about the relationship between democracy and deception? Reiter, continuing a line of argument first developed in *Democracies at War*, theorizes that democracy should serve as a deterrent to deception.⁴ Because elected leaders have to operate in an institutional context that increases the chances that their deception will be exposed, they will be deterred from resorting to it in the first place, lest they suffer domestic political punishment. This is certainly plausible, but one could make the opposite case: that deception is a natural outgrowth of the democratic process.⁵ Exactly because “democratic decisions for war are determined and constrained by public consent,” that is, elected leaders have powerful incentives to manufacture that consent through whatever

¹ The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government or the Department of Defense.

² Dan Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (October-December 2012), pp. 594-623; and John Schuessler, “The Deception Dividend: FDR’s Undeclared War,” *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Spring 2010), pp. 133-165.

³ Marc Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter and America’s Road to War in 1941,” H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable on Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” p. 40. As Trachtenberg alludes, I drew extensively on his work in crafting my own interpretation of the 1941 case. See Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 4.

⁴ Dan Reiter and Allan Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), esp. p. 146 and Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” pp. 600-603.

⁵ John Mearsheimer makes an argument along these lines in his book on lying. See John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 59-60. Also relevant is Joshua Rovner’s finding that democratic politics increase the likelihood of politicization of intelligence. See Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 198.

means necessary.⁶ If public opinion could be safely ignored, then elected leaders would have no need to deceive.

This is not to suggest that elected leaders engage in *more* deception than their autocratic counterparts. Autocrats have to be at least mindful of public opinion, and for that reason they regularly engage in crude attempts to gin up mass enthusiasm for war, as Reiter notes in his article.⁷ But, just because elected leaders have to be more creative and subtle in their machinations than their autocratic counterparts does not mean they have lesser incentives to be duplicitous. Only the empirical record can help us determine whether the deterrent effect that Reiter highlights is enough to outweigh the positive incentives that democracy creates for elected leaders to deceive.

What does the empirical record show?

Reiter is correct to point out that the existing body of empirical knowledge on the relationship between democracy, deception, and entry into war is narrow.⁸ The World War II case has now received extensive attention, and enough evidence has been marshaled to safely conclude that Roosevelt misled the public about his ultimate intentions toward the Axis, even if one does not buy every particular of the ‘back door’ theory that Trachtenberg and I subscribe to. The World War II case is not an aberration, either, at least in the American experience. One also finds substantial evidence in the Vietnam War and Iraq War cases that when (perceived) geopolitical and domestic political imperatives conflict elected leaders resort to deception to secure public consent for wars that would otherwise be divisive. Together, these three cases constitute the core of a book manuscript I am completing on the subject of democracy, deception, and entry into war.⁹

Assuming for the moment that my case findings hold up, what can we conclude from the pattern of deception that one finds in these three wars? Certainly it is premature to conclude that deception is more prevalent in democracies than autocracies. That would require a fuller comparison of the pre-war politics in democracies and autocracies than has yet been undertaken. Such a comparison would obviously be labor intensive, given the care with which historical evidence needs to be handled when charges of deception are being thrown around. While we cannot go so far as to argue that deception is more of a problem for democracies than autocracies, however, we can ask whether democracies are

⁶ Quote is from Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, p. 144.

⁷ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” p. 604.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 596.

⁹ John Schuessler, “Democracy, Deception, and War” (work in progress). On the Vietnam War, see also Alexander Downes, “The Myth of Choosy Democracies: Examining the Selection Effects Theory of Democratic Victory in War,” part of the H-Diplo/ISSF Exchange on *Democracy and Victory*, H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable, Vol. II, No. 12 (2011), pp. 79-100. On the Iraq War, see also the contributions to A. Trevor Thrall and Jane K. Cramer, *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11* (London, UK: Routledge, 2009).

as uniquely constrained as Reiter would have us believe. A succession of presidents, after all, has found ways to bypass institutional constraints even when those constraints have been fairly formidable. Moreover, the marketplace of ideas should have had ample opportunity to work its effects in these cases, as the build up to war was long and the scale of the potential fighting was great. It is difficult to dispute empirically that democracies have remained at peace or that they have won an impressive percentage of their wars. But whether this has been due to the moderating effect of democratic institutions is open to question. As Sebastian Rosato has argued in another context, it becomes problematic to underpin strong claims like “democracies rarely fight each other” and “democracies almost always win the wars they start” with causal mechanisms that fail regularly.¹⁰

Is deception ever justified?

At one point, Reiter suggests that “the 1941 cases are intrinsically important because if Roosevelt did secretly provoke Germany and Japan into drawing the United States into the bloodiest interstate war in its history, it would constitute a stunning indictment both of one of America’s most revered presidents and of its participation in the ‘good war.’”¹¹ Is this really fair to Roosevelt, however, or the ‘good war’? If he had not resorted to deception, Roosevelt may not have been able to generate public consent for entry into World War II; and if the United States had not entered the war, then Hitler may have dominated Europe and threatened the Western Hemisphere. Do not the ends justify the means in this case? More generally, the lesson to be learned from the American experience is not that dishonesty should be avoided at all costs, but that one must learn to discriminate between deception that advances the national interest and deception that harms the national interest. Of course, this is easier to do in hindsight and necessarily involves value judgments about the conditions under which war is justified. But, at the very least, deception cannot be ruled out *a priori* as contrary to the national interest.

Conclusion

To conclude, I want to thank Dan Reiter for triggering and now advancing this ongoing debate over democracy, deception, and entry into war. It is exactly because I share his sense that democratic decisions for war are powerfully shaped by the need to secure public consent that I see democracy and deception as intimately related. Obviously, the larger conclusions we reach about democratic exceptionalism are different, but the conversation could not have gotten started without the initial spark provided by his writings on democracies at war.

¹⁰ Sebastian Rosato, “Explaining the Democratic Peace,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (August 2005), p. 468. Reiter concedes in his conclusion that institutional constraints can fall short in reigning in elected leaders and makes the sensible recommendation that future research explore the conditions under which various institutional constraints are more or less likely to operate. See Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” p. 622.

¹¹ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War,” p. 596.

