
Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux
Reviewers: Mark Gilderhus, Alonzo L. Hamby, T. Christopher Jespersen, J. Simon Rofe


**Contents**

- Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.......................... 2
- Review by Mark T. Gilderhus, Texas Christian University ..................................................... 6
- Review by Alonzo Hamby, Ohio University............................................................................. 8
- Review by T. Christopher Jespersen, North Georgia College & State University .......... 14
- Review by J. Simon Rofe, Leicester University....................................................................... 17
- Author’s Response by David F. Schmitz, Whitman College ..................................................... 20

Copyright © 2008 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.
Franklin D. Roosevelt’s leadership of the United States from 1933 to Pearl Harbor has not been a subject of significant historiographical debate since the demise of post-World War II revisionism, although the “back door to war” conspiratorial perspective has continued to resurface with new studies and memoirs about intelligence information. Robert Divine’s *The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II* (1965) and Robert Dallek’s *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (1979) established a viewpoint on FDR as a nationalist and isolationist before shifting under the impact of war in 1939 to an increasing internationalist stance. The main dissent to this perspective came from Frederick W. Marks III in *Wind over Sand: The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt* (1988). Marks argued that FDR usually pursued a zig-zag course that reflected his own vacillation on problems in Europe and Asia and his reluctance to prepare the public and the U.S. military for increasing challenges in both areas.

The reviewers agree that in less than one hundred pages of text David Schmitz has provided a succinct and perceptive assessment of FDR that keeps the focus on the President and his handling of the major foreign policy challenges of the thirties. By providing twenty-five documents to illustrate FDR’s speeches, assessments by his advisers, and diplomatic exchanges with Japan, as well as a bibliography, Schmitz has provided a text that will be particularly valuable for an introductory course on U.S. diplomacy.

The reviewers note several significant strengths in Schmitz’s study including

1.) As Mark Gilderhus, Simon Rofe and Alonzo Hamby point out, Schmitz places FDR in an internationalist perspective which he introduces in the first chapter on “The Perils of Republican Internationalism” from Woodrow Wilson through Republican policy makers in the 1920s. Schmidt notes that a number of historians including Divine and Dallek “argue that Roosevelt was an isolationist who only slowly changed his views in the late 1930s in response to events abroad.” (p. xxii) Although FDR gave priority to the New Deal’s efforts to counter the effects of the Great Depression, Gilderhus welcomes the attention that Schmitz provides to FDR’s parallel efforts to develop a Good Neighbor policy for Latin America, to negotiate reciprocal trade agreements, and to encourage hemispheric cooperation. Rofe seconds this evaluation but also asks for more development of FDR’s emerging views on foreign policy beyond a couple of pages in chapter two. Hamby agrees with this point and makes the case for viewing FDR as “a classical realist, committed to US participation in world politics.” (1)

2.) Christopher Jespersen and the other reviewers agree with Schmitz’s emphasis on the evolution in Roosevelt’s level of understanding of the challenges posed by Nazi Germany and Japan and the extent to which FDR was limited by the domestic political climate. As Gilderhus notes, Roosevelt after the 1936 election tried appeasement with Adolf Hitler in the context of believing that Germany had legitimate grievances from the Treaty of Versailles settlement of World War I and economic challenges from the Great Depression. With backing from the State Department, Roosevelt had Undersecretary of
State Sumner Welles’ initiate efforts for an international conference on disarmament and trade. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, however, preferred his own approach to Berlin which culminated in the Munich conference and ultimate dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. (42-50) Hamby does suggest that Schmitz’s analysis would have been strengthened by increasingly linking together Asian and European problems especially by 1938. Hamby also would welcome more assessment of FDR’s views on the Soviet Union and how he considered the possible contributions of Moscow in dealing with Japan and Germany.

3.) The reviewers endorse Schmitz’s favorable assessment of FDR’s effort to make the case for internationalism after the 1936 election in public speeches, in negotiations with Congress over neutrality legislation and military preparedness, in developing a response to Japanese expansion in China and East Asia that would discourage Japan from moving beyond China, and in FDR’s increasing recognition that Hitler’s Germany posed the most serious strategic threat to the United States. In hindsight critics have questioned the caution in FDR’s dealings with Congress and the public, but Schmitz makes a strong case for FDR’s concerns about moving too far ahead of the public. Schmitz develops FDR’s step-by-step approach after the outbreak of the European war in 1939 and his successful escalation of U.S. aid to the British after Hitler’s conquest of France. The reviewers appreciate Schmitz’s emphasis on FDR’s integration of the European conflict with the East Asian situation and FDR’s ultimately unsuccessful efforts with the partial embargo in 1940 and the freeze of Japanese assets in 1941 to keep Japan from attacking the Soviet Union or East Asia beyond China and Indochina.

4.) Jespersen notes two favorable characteristics about Schmitz’s assessment of FDR’s relations with Congress and the public. First, FDR recognized the importance of bipartisanship as conflicts expanded in Asia and Europe and he successfully brought two Republicans, Henry Knox and Henry Stimson, into his administration in 1940 as, respectively, Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of War. Second, “Schmitz emphasizes what FDR faced as he moved the nation toward a greater international perspective,” Jespersen observes, “but he’s careful not to dismiss the critics or leaders of countervailing forces,” most notably the Congressional leaders who worried about how FDR’s policies to aid the Allies such as Lend-Lease could lead to an erosion of powers in the legislative branch and enhanced executive powers.

