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Mr. Kerry goes to Washington: Lord Lothian and the genesis of the Anglo-American alliance, 1939-1940

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MR. KERR GOES TO WASHINGTON:
LORD LOTHIAN AND THE GENESIS OF THE ANGLO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE,
1939-1940

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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M.A., Louisiana State University, 1995

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To Triche

Je suis perdu sans toi

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine and assess the role of Philip Henry Kerr, eleventh Marquis of Lothian, the British ambassador to the United States from August 1939 to December 1940. While much of the historiography of Anglo-American relations during the Second World War focuses on the Roosevelt-Churchill axis, this dissertation contends that Lord Lothian played a vital, if not the principal, role in creating that axis and in forging closer relations during the vital months before Pearl Harbor. More generally, this dissertation contends that Lothian is a vital, if not the principal, architect of the “Special Relationship.” Anglo-American relations during the interwar years were characterized by an underlying discord, caused by economic disparity, naval rivalry, and divergent approaches to international security. By December 1940, however, relations were stronger and closer, as many Americans came to appreciate that Britain’s survival was critical to keeping the United States out of the war.

Although not exclusively responsible, Lothian played a significant role in affecting this transformation in public opinion. First, he established a British public relations apparatus and initiated a vigorous publicity campaign in the United States, which generated greater awareness of Britain’s increasingly dire military predicament and more widespread popular support for Britain. Second, Lothian helped to broker the celebrated Destroyers-for-Bases deal, by which the United States agreed to provide Britain with fifty destroyers in return for land rights in various British possessions in the Western Hemisphere. Third, Lothian helped to lay the foundations for the Lend-Lease program. Following a brief autumn visit to Britain, he intimated to the American press that London was running out of cash with which to purchase American military supplies. He also urged Churchill to outline the realities of Britain’s position in a long, detailed letter to Roosevelt. These two initiatives presented the Roosevelt administration with a comprehensive view of Britain’s desperate situation that compelled the president to take action. The result was the Lend-Lease Act, which provided Britain with a program of American assistance, hardly compatible with neutrality, and ultimately became the foundation of the Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine and assess the role of Philip Henry Kerr, eleventh Marquis of Lothian, who served as the British ambassador to the United States from August 1939 to December 1940. Lord Lothian was ambassador for only a brief time, but it coincided with a crucial period in relations between Britain and the United States -- the first fourteen months of the Second World War, when Britain faced Nazi Germany essentially without allies, while the United States remained neutral. While much of the historiography of Anglo-American relations during the Second World War focuses principally on the Roosevelt-Churchill axis, this dissertation contends that, in a fundamental way, Lord Lothian played a vital, if not the principal, role in creating that axis and in forging closer Anglo-American relations during the vital months before Pearl Harbor. More generally, this dissertation contends that Lord Lothian is a vital, if not the principal, architect of the "Special Relationship." The United States and Britain are often seen as natural allies, held together by ties of kinship, language, and a commitment to democracy and constitutional government. But there was nothing particularly "special" about Anglo-American relations during the interwar years, which were, in fact, characterized by an underlying discord, caused principally by economic disparity, naval rivalry, and divergent approaches to international security.

Anglo-American discord emerged from the transfer of global economic leadership from Britain to the United States. As early as 1919, the United States had replaced Britain as the leading creditor nation in the world, its industrial production exceeded that of Britain, France, and Germany combined, and its share of world trade began to displace the British. Furthermore, the United States kept its markets tightly closed; the Fordney-MacCumber Tariff of 1922 imposed the highest import tariffs in American history. Most important, however, although Britain hoped that the United States might agree to a general cancellation of debts once the war was over, Wilson and American bankers made it clear that they expected to be paid back. The severity of Britain's repayment terms, particularly compared with the more lenient terms ultimately granted to France and Italy, provoked considerable resentment in Britain and

remained a source of persistent ill feeling in both countries. The onset of the Great Depression helped to exacerbate these economic strains. In 1932, faced with a sterling crisis and tighter protectionism in the United States, Britain decided to follow the American example and adopted a system of Imperial Preference, provoking American denunciations of British policy, ironically, as protectionist. When the United States Senate passed the “Johnson Act,” which proposed to ban all loans to countries that had defaulted on previous debts, the British, who considered the legislation as a decidedly unfriendly gesture, made a few more token payments and finally defaulted in 1933.