I want to thank Marc Trachtenberg, John Schuessler, and David Kaiser for taking the time to record their thoughts on my 2012 *Security Studies* article.¹ That article and a shorter, earlier note in *International Security* were in turn responses to thought-provoking essays by Trachtenberg and Schuessler that developed the deception/provocation/‘back door’ thesis.² I also thank H-Diplo for providing this forum for scholarly exchange between us. This kind of direct, public exchange can be instrumental in advancing scholarly debates.

This question of how much leeway elected governments have to slip the constraints of public opinion is important. Realists such as Walter Lippmann, George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, and John Mearsheimer have long argued that elected governments are not constrained by public opinion, in part because they are able to mislead the public through lies and deception.³ Conversely, liberal thought on international relations as far back as Immanuel Kant has maintained that democratic political institutions make for different foreign policy, primarily because democratic institutions make elected leaders answerable to the people. More broadly, as citizens and engaged scholars we should be deeply concerned if our government is able to engage in deception or concealment while making decisions about war and peace, decisions that cost lives and money and affect our national security.

Marc Trachtenberg’s Response

I focus first on Trachtenberg’s essay, it is by the far the longest and most extensive of the three. As he notes, there are several points we agree on. Specifically, I would agree that President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not reveal all the details of American policies to the public. Certainly, for reasons of national security, no president reveals all the operational particulars of military planning. The key question is, how do presidents in general (and how did Roosevelt in particular) balance disclosure and the need for secrecy? One general point I make in the *Security Studies* essay is that elected leaders are closer to the disclosure side than the secrecy side, as compared with autocratic leaders. I propose, both in the essay and in my coauthored 2002 book *Democracies at War*, that this tendency for greater disclosure in democracies has a number of consequences, including a higher quality of

¹ Dan Reiter, “Democracy, Deception, and Entry Into War,” *Security Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2012): 594-623. Thanks also to Michael Horowitz for his comments on an early draft of this essay.

² Dan Reiter, “Correspondence: FDR, U.S. Entry into World War II, and Selection Effects Theory,” *International Security* 35 (Fall 2010): 176-181.

³ George F. Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), 3-9; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, fourth edition (New York: Knopf 1967), 142; Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1992), 26; John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

debate over foreign policy, which in turn helps democracies enjoy more successful foreign policy outcomes.⁴

Trachtenberg, Schuessler, and others have proposed that Roosevelt faced public opposition to going to war, and that Roosevelt took secret, deceptive actions designed to drag an unwilling and unwitting America into war against both Germany and Japan. I disagree with these assessments. Regarding Germany, my central points were that the American public had an understanding of what Roosevelt was doing in the Atlantic, Roosevelt frequently forewent opportunities to provoke an incident, and there is evidence that Roosevelt avoided provocation at least in part because of concerns about a public backlash against provocation attempts. Regarding Japan, my central points were that Roosevelt was hoping to deter rather than provoke war (though he understood that his policies risked provocation), that the public understood what Roosevelt was doing, and that the public supported provocative policies that risked war.

Trachtenberg and Germany

Trachtenberg agrees with my central claims that the public understood the broad strokes of American naval policy in the Atlantic in 1941. Specifically, the public understood that American policy was becoming increasingly aggressive, and that, in Trachtenberg's words, Roosevelt "was trying to take the country into war." Trachtenberg also agrees with me that this is not "a case of deception pure and simple."⁵

With that in mind, let me focus on some of the differences that remain between us. Trachtenberg stresses the secret war plans made in early 1941, especially the Plan Dog memorandum and early talks with the British. However, as Kaiser notes in his essay, these plans were not adopted. More generally, the existence of contingency plans for war does not equate to a decision to launch war. For example, the U.S. revised its contingency plans for war with Canada into the 1930s, but has not been close to considering attacking Canada since perhaps 1870.

Trachtenberg finds there to be a difference in our interpretations of U.S. naval policy from mid July to mid September 1941. He proposes that there was a growing aggressiveness in U.S. naval policy during this time period, and that this policy was unannounced until perhaps Roosevelt's September 11 speech announcing the 'shoot on sight' policy. For him, this is evidence of deception, in that U.S. policy, which was perhaps aimed at provoking incidents, was more aggressive than the public realized.

I think that I agree with many of the particulars of Trachtenberg's discussion, though ultimately I do not think that it constitutes strong evidence that Roosevelt engaged in deceptive attempts to provoke war. It seems that Trachtenberg agrees with my point that Roosevelt's concerns about potential domestic political consequences constrained him

⁴ Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁵ Trachtenberg, "Dan Reiter and America's Road to War in 1941," 21.

from allowing the Navy to provoke an incident, given his comment that the U.S. “could easily have opted for a more aggressive policy in the Atlantic but chose not to *for political reasons*” (italics added). Trachtenberg and I also agree that the point of this greater aggressiveness was not to provoke an incident but rather to protect the convoys. In his words, “The principal goal of the naval operations, moreover, was to make sure that the ships got through, and it made sense, given that the German codes had been decyphered and that the naval authorities could listen in on German naval communications, to re-route the convoys so as to *avoid* the German submarines” (italics added).⁶

That said, Trachtenberg limits his above statement by arguing that “the Americans had not decided, as a matter of principle, to avoid major confrontations with German ships,” especially into the last months of 1941.⁷ I would hesitate to go this far. As I noted in my *Security Studies* essay, historians such as David Reynolds, who examine Roosevelt’s decisions regarding arming and escorting U.S. vessels, doubt that Roosevelt was seeking a confrontation with Germany even into December 1941. Reynolds notes that “F.D.R. was apparently trying to protect the Atlantic supply line in the least provocative way.”⁸ Trachtenberg discusses the decision to send an American naval task force in search of a large German naval vessel (thought to be the *Tirpitz*, but in reality the *Admiral Scheer*) in early November as evidence of a U.S. policy that was more eager for confrontation. However, the war-causing battle that never happened would have occurred in the Denmark Strait, a body of water northwest of Iceland, between Iceland and Greenland. I mention this because that Roosevelt had publicly declared, as early as July, that the US Navy would patrol that area aggressively, meaning that the Germans were fairly warned that deployment of ships to this area risked clashes, and that the American public understood Roosevelt’s aggressive naval stance around Iceland.⁹

Trachtenberg observes that we ought not to give much credence to Roosevelt changing internal, secret strategy documents to make official strategy less provocative, proposing that he took such actions for political cover, and that shifts in written strategy were mismatched with the reality of a more aggressive American naval policy. I agree that American naval policy was evolving towards a more forward stance during this period, notably informally coordinating the movements of U.S.-Iceland shipping with the movement of British vessels in the same area. I am a little hesitant to view Roosevelt’s alteration of secret naval strategy as cynically as Trachtenberg does, that Roosevelt did so purely to defend himself against the possibility that such secret documents might one day be publicly aired, and that Roosevelt’s policy sought provocation *de facto* but avoided

⁶ Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter,” 19.