5.) Hamby raises the “back door” to war issue and suggests that Schmitz “formulates a more benign and persuasive version” of this thesis. Hamby credits FDR with recognizing that a sphere of influence accord with Tokyo would not hold up especially after the Tripartite Pact in September 1940 suggested that Japan was shifting to cooperation with the Axis Powers. Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union and Japan’s occupation of southern Indochina prompted FDR to approve a freeze on Japanese assets and an ensuing total embargo on oil sales to Tokyo. “Seeing Japan as an implacably aggressive force that had to be faced down sooner or later,” Hamby concludes that FDR “... was ready to go to war, perhaps even wanted war, and knew without a doubt by late November that it would come soon.”
Participants:

David F. Schmitz is the Robert Allen Skotheim Chair of History at Whitman College. He received a PhD at Rutgers in 1985. He is the author of *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989; Thank God They’re on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-1965; Henry L. Stimson: The First Wise Man; The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940; and The Tet Offensive: Politics, War, and Public Opinion*; and he is the editor, with Richard D. Challener, of *Appeasement in Europe: A Reassessment of U.S. Policies*; and the editor, with T. Christopher Jespersen, of *Architects of the American Century: Individuals and Institutions in Twentieth-Century U.S. Foreign Policymaking*.


Alonzo L. Hamby is Distinguished Professor of History at Ohio University. A graduate of the University of Missouri, Professor Hamby specializes in 20th century U.S. history, especially politics and culture. His books include: *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (1973); *The Imperial Years: The United States since 1939* (1976); *Liberalism and Its Challengers: F.D.R. to Reagan* (2d ed., 1992); *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (1995), and *For the Survival of Democracy: Franklin Roosevelt and the World Crisis of the 1930s* (2004).

T. Christopher Jespersen is Dean of the School of Arts & Letters at North Georgia College & State University, both a liberal arts institution and one of the nation’s six senior military colleges. He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University and is the author of *American Images of China, 1931-1949* (Stanford University Press), editor of *Interviews with George Kennan* (University Press of Mississippi), and author of articles on U.S. diplomacy and U.S. relations with Asia in various edited volumes and professional journals. He has served on the editorial boards of *Diplomatic History* and *Pacific Historical Review*. He has just completed a book entitled *Becoming the Redcoats*. In addition to receiving various teaching awards, in 2000 he was the recipient of a Meritorious Service Award from the United Negro College Fund.

J. Simon Rofe holds the position of Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations and the Centre for American Studies at the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. He previously held positions in the Defence Studies Department of King’s College London at the Joint Services Command and Staff College; the American Studies Department at Canterbury Christ Church University; the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He undertook a BA in American Studies and International History at Keele University,
before undertaking a Masters Degree in International Relations which received a Distinction. He then moved to the University of Wales to undertake his PhD. His recent publications include: *Franklin Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy and the Welles Mission.* (Palgrave: New York, 2007). [http://www.palgrave-usa.com/catalog/product.aspx?isbn=140398073X](http://www.palgrave-usa.com/catalog/product.aspx?isbn=140398073X); ‘Prescription and Remedy: Lothian’s influence upon Anglo-American relations during the Phony War’ in *The Round Table – The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 2 2007; ‘The United States Security Dilemma – a Nation at War’, in *My US: Views on the US National Security and Foreign Policy*, Mireille Radoi (ed.) (Tritonic: Bucharest and Washington: State Department publications, 2007) He is currently embarking upon a substantial research project to provide an original exploration of the fundamental beliefs underpinning Franklin Roosevelt and his administration’s vision for securing US national interest in a post war world during both the 1930s and 1940s. His broader research interests lie in the field of US Foreign Relations and Diplomacy in the twentieth century with a specific focus on Presidential Foreign Policy, and American visions of peacemaking and post-war planning.
This thin book (93 pages of text plus documents) should well serve the intended audience. Aimed at history students and lay readers, it provides a succinct, pointed, and up-to-date introduction to the subject and attributes a powerful role to FDR as the leader who moved the process along incrementally. “The triumph of internationalism” came about in large measure because of the president’s definition of national interests and his understanding of the role of the United States in world affairs.

Schmitz begins with definitions. He argues correctly that the United States has never pursued a policy of strict “isolationism” if the term means cutting off all ties with the outside world. Instead, foreign policy elites have consistently acted in favor of trade expansion and debated the limits and extent of political engagements with countries outside the western hemisphere. The issue concerned varieties of “internationalism.” Typically they resisted commitments in defense of other nations before knowing the full implications of embracing such involvement. Cautious, tradition-minded, and partisan Republicans rejected Woodrow Wilson’s peace plan in 1919 and by so doing compounded the shortcomings of peace making after World War I. They spurned collective security and affirmed a kind of “independent internationalism” which among other things entailed rejection of the League of Nations.

When FDR became the president in 1933, he encountered a crisis on the home front but never forsook his “internationalist” convictions. On this point, Schmitz’s explanation runs counter to some recent scholarship which depicts Roosevelt during the first term as an “isolationist.” Not so says Schmitz. He merely allocated higher priority to the New Deal as a response to the domestic effects of the Great Depression. As a paradigm in his thinking about foreign relations, the Good Neighbor Policy for Latin America demonstrated Roosevelt’s high regard for nonintervention, trade reciprocity, and the cultivation of international cooperation through Pan Americanism.

The crises brought on by the expansionist moves of German Nazis, Italian Fascists, and Japanese militarists moved Roosevelt more rapidly in the direction of full-scale “internationalism.” Initially he experimented with policies designed to appease the anti-status quo powers. Later, without sacrificing his own freedom of action, he perceived emerging communities of interest with Great Britain and the Soviet Union and acted upon them by negotiating the destroyers-bases deal with Winston Churchill and later pushing for the Lend Lease Act. When extended to the British and Soviets as a form of aid “short of war,” the latter, in effect, a declaration of economic warfare on Germany, further strained relations, resulting in an undeclared naval war in the North Atlantic.

In Asia, the Japanese invasion of China, followed by a move into Indochina after the fall of France to the Nazis in June 1940, deepened a parallel crisis. FDR and his advisers always perceived Germany as the more dangerous but could not ignore Japanese aggression, especially after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 threatened to bring down Joseph Stalin’s communist regime. What if the Japanese joined in by attacking the
Soviets in the east? Such a prospect dismayed Roosevelt, because he could not imagine how the British would defeat Hitler if the Soviets dropped out. To divert the Japanese, leaders in the Roosevelt administration tightened economic restrictions on trade and insisted upon respect for the Open Door, self-determination, and free trade in East Asia but could not attain such goals. Rather than deter the Japanese from rash actions as intended, the economic sanctions drove them to desperation and precipitated the decision to attack the Pacific Fleet at its base in Hawaii.

Happily Schmitz entertains no nonsense about conspiracy and back-doors-to-war theories. Neither evidence nor reason provides any support for crackpot claims that Roosevelt knew of the forthcoming attack but let it happen to get the country into the European conflict. No reputable historian accepts this view. True, based on partial intelligence findings, administration leaders had expectations of a Japanese attack somewhere, possibly against Singapore, Hong Kong or the Philippines, but certainly not the great bastion of U.S. naval power concentrated at Pearl Harbor. Ironically what looked to U.S. leaders as a deterrent appeared to the Japanese as a target. Misperception and oversight in combination with good Japanese planning and execution accounted for the disaster, not deceit, betrayal, or treachery by Roosevelt. In any case, Hitler four days later then declared war on the United States, not the other way around.

This compact, accessible book should work well in undergraduate classes and also address the interests of lay readers. Indeed, as a reviewer, I cannot find much of anything to criticize. Schmitz successfully meets his stated goals. He convincingly presents FDR as a skilled leader who viewed himself as a worldly-wise, sophisticated cosmopolitan who believed in the universal applicability of his values. His embrace of liberal-capitalist internationalism as a means toward peace, stability, and prosperity necessarily disposed him against German, Italian, and Japanese aggression and effectively laid the foundations for U.S. policy in the postwar period. Seizing the opportunity for a “second chance” after the failure in 1919, he envisioned a better future based on liberal democracy, collective security, free trade, and economic integration, all of which the Truman administration promoted after his death in conjunction with the containment policy.

Finally, forty pages of well-chosen documents should whet the interest of readers. Carefully picked to illustrate and support the main themes, these primary sources, mainly recommendations about and statements of policy, invite interrogation and address primary concerns about developments in Latin America, Asia, and Europe. They range from the Clark memorandum on intervention and nonintervention to the Stimson Doctrine on non-recognition to the “quarantine the aggressor” speech on Japanese aggressions to the “day of infamy” oration after Pearl Harbor. They all amplify and expand understanding of U.S. foreign policy toward the outside world and should intrigue novices.
At one level, this is a routine classroom text consisting of a narrative (30-35, 000 words) and selected documents. Done by a scholar with strong credentials in the interwar era, the narrative can also be read as a treatment for a larger book which one hopes may materialize in the future. This review addresses that presumptive treatment, which by its nature, simplifies the twists and turns of a rich and complex topic. It does so by asking--and attempting to answer--a series of questions.

**Was Franklin Roosevelt ever an isolationist?**

Schmitz, doubtless for the benefit of students, gives us, first, a vulgar definition of isolationism as essentially one of belief in cutting off all intercourse (economic as well as political) with the world, but then he correctly defines the term as a policy of avoiding “entangling alliances,” remaining aloof from European power politics, and defining American interests as confined to the Western Hemisphere. Such a stance, of course, did not preclude commerce with any nation anywhere. Even with that more precise definition, however, he seems to construct a straw man in arguing for a historical consensus that Roosevelt was an isolationist at the beginning of the 1930s.

FDR in fact never committed to isolationism, properly defined. As a fledgling politician in the early twentieth century, he was a devotee of Alfred Thayer Mahan and an acolyte of his cousin, Theodore Roosevelt. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he was a big navy man, vocal in his aspirations for a fleet that could project American power around the globe. His correspondence at the beginning of World War I reveals shrewd and sober insight about the nature of the conflict and the impossibility of staying out of it. From an early age, he was a classical realist, committed to US participation in world politics, and by 1920 at least somewhat affected by Woodrow Wilson’s universalistic idealism. An advocate of US membership in League of Nations into 1932, he publicly renounced the goal to secure the support of the publisher William Randolph Hearst. Schmitz rightly observes that he trimmed sharply because of the demands of politics in a deeply isolationist nation during his first term, then moved steadily toward an internationalist posture as the world careened toward war in his second.

**What was the relationship between Roosevelt’s economic recovery program and his diplomacy?**

The First New Deal (1933-35), a loose and ultimately ineffective form of state corporatism, logically pointed toward a strong degree of economic isolationism. Tight supervision of industry, dictation of labor standards, and subsidization of agriculture with accompanying output restrictions were all incompatible with full participation in a competitive international economy.

During his first two years as president, Roosevelt and his advisers sought what we might call “recovery in one country” substantially insulated from the world economy. Although
the Democratic campaign of 1932 had pledged to resuscitate world trade, Roosevelt during his first year as president made no effort even to tinker with the Smoot-Hawley tariff and would never attempt a comprehensive revision of it.

The United States was hardly alone in this position, which almost every other industrial country embraced to a significant degree. Great Britain abandoned free trade, attempted (with slight success) to establish a self-contained imperial economic bloc, and pursued a limited form of state corporatism. France went much farther, especially in its protectionism. Italy by 1933 was the world’s model of the corporatist state. Germany, never a free-market economy, would become as thoroughly state-controlled in the 1930s as any nation in the world.