⁷ Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter,” 20.

⁸ David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 220.

⁹ Jürgen Rohwer, “The Operational Use of ‘Ultra’ in the Battle of the Atlantic,” in Christopher Andrew and Jeremy Noakes, eds., *Intelligence and International Relations* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1987), 284.

provocation *de jure*. For example, one can look to the several naval incidents in 1941 other than the *Greer* episode that Roosevelt did not try to use to inflame public support for war.

Importantly, the secrecy of what the U.S. was doing during this time period should not be exaggerated. From the outset of the July policy shift, Roosevelt publicly described a very open-ended policy of defending Iceland, the sea lanes to Iceland, and the western Atlantic more generally. In his July 7, 1941 address to Congress, he declared that the US would take “all necessary steps...to ensure the safety of communications in the approaches between Iceland and the United States, as well as on the seas between the United States and all other strategic outposts.” Then, in a July 18 news conference, Roosevelt described the aggressiveness and open-endedness of this policy even more explicitly, stating, in the words of one reporter, that “no one, not even himself, could define what a threat of attack consisted of, thus stressing the breadth of the orders issued to the Navy.”¹⁰

Some might argue that though Roosevelt was open about defending U.S. vessels traveling to Iceland, the informal arrangement of also protecting British convoys in the region was still a secret. However, it was publicly understood that the US policy of defending the sea lanes to Iceland had spillover benefits to British shipping. The front page headline of the *New York Times* on July 8, the day after Roosevelt announced the new policy, read: “U.S. Occupies Iceland to Thwart Nazi Peril, Navy to Clear Sea That Far for British Aid” (italics added).¹¹ Winston Churchill himself was open about Anglo-American cooperation in the wake of the new policy. The U.S. media on July 10 reported that, “The Prime Minister pointed out that consignments of supplies for the United States forces in Iceland would have to be sent through dangerous waters, and he said he believed it might be mutually advantageous for the Navies of the United States and Britain to assist each other as far as might be convenient.”¹² In a July 30 press conference, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Walter F. George (D-Georgia), indicated that, in the words of a reporter, “the United States naval patrol of sea lanes to Iceland appeared to have been of such assistance that Great Britain was ‘slowly gaining the upper hand’ in the Battle of the Atlantic. ...the American defense patrol of the sea lanes had been of ‘great value’ to the British in efforts to move supplies.”¹³ A July 15 newspaper editorial, observing the decision to occupy Iceland and Roosevelt’s decision to defend the sea lanes to Iceland, saw these moves as essentially placing the U.S. in the war. It argued: “This means that a considerable amount of American shipping...must constantly be employed in service to Iceland, which is in the German-declared war zone. It seems, therefore, academic, since the occupation of Iceland, to talk about staying out of war.”¹⁴ Last, though the particulars of the Roosevelt-

¹⁰ *New York Times*, July 19, 1941, 1.

¹¹ *New York Times*, July 8, 1941, 1.

¹² *New York Times*, July 10, 1941, 1.

¹³ *Christian Science Monitor*, July 30, 1941, 6.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, July 15, 1941, 9.

Churchill decision at the Argentia meeting in August to take stronger measures were not announced at the time, the media immediately observed a marked shift away from American neutrality.¹⁵ For example, the *Los Angeles Times* speculated on August 15 that it expected that “United States naval and aerial patrols may be enlarged to ensure swifter and safer delivery.”¹⁶

In short, as of early July 1941, Roosevelt himself made very clear that the U.S. was taking an aggressive naval stance in the Atlantic with a very liberal interpretation of possible threats. High level members of the U.S. government were open about the spillover protection benefits to British shipping. Churchill publicly confirmed these benefits. The media conveyed that these moves increased the risk of war with Germany. In short, though as Trachtenberg notes members of the administration such as Admiral Harold Stark occasionally worried privately about the need for moving secretly, the reality was that there was little official attempt at concealing the principle elements of American policy.

Not that any botched attempt at secrecy threatened domestic political support for Roosevelt or his foreign policy. As early as mid July, a majority of Americans favored formally protecting British convoys, a policy more aggressive than anything that the U.S. had adopted to that point. In one mid-July poll, 51% of respondents agreed that “the United States Navy should be used to convoy ships carrying war materials to Britain,” and only 39% disagreed. By late July that split was 54-39 (early August polls had the split at 53-38 and 55-39; a week later it was 51-40, and in late August it was 53-40).¹⁷ Hence, it would be questionable to claim that the Navy was slowly approaching a policy of escort protection that most Americans opposed.

Let me offer my own general interpretation of what was going on. First, Roosevelt was trying carefully to strike a balance between his preference of more aggressively helping Britain and the average voter’s preference of more moderate (though non-negligible) assistance. Members of the administration, such as Admiral Stark, sometimes saw Roosevelt’s balancing act as vacillation.

Second, as noted, Roosevelt was more interested in providing Britain with assistance than in trying to provoke incidents that might drag the U.S. into war. Though Roosevelt initially exaggerated German hostility regarding the *Greer* incident, he quickly retracted the exaggeration, and did not try to inflame public opinion after the *Niblack*, *Robin Moor*, *Kearney*, *Reuben James*, or *Salinas* incidents. He elected not to order the Navy to pursue the

¹⁵ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception,” 609.

¹⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1941, A3.

¹⁷ One mid July poll found a 50-40 split in favor of US protection of British convoys. All polls in this paragraph come from iPoll, maintained by the Roper Center (<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/> accessed 21 March, 2013). The polls referred to include (the following are the identifying codes used by iPoll) USGALLUP.41-241.QK09, USGALLUP.41-241.QT09, USGALLUP.41-242.QKT03, USGALLUP.41-243.QT02A, USGALLUP.41-243.QK02A, USGALLUP.41-244.QKT02, and USGALLUP.41-246.QKT05.

German super battleship *Bismarck*, even if it sailed as close as the Caribbean. He twice pulled back U.S. naval strategy towards less provocative stances. Trachtenberg retains his belief that Churchill's recitation of Roosevelt's remarks made at Argentia is evidence that Roosevelt attempted provocation. I relayed my doubts about whether Roosevelt actually made these remarks in my *Security Studies* article (or that he actually meant them if he did say them), and I like to think that I have good company in the doubters' camp. Warren Kimball, whom Trachtenberg respects, also doubts that Roosevelt made such remarks.¹⁸

Third, though Roosevelt's actions fall short of deception, they also fall short of complete transparency. Trachtenberg summarizes Kimball's view that the Roosevelt administration repeatedly engaged in acts of "indirection and evasion."¹⁹ I think this is an important point and highlights a limitation of my theoretical argument. The marketplace of ideas is a model of reality, a simple sketch of how politics and the public sphere work, and certainly there are inevitably aspects in which reality deviates from the model (as is the case for all models). My view is that Roosevelt was trying to balance between politically-convenient evasion and transparency, often erring on the side of transparency, but sometimes sliding into evasion (such as his initial portrayal of the *Greer* episode).

But to push back a bit against this view of Roosevelt as dissembler, I think that Roosevelt needs to be given more credit than he usually receives for publicly describing American policies and for keeping American diplomatic and military policy in line with American public opinion, and less blame for seeking war through provocation. Roosevelt was by May 1941 uninhibited in his public description of the German threat, Britain's grim outlook for survival, the importance to the U.S. that Germany be stopped, and the importance of American assistance to Britain. Americans understood both the essential elements of American policy and what was actually occurring in the Atlantic, through government statements and press reports. The majority of Americans supported what the U.S. was doing. There were some gaps in the particulars. But especially in broad strokes, Roosevelt's actions are closer to the democratic ideal of transparency and responsiveness to American public opinion than he is often given credit for. Were Roosevelt's actions a perfect match for the idealized marketplace of ideas? Of course not. Were his actions much closer to the marketplace of ideas vision than those of autocratic governments like Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan? Certainly.

One last point. The marketplace of ideas functioned reasonably well not only because of Roosevelt's actions, but also because of other elements in America's liberal society and political system. Roosevelt knew that he had little chance of keeping a lid on provocative actions in the Atlantic in part because newspapers relayed the reports of sailors recuperating in East Coast ports from Atlantic voyages. Newspapers pieced together the big picture of what was occurring. Legislators pressed Roosevelt for details of his naval policy, and in particular vigorously pursued the particulars of the *Greer* incident. Senator

¹⁸ Reiter, "Democracy, Deception," 613; see also Trachtenberg, "Dan Reiter," 22.

¹⁹ Trachtenberg, "Dan Reiter," 2.

George publicly described the implications of the new July 1941 naval policies regarding Iceland for British shipping. Consistent with the theory I presented in the *Security Studies* article, Roosevelt avoided deception not because he was a saint who was ethically incapable of deception, but because the institutional environment of a liberal society deterred him from engaging in deception. That is, though, as Trachtenberg writes, Roosevelt might have liked “to take measures that reduce the risk that [he would] get caught,” he recognized that he was limited in his ability to do so.²⁰

Trachtenberg and Japan

Let me reiterate a few key points about the July oil sanctions, that Trachtenberg appears perhaps to accept, or comes close to accepting. The public saw the July oil sanctions from the start as a complete embargo. The oil sanctions were widely popular. The public was willing to support policies that risked war with Japan. Roosevelt himself told the public that the sanctions risked war. I think that if one accepts this cluster of points, it becomes difficult to embrace the ‘back door’ thesis that Roosevelt dragged an unwilling America into war by enacting sanctions he secretly knew would cause Japan to attack, but that the American public did not think risked provoking war.

That said, I think there remain two points of disagreement between Trachtenberg and I. The first concerns the degree to which Roosevelt sought war with Japan. Trachtenberg takes the more severe line that Roosevelt sought war with Japan, and in particular that his diplomatic moves closed off avenues for peaceful settlement. I agree that Roosevelt did take a hard line on Japan from July to December, but I think there is enough evidence to support a different, more nuanced take. Though Roosevelt understood that his hard-line policies risked war with Japan, his primary hope was that such policies would deter, contain, and perhaps coerce Japan.

Trachtenberg critiques three documents I cite in support of my argument, and I think his discussion of these documents is helpful. Building on Trachtenberg’s discussion, I think a more accurate, perhaps narrower reading of the documents is that Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and Roosevelt believed that the sanctions might not provoke a Japanese attack. The June 23 Ickes letter to Roosevelt reads: “There will never be so good a time to stop the shipment of oil to Japan as we now have. Japan is so preoccupied with what is happening in Russia and what may happen in Siberia that she won’t venture a hostile move against the Dutch East Indies. To embargo oil to Japan would be as popular a move in all parts of the country as you could make.”²¹ The June 25 Ickes letter to Roosevelt reads: “Japan will make no decision to attack either Russia or the Dutch East Indies until it is pretty clear what the outcome in Russia will be. If Hitler, as I anticipate, smashes Russia, as he has other countries, it is my guess that Japan will invade Siberia, just as Mussolini went over the French border when he saw that France was thoroughly licked. Japan will want to

²⁰ Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter,” 5.

²¹ Harold Ickes to Roosevelt, 23 June 1941, PSF Interior, Box 55, FDR Library.

be in a position of exacting from a victorious Hitler at least part of the loot. ...I do not believe that Japan will attack the Dutch East Indies in any event until the die is cast with respect to Russia. Then she will attempt the Dutch East Indies if she chooses, whether or not we are supplying her with oil.”²² In a third document, British Ambassador to the United States Viscount Halifax recounted on July 15 Roosevelt’s remark that, “As to the question of precipitating the Japanese into the Netherlands East Indies, he said that of course they recognised the risk, but did not rate it very high. Their information was that Japan had twelve months’ stock of oil and that so long as she was occupied in China and compelled to make provision against Russia in the north, he did not think, according to United States Staff advice, that Japan was very likely to embark on major adventures in the East Indies.”²³

Trachtenberg is right that Ickes in the June 23 letter indirectly and vaguely talks about how the embargo might provide an avenue for entry into war, but the scenario Ickes envisions is unclear. The sentence that Trachtenberg quotes, “There might develop from the embargoing of oil to Japan such a situation as would make it, not only possible but easy, to get into this war in an effective way,” comes right after the above excerpt from that letter arguing that a full embargo would not cause a Japanese attack.