When the World Economic Conference convened in the spring of 1933 with the goal of reviving a collapsed international trade system, it was Roosevelt who, after having provided substantial encouragement, hurled the “bombshell” message that effectively destroyed it. It is easy to say he was realistic; there was by then no chance of a comprehensive lowering of tariffs based on the currency stabilization agreements that such a pact would have required. Still, the conference provided an opportunity for bilateral accords, not least between the United States and Britain. Instead, Roosevelt sent a divided delegation, gave it no mandate to engage in meaningful negotiations, and ultimately undercut his free-trade Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. British Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain seems to have attempted bargaining in good faith only to be rebuffed without warning. The presidential bombshell left him distrusting Roosevelt for the balance of the 1930s and convinced him that the United States would be an unreliable ally.

Roosevelt’s instinct during the critical first year of his presidency was to preserve his freedom of action economically. This required a rejection of international economic pacts. Yet an economic agreement with Britain, possibly also France and some smaller European nations, would have set the stage for a diplomatic alliance that would have strengthened the hand of the democracies against an aggressive fascism. Moreover, economic isolationism failed to promote recovery. The Depression persisted in the United States a good four years longer than in the other industrial powers.

With great fanfare, Roosevelt secured authorization of his Reciprocal Trade program in 1934. Schmitz quite correctly observes, however, that it was no “panacea” (26). In fact, it was hardly a band-aid. US exports increased by “more than a billion dollars” over the next five years, but much of this doubtless reflected the general world economic recovery. According to “Historical Statistics of the United States,” exports were 3.9 percent of GDP in 1934 and 4.2 percent in 1939, a year in which US GDP was about 88 percent of 1929. A major trade agreement with Great Britain finally came in 1938, generated on both sides by a common concern with aggressive fascism.

Just What Was the Significance of the Good Neighbor Policy?

Schmitz dutifully covers Roosevelt’s avoidance of overt intervention in Latin America, giving relatively detailed attention to the Cuban crisis of 1933-34. Although he is reluctant
to state it baldly, he depicts a kinder, gentler way of securing American hegemony in the Western hemisphere. The installation of compliant “strongmen,” well-equipped with US weaponry, in the turbulent Caribbean and Central American nations replaced the periodic dispatch of Marines. Trade agreements with South American nations established a basis for cordial relations. In a case the author surprisingly does not mention, Roosevelt resorted to appeasement in the Mexican expropriation of American oil interests in 1938. More opportunistic than democratic, the Good Neighbor policy overlay a classical well-managed informal empire based on power, commerce, and accommodation. As war approached at the end of the 1930s, most of the hemisphere was willing, even eager, to accept US leadership.

**How did the Soviet Union fit into Roosevelt’s view of the world?**

Here I think Schmitz misses something. The Roosevelt administration took the initiative in recognizing the Soviet Union just eight months after the president had taken office. It did so with some hope for mutually beneficial trade relations, but other impulses seem to have been in play. Roosevelt, as Robert Dallek has shown, devoted considerable time and energy to the project.¹ Many of the New Dealers admired the Soviet model of state planning and the speed with which it seemed to be bringing an archaic society into the modern industrial world. They understood that the Soviet regime was despotic but had scant conception of the enormity and pervasiveness of its brutality. With perhaps an exception or two on the fringe, they had no desire for a Soviet America, but most felt that the USSR was a fundamentally progressive force traveling a rough road toward the goal of an egalitarian democracy. The decision for recognition surely was significantly motivated by that perception.

Schmitz characterizes US-Soviet relations as cold and distant throughout the thirties and singles out Robert Kelly’s Division of Eastern European Affairs as a source of abiding hostility toward the USSR. In fact, after the first US ambassador, William Bullitt, became disillusioned with the relationship, he was replaced by Joseph Davies, an earnest booster of the Soviet regime. At about the same time, the Division of Eastern European Affairs was abolished. According to George Kennan, there was strong evidence that the reorganization was pushed by the White House.

Soviet trade missions to the US never came to much and appear to have been motivated as much by their espionage possibilities as by commerce. Roosevelt, as Katherine Sibley amply demonstrates, appeared unconcerned. Nazi Germany loomed increasingly as a menace throughout the 1930s. The president and those around him may have seen the Soviet Union as an important potential ally worth cultivating and destined by its “progressive” character to be on the anti-Fascist side. The issue needs far more scholarly investigation, on a nonpartisan and nonideological basis, than it has received.²

---


If Roosevelt was a realist, why was he unwilling to reach a spheres of influence agreement with Japan?

Greg Robinson and others have argued that Roosevelt in dealing with Japan was motivated by an elemental racist fear of “the yellow peril” that was quite common in the early years of the century, when Japan rapidly emerged as a formidable world power. Conversely, Roosevelt clearly was instinctively attached to the Western European democracies. Schmitz strikes one as having his priorities right when he concludes that Roosevelt was convinced that Japan's ambitions in East Asia and the Western Pacific were unlimited, and, he might have added, spurred by a sense of racial destiny every bit as strong as Western racial sentiment toward the Japanese. Any spheres of influence agreement by this logic would leave the Western democratic powers weaker and would likely be followed by new demands down the road. Such an agreement might recognize US influence in the Philippines--scheduled for independence in 1944 and expected to remain an American dependency--but would leave the American position there more precarious.

Moreover, as Japan became friendlier with Germany and Italy, joining the Axis military alliance with the Tripartite Pact of September, 1940, it became in the mind of the president and many others part of a worldwide challenge to democracy. Schmitz mentions the Tripartite Pact only in passing and without explanation. Citing some administration officials, he considers it of little importance. Yet it changed the strategic map, as the author himself demonstrates later in his discussion of the runup to Pearl Harbor.

It is customary and perhaps pedagogically sensible to divide the narrative into European and Asian segments, but does that cause us to miss connections?