Beyond the above three documents I refer to that Trachtenberg critiques,²⁴ there is other evidence I described in my *Security Studies* article that Roosevelt aimed for deterrence, containment, and coercion rather than provocation. We have Roosevelt’s August 1941 comment to Churchill that the sanctions were “bearing fruit”²⁵ because they were encouraging Japan to back down. We have several instances in which Roosevelt strove to make American policy appear less provocative to the Japanese, including in private interactions with Japanese officials and comments made after Argentina, actions that are consistent with a policy aiming to deter, contain, and coerce, and not consistent with a

²² “Harold Ickes to Roosevelt, 25 June 1941, PSF Interior, Box 55, FDR Library.

²³ Halifax to Eden, July 15, 1941, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, pt. III, series E., vol. 4 (Bethesda, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1997), 336. Note that Trachtenberg overlooks a July 8 telegram. I cited both the July 8 and July 15 telegrams in my *Security Studies* article. However, the July 8 telegram does not indicate clearly, as Trachtenberg writes, that Roosevelt “wondered whether it would be a ‘good thing’ to place Japan ‘under all economic pressure.’” Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter,” 33. That part of the telegram is simply Roosevelt requesting that Halifax discuss the issue with Welles: “[Roosevelt] asked me to discuss with Welles whether, in the event of the Japanese Government taking the action foreshadowed in these telegrams it would, or would not, be a good thing for the United States Government at once to announce the placing of Japan under all possible economic pressure.” The July 15 telegram more clearly indicates that Roosevelt felt that the embargo might not cause a Japanese attack. Importantly, the July 8 telegram later offers support for one of my critiques of the ‘back door’ thesis, that Roosevelt wanted to avoid war with Japan because he did not want to fight Germany and Japan simultaneously: “[Roosevelt’s] own view was the neither they nor we could fight a war simultaneously in the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.”

²⁴ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception,” 615, n88.

²⁵ Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 225.

policy aiming to provoke war.²⁶ Secretary of the Navy William Knox in August (privately) framed the goal of Anglo-American policy in the Far East to be avoiding war through deterrence.²⁷ In short, the Roosevelt administration sought peace, though not any price.

One reason I am reassured that Roosevelt did not want to provoke war is because there is good evidence that he wanted to avoid or at least delay war with Japan. Some of the reasons were for the national interest, including better meeting the German threat. I describe this evidence in my *Security Studies* paper (see also note 24 from this essay). Other historians agree. Jonathan Utley is blunt: “No one during the fall of 1941 wanted war with Japan.Roosevelt could see nothing to be gained by a war with Japan.”²⁸ I might add that Trachtenberg broaches a related issue of whether the U.S. and Japan could have avoided war in 1941 had the US been reasonably conciliatory. Here I side with Kaiser, who argues that absent extraordinary and politically impossible US concessions it was unlikely Japan could have been appeased.²⁹

The evidence for the argument that the Roosevelt administration wanted war because it imposed sanctions that it knew would cause war is in my view more limited than Trachtenberg allows. For example, Trachtenberg refers to a July 9, 1941 comment that Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles made to the Australian ambassador to the United States that an embargo “would provoke Japan to war with them before long.” However, in that same conversation, Welles also remarked that the US and Australia “should avoid, as long as possible, becoming involved in war in the Far East as well as in Europe,” though Welles also noted that he had “little faith in our being able to do so for long.”³⁰ That is, Welles expressed a desire for avoiding war rather than provoking war. And, in another

²⁶ Reiter, “Democracy, Deception,” 616. See also Hull’s September 3 remarks to the Australian ambassador about the critical importance of minimizing provocation of Japan. Telegram from Casey, September 3, 1941, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-1949* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1982), vol. 5, 95.

²⁷ Telegram from Casey, August 14, 1941, *DAFP*, vol. 5, 79.

²⁸ Jonathan G. Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937-1941* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 157.

²⁹ I have some doubts about some of the evidence Trachtenberg marshals for the position that Japan sought peace in fall 1941. Especially in his 2006 book, Trachtenberg’s case for the possibility of a U.S.-Japan settlement in fall 1941 leans on one historical work written by a former World War II Japanese government aide, Tsunoda Jun, whose perspective is less than objective. Trachtenberg refers to the work, James W. Morley, ed., *The Final Confrontation: Japan’s Negotiations with the United States, 1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), as “the standard reference” for understanding Japanese intentions. Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 107n. One historian viewed Jun as being on a “mission” to cast the war as a result of miscalculation rather than on Japanese aggression, and that “his assertions concerning the possibilities for peace should be treated with caution.” Michael A. Barnhart’s review of the book in *Journal of Asian Studies* 54 (May 1995): 506.

³⁰ See Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter,” 28-29. The document is Casey to Menzies, July 9, 1941, *DAFP*, vol. 5, 6.

conversation with the ambassador on July 21, Welles remarked that he expected that Japanese reaction to the American sanctions would be “renewed public outburst...and strong protests but nothing more.”³¹ This is inconsistent with the view that the administration thought the sanctions would provoke war.

I would like to focus on one piece of evidence Trachtenberg refers to, the observation from the classic Robert Sherwood biography that after the news of Pearl Harbor reached the White House, “The conference met in not too tense an atmosphere because...all of us believed that in the last analysis the enemy was Hitler and that he could never be defeated without force of arms; that sooner or later we were bound to be in the war and that Japan had given us an opportunity.”³² However, we should resist the inference from this quote that Roosevelt sought war with Japan or hoped that war would happen. Sherwood also recorded that on that same day, “The President discussed at some length his efforts to keep the country out of the war and his earnest desire to complete his administration without war.” Roosevelt described the Pearl Harbor attack as “just the kind of unexpected thing the Japanese would do, and that at the very time they were discussing peace in the Pacific they were plotting to overthrow it.”³³ That is consistent with the argument that Roosevelt was surprised by the attack and retained at least some hope that war with Japan could be avoided or delayed, and it is inconsistent with the view that Roosevelt hoped such an attack would occur, and expected such an attack to happen because of the July oil sanctions.