During the 1930s, American diplomacy faced issues in geographically separate areas of the globe, but these involved a common problem--an increasingly perceived need for an alliance of liberal democracies to counter a growing threat from aggressive authoritarian nations. Like the United States, the two leading democracies, Britain and France, possessed important interests in Asia and the western Pacific. Formal military alliances were politically impossible, but informal understandings and consultative arrangements were feasible. By his second term, Roosevelt was clearly interested in seeking these, especially with Britain. He was, however, hampered by domestic political inhibitions and by well-founded doubts about American reliability in Western Europe.

The brief crisis occasioned by the Japanese sinking of the US gunboat Panay on December 12, 1937, is illustrative. On the same day, the Japanese shelled two nearby British vessels. Roosevelt reacted sharply and dispatched naval officers to London for consultations with their British counterparts. British officials were momentarily hopeful, but wary. Prime Minister Chamberlain privately cautioned: "It is always best & safest to count on nothing
His fears were realized. Japan backed down, apologized, and paid an indemnity. US opinion wanted only conciliation. Roosevelt backed off. Schmitz covers the incident thoroughly and professionally as an Asian incident, then goes on to examine other issues of the war between Japan and China.

A few pages earlier in a discussion of European matters, he surveys a contemporaneous Roosevelt proposal for an international economic conference, presenting it as a State Department generated plan for “appeasing” Germany through economic concessions. In the wake of the American backdown on the Panay, Chamberlain, deciding on a policy of going it alone, rejected the proposal after a vigorous Cabinet debate in which the main advocate of the proposal was Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. This was one of the reasons for Eden’s sudden resignation on February 20, 1938. The episode left the president and the prime minister more doubtful of each other.

It is certainly possible to view the reaction to the Panay and the economic conference proposal as isolated incidents to be treated separately. But might it be more fruitful to see them as part of a larger theme--Roosevelt's gropings, poorly and inconsistently executed, for a common front against a common menace?

**H. Did Roosevelt employ a back-door-to-war strategy that led to Pearl Harbor?**

In 1952, Charles Callan Tansill published his controversial revisionist work, *Back Door to War*. He argued that Roosevelt, bent on a full-scale conflict with Germany in order to save the British Empire had been unable to elicit a sufficiently dastardly act of aggression from Hitler and thereupon embarked on a policy of provoking Japan into an attack. War with Japan, Tansill’s argument went, would then enable war with Japan’s ally Germany. There are, of course, many problems with the Tansill argument (not the least being Roosevelt’s utter lack of interest in saving the British Empire).

David Schmitz formulates a more benign and persuasive version of the Tansill thesis. By mid-1941, administration foreign policy formulators, even the reluctant Ambassador Joseph Grew in Tokyo, were agreed that Japan’s ambitions for Far Eastern empire were unlimited and nonnegotiable, that conflict was hence inevitable. Moreover, they worried about a Japanese thrust into Soviet East Asia that could knock the USSR out of the European war. Japan’s move into south Indo-China that July provided the occasion for instituting a full-scale oil embargo that made the war inevitable.

The Asian and European dimensions of American foreign relations probably never had existed as parallel problems with few or no connections. By July, 1941, they palpably had come together. Roosevelt surely wanted to protect Britain (if not its empire), and Britain’s major co-belligerent, the Soviet Union. Seeing Japan as an implacably aggressive force that had to be faced down sooner or later, he was ready to go to war, perhaps even wanted war, and knew without a doubt by late November that it would come soon. Expecting to face the

---

Japanese from a position of strength that would include defensible air bases in the Philippines, he could not imagine a successful sneak attack that would disable the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. In the aftermath, he asked only for a declaration of war against Japan. Formal hostilities with Germany would be initiated by Hitler.

Conclusion

A review employing a list of queries may seem very critical. Actually, *The Triumph of Internationalism* largely succeeds in its fundamental mission as a classroom text. The narrative is readable and broken up into well-defined segments for benefit of undergraduates. The accompanying documents are very well-chosen. It is a tribute to the author that he provokes so many questions and that one hopes for a larger work that will allow him to deal with them.
Internationalism has triumphed. Globalization is all the rage. People, goods, and ideas are moving about the world in record numbers and to unprecedented degrees, or so it seems and is proclaimed by the likes of pundits. It was not always like this, of course, and yet at another level, the world is getting back to where it once was roughly a century ago.

That was before World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. The first two were cataclysms the likes of which the world had not seen, especially the massive killing made possible by modern weapons during World War I. The impact was immediate and severe. In some instances, nationalistic, insular, and xenophobic reactions took many forms, the ugliest of which came to root in Germany and Japan. Those two nations, fueled by the indignation of real and imagined wrongs perpetrated against them by other countries, surged in frightening and destructive ways during the 1930s.

In less than one hundred pages of text, David Schmitz presents a coherent analysis of the numerous challenges faced by Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration in its efforts to affect international affairs during a very turbulent decade. To the text he adds twenty-five documents in an appendix, along with notes, a bibliography, and index. There are nine photographs, two maps, and a chronology to round out the volume. In clear, succinct, and engaging prose, Schmitz lays out a strong case for a president who understood the nature of what the United States faced internationally at the same time he recognized just how staunchly the domestic political climate limited the range of options available to him. Roosevelt worked within the parameters set by isolationists, apologists, and political opportunists to both understand the mistakes of the Wilson administration following World War One and to learn from them in an effort to guide American policy more effectively.

There are a number of admirable qualities Roosevelt brought to the table. First, he worked with Republicans as well as Democrats, especially as the 1930s came to a close and the looming threat became ever more imminent. When former Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote the president after his "Quarantine Speech," Roosevelt asked Secretary of State Cordell Hull for assistance in replying. Stimson wanted a firmer response to Japanese aggression, and while the president agreed with the expressed sentiments, he understood that the American public was not prepared to go quite that far. His own administration was divided over how to respond to Japan. In short, Stimson's suggestions were premature, but Roosevelt sent an encouraging reply, and in 1940, he brought Stimson into his administration as secretary of war. From there, Stimson played a key role in moving the administration and the nation toward a more firmly established internationalist position. Stimson was not an exception either; Roosevelt brought along another Republican, Henry Knox, to be secretary of the navy, but it was Stimson who played the larger role. As war between the United States and Japan appeared to be more and more likely after July 1941 when Roosevelt ordered a freeze on all Japanese assets, Stimson recommended to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that negotiations be conducted in such a
way “so as to be sure that Japan was put into the wrong and made the first bad move – overt move.” (p. 88) Abraham Lincoln, who maneuvered the South into attacking Fort Sumter, would have admired Stimson’s recommendation.

Second, Roosevelt knew the importance of patience. With hindsight, America’s involvement in world affairs as a result of Japan’s, Germany’s, and Italy’s actions seems inevitable. Perhaps it was a little slow, but the nation’s involvement nonetheless had to happen. Schmitz carefully reminds readers of just how determined and well supported opposition to Roosevelt’s carefully crafted internationalism was. In one telling example, Schmitz points to the often overlooked way in which one Congressman responded to the December 1937 Panay incident, when Japanese planes attacked an American gunboat on the Yangtze River, killing two Americans and wounding more than thirty. Representative Louis Ludlow proposed a constitutional amendment to transfer the power to declare war from Congress to a national referendum. At the time it was offered, nearly three-quarters of the American people supported the idea. Although defeated, the amendment and its popularity served as a sober reminder to the administration on the national mood.

And so Roosevelt, the juggler, to borrow Warren Kimball’s apt characterization of the president, pushed and prodded with a speech here or a press conference there. He offered his famous “Quarantine Speech” two months before the Panay was attacked. A month later, he asked Congress to increase spending on defense. In 1938, FDR extended a $100 million load to Nationalist China in an effort to keep the government led by Chiang Kai-shek afloat. A year later, the administration terminated the 1911 Commercial Treaty with Japan. By the time Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, it became clear that the administration’s work to prepare the American people for involvement in the war would have to be accelerated. And the startling collapse of France in the spring of 1940 made preparations all the more imminent and necessary.

Opponents to the administration are often viewed with disdain or alarm. In hindsight, that’s easy enough to do, but a closer examination of some of their arguments brings to light issues that continue to affect the balance of powers within the Federal government to this very day. When Senator Gerald Nye responded to the proposal that lend-lease aid be extended to Great Britain, he raised the troubling specter of a president suddenly empowered to give away critical assets within the nation’s defense. He asked: “Is it true that all this bill would do would be to confer on the Executive a few, only a few, and those necessary powers – powers which Congress, having once given away, would never miss, and whose passing from the control of the legislative to the control of the executive branch of the Government would cause no significant change whatever in our constitutional form of government? Is that true?” (p. 119) Nye answered his own question in the negative. These powers transferred to the president would not be returned to Congress and that would seriously erode Congressional oversight. In an era long after, the Gulf of Tonkin provided justification for Lyndon Johnson to seek a full-scale military solution to the situation in Vietnam, and at a time after both the House and Senate caved in to the Bush administration in its push for war in Iraq -- indeed, when Congress has willingly abdicated its oversight function in national security and defense -- it is tempting to wish for a few more senators like Gerald Nye. Schmitz emphasizes what FDR faced as he moved the
nation toward a greater internationalist perspective, but he’s careful not to dismiss the critics or leaders of countervailing forces.

The end result is a concise and useful work for the classroom purposes. The documents in the appendix are well selected and highlight debates within the administration as well as Congressional opposition to much of what Roosevelt rightly felt had to be accomplished. They also serve as a reminder to just how difficult the times were for those seeking to affect international affairs.
First of all this is a book which I have enjoyed reading immensely: it is an impressive volume. Credit must therefore be given at the very outset to the author, Dr David Schmitz. To tackle the foreign policy of Roosevelt is a daunting task. To have provided an expert account in a little under a hundred pages is all the more impressive. The lines of Schmitz’s analysis are clear cut and the work does well to provide a comprehensive account of the narrative and the debates of the era.

The aim of the work is to illustrate that Roosevelt encouraged the United States towards a new, broader understanding of American National Security during the period in question. Schmitz sees Roosevelt moving the United States "slowly but surely... away from a limited view of hemispheric defense and neutrality toward intervention against German and Japanese aggression in the defense of national security and American values." (p.xxi) For Schmitz, Roosevelt did this by "educating" the American people, "invoking the arguments of just war and the defense of democracy against totalitarianism," in a series of pronouncements from the Quarantine Speech (Oct 1937), to the articulation of the United States as the ‘Arsenal of Democracy’ (Dec 1940) and the Four Freedoms speech (Jan 1941) as “the culmination of this process”. (p.xxi)

The book’s opening addresses the formulation of American foreign policy from Versailles to Roosevelt’s inauguration with admirable succinctness. Schmitz argues that it is “essential” to examine this period because it allows a fuller understanding of “the issues, problems and restraints that Roosevelt confronted when he became president in March 1933.” (p.1) Not only that, and in acknowledging the familiar debate over whether Roosevelt’s was consistent in his views, Schmitz argues that by “Examining the whole period, the context and the continuity for the crucial decisions of 1939-1941 demonstrate Roosevelt was consistent in his outlook on international affairs and acting as quickly as he thought politically possible.” (p. xxii emphasis added) The distinction between Roosevelt having a consistent vision but being politically pragmatic, at the heart of many judgements about Roosevelt, is concisely articulated here. However, one minor critique is that Schmitz’s explanation of Roosevelt’s beliefs and background as a means of explaining the President’s confidence in his own judgements is not wholly reconciled in this author’s mind with Roosevelt’s capacity to readily have a change of heart. The debate over the primacy of domestic issues in the first term, and the strength of isolationism as a constraining factor on Roosevelt is also well handled with Schmitz seeking “to demonstrate that old categories of debate about Roosevelt’s policy during the 1930s, isolationism versus intervention, are misleading.” (p. xxi) Schmitz touches on the debate, well propagated previously by Wayne S. Cole, on the attributes of isolationism, arguing that “isolationists”, “are better characterised as proponents of non-intervention and neutrality.” (p.21)