Another cluster of evidence deserving closer scrutiny is the record of conversations between Roosevelt and Churchill at the Argentia meeting on August 11, 1941. Trachtenberg’s take is that Roosevelt did not want to avoid war with Japan, and sought to use negotiations with Japan strategically to engineer a brief delay in the outbreak of war, perhaps 30-90 days. I have a different view, that the evidence more clearly indicates that Roosevelt preferred peace (though certainly not peace at any price). The American record of the secret August 11 meeting states that Roosevelt indicated that he “*felt very strongly that every effort should be made to prevent the outbreak of war with Japan*” (italics added).³⁴ Further, Roosevelt and Churchill, again, in private talks, framed their hardline diplomatic proposal to Japan as an opportunity to delay and perhaps even avoid war, not as a way to force Japan into (eventually) attacking: “The President expressed the belief that by adopting this course any further move of aggression on the part of Japan which might result in war could be held off for at least thirty days. Mr. Churchill felt that if negotiations or conversations actually took place between the United States and Japan on the basis

³¹ Casey telegram, July 21, 1941, *DAFP*, vol. 5, 20.

³² The quote is from Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper, 1950), 431. Trachtenberg refers to this quote in “Dan Reiter,” 26.

³³ Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 431.

³⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1941* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1958), volume 1, 358.

which had been formulated, there was a reasonable chance that Japanese policy might be modified and that a war in the Pacific might be averted.”³⁵ Not unrelatedly, Welles himself at this stage did not see war as unavoidable.³⁶

Trachtenberg might wish to qualify the apparently unconditional nature of Roosevelt’s above statement by observing that Welles felt that war was inevitable (note Trachtenberg’s reference to Welles’ comment that Roosevelt wanted to avoid war (only) for the “time being”³⁷). However, the context of the “time being” quote indicates two important points. One, Welles was making reference to the views of the U.S. Army and Navy, not Roosevelt himself. Two, the context of the quote stresses the dire need to avoid war with Japan, because war with Japan would undermine America’s ability to confront the German threat. The quote reads: “I [Welles] said that in the opinion of both the War and Navy Departments of the United States the chief objective in the Pacific for the time being should be the avoidance of war with Japan inasmuch as war between the United States and Japan at this time would not only tie up the major portion of, if not the entire, American fleet but would likewise create a very serious strain upon our military establishment and upon our production activities at the very moment when these should be concentrated upon the Atlantic.”³⁸

Trachtenberg recognizes that there was discussion in August about the need to delay war, perhaps by 30-90 days, and his take is that this casts any American peace talks at the time as not genuine, and that the broader context is that Roosevelt wanted to cause war, after the period of delay. I am not certain how well the evidence supports this portrayal of Roosevelt’s motives and planning. It means that Roosevelt understood that oil sanctions imposed in July would be severe enough to provoke a Japanese attack, but mild enough not to provoke such an attack for up to three months. It also means that Roosevelt felt that America’s military mobilization inadequacies could be redressed in a few months (that is, America would be ready for war in a few months), a belief that would seem to be at odds with the other evidence Trachtenberg discusses regarding the Roosevelt administration’s perceptions regarding America’s severe military inadequacies. In my view, a portrait that is more easily supported by the evidence is that Roosevelt was attempting to deter, constrain, and/or coerce Japan, wanted to avoid war but not at the cost of allowing Japan to maintain an empire in East Asia, saw sanctions as increasing the chances of reining in Japan, understood that the sanctions might provoke war but hoped they would not, saw that sooner or later there was a good chance of war with Japan, but wanted to delay war to permit greater time for the U.S. to prepare.

³⁵ *FRUS 1941*, vol. 1, 360.

³⁶ In talking about the possibility of war, Welles talks about putting off war “*if such [a showdown] was inevitable*” (italics added). *FRUS*, vol. 1, 347.

³⁷ “Trachtenberg, “Dan Reiter,” 30.

³⁸ *FRUS*, vol. 1, 347-348.

A second area of disagreement between Trachtenberg and me regards public knowledge of and support for Roosevelt's policies. Trachtenberg comments that the polls I cite "do not show that people approved of the more extreme policy of insisting that Japan withdraw from China or, in effect, face war with the United States; it is not even clear from the evidence Reiter presents that they understood that the U.S. government was making that demand."³⁹

However, the administration was quite clear as early as mid-August, 1941 that it was demanding Japanese withdrawal from China. On August 11, Secretary of State Cordell Hull declared in a press conference that Japan would have to abandon its imperial conquests for the sanctions to be lifted. The *New York Times* summarized Hull's comments as such: "It was obvious to his press conference listeners that Secretary Hull was ...insisting that Japan must come back to a *pre-conquest* system of peaceful dealing if she wants to take up the question of settlement of difficulties here" (italics added).⁴⁰

Such a stance was popular, as the public supported a hardline U.S. policy that risked war. Indeed, Roosevelt was pulled to some of the hard line positions that Trachtenberg regrets, such as his refusal to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoye, *because* of public demand for a hard line.⁴¹ Trachtenberg posits that at least one opinion poll casts doubt on the conclusion that the public supported a hard line.⁴² Here are essentially all of the public opinion polls on US policy towards Japan taken from July 1941 to December 1941, including the one that Trachtenberg highlights.⁴³

--July 1941: "Do you think the United States should go to war with Japan, if that is the only way to keep Japan from taking British, French, and Dutch possessions in the South Pacific?" 46% yes, 40% no.

--July 1941: "Do you think the United States should go to war with Japan, if that is the only way to keep Japan from seizing the Dutch East Indies and Singapore?" 52% yes, 35% no.

--July 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means risking a war with Japan?" 52% yes, 31% no.

³⁹ Trachtenberg, "Dan Reiter," 36.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, August 12, 1941, 1.

⁴¹ Reiter, "Democracy, Deception," 621.

⁴² Trachtenberg, 36, n111.

⁴³ All derive from iPoll. These polls include the following: USGALLUP.41-242.QKT10, USGALLUP.41-243.QKT10, USOPOR.41-809.Q11KT, USGALLUP.41-244.QT12, USGALLUP.41-244.QK12, USGALLUP.090741.RK13, USGALLUP.111441.RK09, USGALLUP.41-251.QKT06, USOPOR.41-810MORALE.Q11, USGALLUP.41-254.QT09, and USGALLUP.41-254.QK03.

--August 1941: "Should the United States go to war now against Japan?" 67% yes, 24% no.