The second of Schmitz’s chapters draws upon his solid foundation and amongst a number of interesting lines of argument two stand out. In the first, Schmitz sees Roosevelt’s devotion to the New Deal as integral to overseas United States interests that were focused on expanding American trade and encouraging other states to follow this example by
participating in reciprocal trade agreements. The idea that Roosevelt was seeking to act as an example also comes through in the second point, a well-pitched analysis of the Administration's "good neighbor" policy, which offered an alternative model to Japan's expansion and European imperialism. Schmitz argues that the policy which established a collegiate relationship with Latin America gave Roosevelt an opportunity: a "starting point to define American security needs and meet the challenges posed by Germany and Japan later in the decade." (p.30).

The third chapter sees Schmitz present the case for Roosevelt's increasing internationalism beginning before the end of his first term in 1936 by "re-educating the American people" based on preparedness and a keen interest amongst the population in events in Asia and Europe. Schmitz sees a commitment in Roosevelt to "make the American public aware that its security depended as much on developments on the other sides of the two oceans as it did on securing the Western Hemisphere." (p.39) This would be a painstaking task and Schmitz does exceptionally well to chart the dilemma Roosevelt faced of articulating an understanding of US national security that went beyond its physical boundaries.

One feature of the book which was noteworthy and particularly for those who might consider using this book in teaching, is the integration into the body of the text of considered analysis of particular diplomatic documents. Examples can be found at the beginning of chapter three with a detailed analysis of a State Department report on German Fascism, and then the work of Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles in outlining the example that the Good Neighbor provided for international relations. (pp.43-48) This feature provides an important insight for the reader into Schmitz's thinking in relation to the primary material at the heart of the work. This is seen plainly in the last quarter of the book, which contains copies of twenty-five primary documents that form a canon of evidence in support of Schmitz's argument illustrating consistency of thought in the President’s thinking.

Self-evidently Schmitz' book is short and it is obvious therefore that the balance between being concise and comprehensive has been tipped toward the former. As such the only mild criticism that can be made of the work is that while the important debates are acknowledged they cannot be fully explored. By way of example, Schmitz argues convincingly throughout that Franklin Roosevelt moved the American people to accept "the internationalist definition of America’s role in the world and national security" (p.xix), which he explains in the following manner. Schmitz states that Roosevelt's internationalism saw "the United States as a world leader, with its power and influence extended globally, basing its defense on preparedness and collective security, working with allied and international organisations to promote American values and institutions, and willing to intervene when necessary to protect US interests and carry out its goals" (pp.xix-xx). Such an assessment rings true to my own understanding of the vision Roosevelt had for the United States, but given the clarity of the analysis throughout the work I would like to have seen the author develop the antecedents of this appraisal addressing such questions as was Roosevelt always an internationalist? And what were the significant influences in him attaining these views? The criticism here could be extended elsewhere to Schmitz's use of the term "just war" given the canon of literature on the concept. It would be interesting to
learn Schmitz’s assessment of Roosevelt’s thoughts related to the ‘just war tradition’ particularly since he sees the Quarantine Speech as establishing the “doctrine of just war as the basis for national security”. (p.xxi)

Nonetheless, these points form nothing more than an acknowledgement of the scale of the task facing any author attempting to analyse a man who sought, with considerable acumen, to evade being pinned down. As I finish off this review, I find myself, like Roosevelt, consistently asking more questions than answers can be provided for. One which predominates is how does one judge the success of Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy during the 1930s? Here it is rhetorical of course, but this work has done wonders in prompting my thinking, and I’m sure it will do the same for others.
Author’s Response by David F. Schmitz, Whitman College

I want to thank Thomas Maddux for selecting my book for a Roundtable discussion and his editorial work, and the four reviewers, Mark Gilderhus, Alonzo Hamby, T. Christopher Jespersen, and J. Simon Rofe, for their close reading and comments.

The reviewers are all correct that my aim was to produce a brief, up-to-date, synthesis of Franklin D. Roosevelt's diplomacy up to the outbreak of World War II that was accessible to students and general readers while simultaneously hoping to provoke more thinking about the period by providing an analysis based on primary sources as well as secondary works. I am grateful for all of the positive evaluations and agreement with many of my points.

In their comments, Gilderhus and Jespersen focus on the crucial role of Roosevelt in the making of United States foreign policy during the 1930s. In doing so, I believe they are in agreement with me that the individual is often crucial in the making of policy. Jespersen brings up Warren Kimball's concept of the president as the "juggler." I would add, building on the president’s love of sailboats and experience as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, that Roosevelt was a skillful navigator who skillfully managed the different restraints and volatile political climate while he slowly and gradually moved the nation toward his vision of internationalism. Trying to act too quickly or without building certain coalitions would have provoked the significant opposition that existed to a greater involvement of the United States outside of the Western Hemisphere at any number of points without having built up enough support for his policies. The contrast with Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson is illuminating. Even prior to joining the cabinet, Stimson regularly encouraged Roosevelt to move faster and to be bolder in his actions against Germany and Japan despite public opposition. Had the president followed this type of advice, measures such as the Ludlow Amendment might have passed, and the Neutrality Acts would have surely been strengthened rather than weakened in the latter part of the 1930s. Roosevelt was not necessarily an original thinker in terms of policy, but he had an overall concept of the United States as a world leader, extending its power and influence globally, basing its defense on preparedness and collective security, and working with allies and international organizations, and he was adroit at articulating that view as necessary to protect the national interest and promote American values.