--August 1941: "If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States going to war now against Japan, how would you vote--to go to war now against Japan, or to stay out of war with Japan?" 22% go to war, 71% stay out.

--August 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if it means risking a war with Japan?" 70% yes, 18% no.

--October 1941: "Should the United States declare war on Japan now?" 15% yes, 74% no.

--October 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to prevent Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means risking a war with Japan?" 64% yes, 25% no.

--November 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means we have to go to war against Japan?" 64% yes, 23% no.

--November-December 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means risking a war with Japan?" 74% yes, 17% no.

--November-December 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means risking a war with Japan?" 74% yes, 18% no.

--November-December 1941: "Should the United States take steps now to keep Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this means risking a war with Japan?" 74% yes, 17% no.

In summary, there are seven questions asking if the US should take steps to prevent Japan from becoming more powerful, even if this risked war. In all seven, clear majorities said yes. There are five polling questions asking if the US should go to war now. In two, majorities supported going to war; in one, a majority of those expressing an opinion (that is, a plurality of all those polled) supported going to war; and in two, majorities opposed going to war. Overall, a fair assessment is that a majority of the American public favored sanctions against Japan even at the risk of war, and a very rough guess is that a non-trivial portion of the population, perhaps as much as half, supported an immediate American declaration of war against Japan, a more aggressive policy than the provocation approach that the 'back door' thesis proposes Roosevelt was engaged in. Notably, Roosevelt and his cabinet agreed in a meeting on November 7 that the public would be supportive if the US attacked Japan first.⁴⁴ That is, if one views Roosevelt's policy as an attempt to contain Japan that risked war, there is clear evidence that a solid majority favored that policy. If one instead takes the more extreme view that Roosevelt's policy was an attempt to provoke Japan into war, there is at least some evidence that perhaps as much as half the country would have supported the even more extreme policy stance of openly declaring war on Japan.

⁴⁴ Reiter, "Democracy, Deception," 621.

One last point. The ‘back door’ thesis rests on the supposition that Roosevelt wanted war with Japan in order to achieve his desired war with Germany. The gist of the argument is that this is the only reasonable explanation for Roosevelt’s actions, given evidence that Roosevelt sought war with Germany, and that he knew his Pacific diplomacy would ensure war with Japan. Trachtenberg states that I have driven “another nail into the coffin of the old argument about the President not being aware until much later that the measures taken in late July were tantamount to a virtually total cut-off of trade by showing that from the outset newspapers ‘bluntly described’ that move as a full embargo.”⁴⁵ I prefer the interpretation suggested by Jonathan Utley, that it was an attempt at a deft political move, allowing the public to think there was a freeze, whereas in reality there was a bit of wiggle room for the Japanese to procure some petroleum.⁴⁶ This is the kind of misdirection short of outright deception Roosevelt engaged in that Kimball describes. It is also the reverse of the pattern described by the ‘back door’ thesis, in that it was partial sanctions disguised as an embargo, rather than an embargo disguised as partial sanctions.

Trachtenberg suggests that archival discoveries encouraged Waldo Heinrichs to argue that Roosevelt authorized a full embargo, as early as July 1941. My take is that though Heinrichs views Roosevelt as approving a full embargo, Heinrichs disagrees with other important elements of the ‘back door’ thesis. Heinrichs believes that Roosevelt saw the sanctions, at least initially, as allowing him the flexibility to decide how much oil Japan would receive. Heinrichs believes that Roosevelt saw the possibility of avoiding war through containment and deterrence, and doubts that Roosevelt believed that an embargo would assuredly provoke Japan. His July 1941 chapter is titled: “July: The *Containment of Japan*” (italics added). Heinrichs argued that Roosevelt understood that an embargo might not cause war, and instead might serve the goals of deterrence, containment, and coercion: “On the other hand, there were reasons for believing that an embargo might not precipitate a Japanese attack southward. ...embargo was a deterrent, or, if stringently applied, powerfully coercive.”⁴⁷

John Schuessler’s Response

My reactions to Schuessler’s thesis are laid out in my *International Security* letter and my *Security Studies* article. In very brief, in my view it is difficult to sustain the deception thesis as applied to 1941 when there is clear evidence that the public knew and supported what Roosevelt was doing, and that on several occasions Roosevelt held back from taking provocative actions.

⁴⁵ Trachtenberg, 28.

⁴⁶ Utley, *Going to War with Japan*, 153-154.

⁴⁷ Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 142, 145.

Those issues aside, the absence of deception becomes even clearer when comparisons are drawn with the behavior of authoritarian leaders. World War II in Europe and Asia both started when authoritarian states used deceptive provocations to mask aggression, namely the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and the Marco Polo incident in Manchuria in 1937. As I describe in the *Security Studies* article, authoritarian states engage in this kind of deception more routinely, and democratic states engage in this behavior quite rarely.

This discrepancy between the deception behaviors of democracies and autocracies is part of an overwhelming wave of systematic empirical evidence, emerging from a similar set of theoretical assumptions about the effects of democratic political institutions, demonstrating that democratic foreign policy operates in systematically different ways than authoritarian foreign policy.⁴⁸ These findings have provided evidence supporting several assumptions and empirical implications of this liberal institutionalist view, including: democracies are quite unlikely to fight each other; democracies tend to win the wars they start; democracies become increasingly likely to initiate conflict as their chances of victory increase; democracies fight shorter wars, and become increasingly likely to seek draw outcomes as wars endure; democracies suffer fewer friendly casualties when they fight their wars; public support for war degrades as the chances of success erode and casualties increase; and military conscription strengthens the pacifying effect of democratic institutions in comparison with voluntary force systems. Schuessler is, of course, correct that debates continue about various elements within this large research agenda; most recently there has been lively and useful debate about the "audience costs" thesis.⁴⁹ But the broad picture is clear: democratic institutions cause elected governments to adopt different foreign policies as compared with unelected governments that are unconstrained by such institutions.⁵⁰

David Kaiser's Response

I admit that I was a little puzzled by Kaiser's remarks, in that though he initially indicated that he found himself in greater agreement with Trachtenberg than with me, I agree with many of Kaiser's points, and found them to be supportive of my thesis. I was pleased to

⁴⁸ For a review, see Dan Reiter, "Democratic Peace Theory," *Oxford Bibliographies* in "Political Science," Ed. Richard Valeyly (New York: Oxford University Press, October 25, 2012), <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756223/obo-9780199756223-0014.xml>.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Jack Snyder and Erica D. Borghard, "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound," *American Political Science Review* 105 (August 2011): 437-456; Marc Trachtenberg, "Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis," *Security Studies* 21 no. 1 (2012); Kenneth A. Schultz, "Why We Needed Audience Costs and What We Need Now," *Security Studies* vol 21 no. 3 (2012): 369-375."