Rofe and Hamby both raise questions that a longer study, as they note, could more adequately address, and I want to thank Professor Hamby for the encouragement to move forward with a larger book on the topic. Rofe notes his desire to have some of the debates of the time period and basis of Roosevelt’s thinking developed more, issues that certainly would get greater treatment in a larger book, while Hamby sets out some topics and questions that would receive attention in a comprehensive analysis. Due to space concerns, my book does omit certain events, such as the Mexican expropriation of oil, and has limited discussions on other matters such as U.S.-Soviet relations during the 1930s. Let me say a few words, however, on some of the other questions as they will help shed light on what I see as the crucial points in The Triumph of Internationalism.
Concerning Roosevelt’s ability to have a change of heart, or, staying with my earlier metaphor, ability to tack, it is not mutually exclusive for Roosevelt to be able to trim his sails at times and still hold to some set positions and beliefs. Roosevelt was a master politician because he was flexible, able to convince many different people that they agreed with him, and mostly unwilling to express his positions in categorical terms. There is no doubt, as Rofe notes, that Roosevelt worked hard to avoid being “pinned down” and that the president was flexible and able to change course. This makes it, in my mind, all the more important to take the long view and find the parts of Roosevelt’s thinking about foreign policy that remained consistent.

On this point, I think Hamby misreads me when he states I set up a straw man of an historical consensus that Roosevelt was an isolationist at the beginning of the 1930s. I clearly do not think that was the case. Rather, I note that some important scholars have made this argument, and that many others simply ignore Roosevelt’s first term in analyzing his policies leading up to World War II. This is not a minor point. If Roosevelt had been an isolationist, then the debates of the decade over the role of the United States in the world would have been very different, and there would have been no reason, given the popularity of the isolationist-noninterventionist position, that the president would not have taken the lead. Moreover, had Roosevelt only changed his mind on these issues in 1938-1939, it is hard to imagine him moving the nation to the acceptance of the internationalist definition of America’s role in the world and the president’s conception of national security without Roosevelt having laid the groundwork over the years through such things as his acceptance of the Stimson Doctrine, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Quarantine Speech.

I, therefore, wholeheartedly agree with Hamby that it is necessary to understand the points he makes about Roosevelt’s views on the world prior to becoming president, except his contention that Roosevelt can be seen as “a classic realist.” Hamby wonders why, if Roosevelt was a realist, the president rejected a spheres of influence agreement with Japan? His answer is that Roosevelt shared the racist fear of “the yellow peril” and this led him to worry about Japan’s ambitions. But if one does not see Roosevelt as a realist, then the question that needs to be addressed, and the one I analyze in the book, is why did the Roosevelt administration tolerate Japan’s aggression up until 1939 but then shift to a position of increased pressure and opposition? It was at this point, and not earlier, that the crisis in Europe and in East Asia came together for Roosevelt. Hamby is correct that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was wary of counting on the United States, and that the reaction to the Panay incident may have influenced his later response to Sumner Welles’s economic appeasement proposal. But in Washington, the tepid British (and League of Nations’) response to the Manchurian incident in 1931-1932 had left its mark and convinced American policymakers that in dealing with Japan the United States had to make its way alone in East Asia.

As war engulfed Europe in 1939 and many European colonies the next year, Roosevelt linked the separate wars in Europe and China into one world war, and made policy accordingly. I am a bit startled to see my analysis called a “more benign and persuasive version of the Tansill thesis,” and thank Professor Gilderhus for noting that I do not subscribe to any “conspiracy and back-door-to-war theories.” The connection of the events
in Europe and Asia, for Roosevelt, was the need to defeat Nazi Germany. That was the greater danger and the adversary that Washington could not be sure would be defeated. To do so, it was vital that the Soviet Union survive the German invasion and supplies be available to the allies. All of this meant a policy of confrontation with Japan, even it if meant war. This is where Roosevelt’s internationalism and concept of American national security directly influenced the decisions on how to respond to Japan’s taking of all of Indo-China in July 1941. American interests were seen as global and the events in both Asia and Europe as one war, with the consequences of an Axis victory linked together for the United States.

It was this understanding that Roosevelt had carefully crafted throughout his presidency as he confronted the arguments of the non-interventionists. By presenting his policies as necessary for the defense of the United States against international aggression, and as an expression of American values and necessary to protect the nation’s democratic institutions, Roosevelt gained the support of the American people for the sacrifices that World War II demanded and redefined U.S. national security as global in scope and best secured through a foreign policy of collective security, cooperation with allies, and promotion of American interests in the world.

As this discussion demonstrates, we are seeing a consensus developing over certain issues. There seems little doubt that FDR was an internationalist; that the president played the central role in the defeat of isolationist-noninterventionist position; that there was no back door policy or conspiracy at Pearl Harbor to bring the nation into war; and that Roosevelt’s internationalist positions were the basis of America’s policies at the outset of the Cold War. More research and thinking needs to be done on various questions of 1930s diplomacy, such as the influence of relations with the Soviet Union, the connection of the New Deal with foreign policy, and how Roosevelt carried his internationalist vision forward into World War II.

All of these should remind us that the late 1930s and early 1940s was a pivotal moment in the nation’s history and foreign policy. Franklin Roosevelt was ahead of most Americans in terms of seeing the dangers posed by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan and arguing for an internationalist foreign policy based on the United States being a great power with global interests. The president’s success in getting the nation to embrace his vision in the period between the fall of France in June 1940 and the passage of the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941 was remarkable. There was nothing inevitable about this achievement. The negative views of World War I, its failed peace, and the economic crisis were firmly entrenched and expressed through the Neutrality legislation of the 1930s. The years leading up to World War II were the defining and decisive moment of change in American foreign policy. I want to again thank the four reviewers for their comments and this opportunity to discuss these critical events.