⁵⁰ Schuessler cites Sebastian Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review* 97 (November 2003): 585-602. For critiques of Rosato's analysis, see David Kinsella, "No Rest for the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review* 99 (August 2005): 453-457; Branislav L. Slantchev, Anna Alexandrova, and Erik Gartzke, "Probabilistic Causality, Selection Bias, and the Logic of the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review* 99 (August 2005): 459-462

read that Kaiser shares at least the gist of many aspects of my argument, including most critically that Roosevelt and his administration “were unmistakably clear about the nature of the threat they perceived and their goals in dealing with it.” Kaiser also disagrees with Trachtenberg’s claim that the oil sanctions “forced Japan into the war,” and that “Matsuoka fell in part because of U.S. pressure.” Kaiser agrees that the “embargo ...was designed to deter the Japanese from going north,” and that “the embargo did not really increase the risk of war very much.” That said, Kaiser agrees with Trachtenberg that Roosevelt “counted on shooting incidents in the Atlantic to bring” the U.S. into war with Germany. My views on this point are provided in the *Security Studies* article and my reply here.⁵¹

A final point. I regret if my essay gave the impression that I deviated from the conventional wisdom on the Gulf of Tonkin. In my view, this is the one clear case of an elected government engaging in deception to get its war. Regarding the 2003 Iraq War, as I noted in my *Security Studies* essay, the mix of deception and incompetence that underlay the decision to invade is a question that future historians with the benefit of comprehensive declassification will be able to sort out more thoroughly.

Conclusion

Elected leaders do not make policy decisions under conditions of complete transparency. However, recognition of this departure from an idealized vision of the marketplace of ideas does not then mean one has to accept the realist critique that elected leaders can routinely and easily deceive their publics, and trigger wars that their publics would otherwise prefer to avoid. If they could, we would see elected leaders resorting to such tactics at least somewhat regularly. The reality, however, is that democratic leaders engage in such tactics rarely, especially in comparison with the frequency with which autocratic leaders use such tactics.

The scholarly task is to take careful measure of all the potential candidate episodes of democratic deception to better assess the frequency of such events. My view is that the Gulf of Tonkin is the only clear case, it is too early to judge Iraq 2003, and the 1941 case is not a case of such deception. Beyond the Gulf of Tonkin and perhaps the Iraq cases, there are virtually no cases of such democratic deception. When compared to the routine use of deception by authoritarian leaders, this bolsters our confidence that, in general, democratic institutions do provide more robust marketplaces of ideas, deterring elected leaders from engaging in deception. Democracy is the better for it.

⁵¹ Kaiser, “Comments,” 3-6.

Comment from David A. Baldwin, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs,
Princeton University

One of the purposes of this list is to allow political scientists and historians to familiarize each other with their respective approaches to diplomatic history. Although I have no special insights as to what ‘really’ happened in July 1941, I would like to suggest an alternative way of framing the question.

The debate seems to be framed as follows: Most scholars have assumed that the goal of U.S. policy was to avoid war with Japan. The oil embargo in July 1941 is difficult to reconcile with this assumption since it was likely to increase the probability of war with Japan. Therefore, one must assume either that Roosevelt did not understand this or that avoiding war with Japan was not his ‘real’ goal. This then leads to a discussion of deception in democracies.

An alternative way of framing this debate is to begin by assuming that foreign policy makers rarely, if ever, pursue only one goal at a time; they usually, perhaps always, have multiple and competing goals. This competition among the goals is crucial, since it means that some goals will have to be sacrificed (at least partially) in order to achieve other goals (at least partially). It should be stressed that all of these are ‘real’ goals—even the ones that are sacrificed. Thus, one may have the goals of ‘having one’s cake and eating it.’ Choosing to eat it now, however, does not imply that the goal of having it later was never a ‘real’ goal; nor does it imply that one was being deceptive in posing it as a ‘real’ goal in the first place. It simply means that one chose one real goal at the expense of another. (Economists use the term ‘opportunity cost’ to analyze such situations.)

For purposes of illustration, I should like to be permitted to posit three plausible goals of U.S. policy in July 1941. First, avoiding war with Japan. Second, Japanese withdrawal from China. And third, preparing for the possibility of war with Japan. These are competing goals in the sense that progress toward one of them necessitates sacrificing progress toward one or both of the others. The third goal receives relatively little attention in the discussion of Trachtenberg’s book. It is difficult to believe, however, that American foreign policy makers were so preoccupied with ‘deterring’ war with Japan that they gave no thought to preparing for the possibility that this attempt at ‘deterrence’ might fail.

If the problem is framed this way, further questions arise: (1) How did various participants in the foreign policy making process perceive the trade-offs among these goals? (2) What estimates of the ‘autonomous probability’ of war with Japan were the participants making, and how did these estimates change over time—say, between 1939 and July 1941? (The phrase ‘autonomous probability’ of war refers to the probability of war regardless of whether an oil embargo was used or not.) Presumably, as estimates of the probability of war with Japan went up, so would the importance of the third goal relative to the other two. The goal of preparing for war with Japan provides a rationale for the oil embargo that is independent of the other two goals. Both keeping the oil for American use and denying it to a potential enemy are directly related to the third goal. Whether war with Japan could have

been avoided is uncertain. There was absolute certainty, however, that continued shipment of petroleum to Japan would strengthen the military capability of a potential adversary.

I do not know whether Roosevelt deliberately provoked war with Japan as an excuse for entering the war against Germany or not. Nor do I know whether he deliberately misled the American public. I am suggesting, however, that the case in favor of these propositions cannot rest on the assumption that there is no other plausible explanation for imposing an oil embargo on Japan in July 1941. Roosevelt may well have imposed the oil embargo knowing that it would increase the probability of war with Japan, but that does not justify concluding that he did not want to avoid war.

David A. Baldwin
Senior Political Scientist
Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University

Copyright © 2013 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.