Another source of tension and misunderstanding during the 1920s was rivalry over naval supremacy. As early as the First World War, London took the position that the American demand for “absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas” represented a direct challenge to Britain’s sea power and its right of blockade. Washington warned that if agreement could not be reached, the United States would launch an all-out race to build the most powerful navy in the world. Although the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 temporarily improved Anglo-American naval relations, the persistence of a fundamental incompatibility of strategic requirements provoked mutual suspicions and endless haggling about the size and number of cruisers. Continuing tensions led to the break-up of the Geneva Naval Conference in August 1927 and even a brief war scare from late 1928 to early 1929. The ferocity of this naval rivalry continued unabated until the late 1920s, when elections in both countries brought to power administrations intent on reaching compromise.

In addition, Anglo-American relations sputtered during the 1930s as a result of their divergent attitudes toward the question of international security. Serious differences emerged as early as 1919 with the American rejection of the peace treaties. Having followed Woodrow Wilson’s lead, and hoping for a continuation of a cooperative spirit into the post-war period, British leaders felt a profound sense of betrayal and thereafter found it difficult throughout the entire interwar period to place much confidence in the assurances of the United States. During the 1930s, in particular, as the international situation became increasingly dangerous, Washington and London often operated at cross-purposes. For example, in response to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, in 1931-1932, Britain and the United States acted

independently and ineffectually, although both sides accused each other of refusing offers of cooperation. London was sufficiently embittered by the experience that, by late 1933, in order to protect its interests in China, and in the absence of any effective cooperation from the United States, British leaders took initiatives to renew the former understanding with Japan, even though they realized that any understanding with Japan was certain to stir up hostility in the United States. Such efforts, however, collapsed when Japan withdrew from the League of Nations.

In July 1937, when Japan again attacked China, Britain sought to act in concert with the United States. The Roosevelt administration, however, refused to participate in any joint action and indicated that it would only take parallel action. While the American reluctance to act firmly in the Pacific reflected the power of isolationist sentiment in the United States, it also reflected the persistence of an underlying American mistrust for Britain. Indeed, there occurred a powerful resurgence of anti-British opinion within the United States, driven principally by the growing belief that the United States had been dragged into the Great War by British propaganda and so-called “merchants of death” -- armaments manufacturers, bankers, and financiers.

American suspicions continued to increase in 1937 and 1938 due to British appeasement of Germany and Italy. In the absence of any effective policy of deterrence, Neville Chamberlain and his cabinet endeavored to reduce the number of potential enemies by satisfying their grievances in return for guarantees of peace and disarmament. They did so, in part, because of an entrenched skepticism about America’s reliability and ability to follow up inspiring words with practical assistance. Consequently, when, in January 1938, Roosevelt put forward a proposal for a peace conference to be held under the auspices of the United States, the British government did not express wholehearted support. The president was “sorely disappointed” and took Chamberlain’s lame response as an indication that Britain placed no great stock in cooperation with the United States. American opinion grew progressively more skeptical of Britain, with the resignation of Anthony Eden in February 1938, which convinced many in Washington that Chamberlain was the agent of selfish City interests, and the British recognition of Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia, in spite of Roosevelt’s warnings of a “serious effect upon public opinion.” During

the *Anschluss*, and again, during the crisis over Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain and the cabinet did not consider the policy and position of the United States as a factor of any significance in their plans. After all, although there was great sympathy in the United States for the Czechs, and while many Americans believed that Britain would in fact sell out Czechoslovakia, the American desire to stay out of any war remained apparent and virtually universal. Consequently, it remained clear that Roosevelt would do little more than offer words of support or reproach. Furthermore, although the United States celebrated the Munich agreement, American denunciations of British policy resurfaced when it became clear that Hitler would not be satisfied merely with the Sudetenland. Americans condemned the agreement as “disgraceful,” “shameless,” a “cynical sellout of principle,” and Roosevelt himself backed away from his earlier endorsement, accusing British leaders of suffering from an inordinate fear of communism. In a January 1939 conversation with Lothian, however, the president rejected any suggestion that the United States should assume a tougher international role, arguing that the danger of the current situation stemmed from Britain’s lack of nerve, not its lack of power.

As a result, when Lothian assumed control of the British embassy in late August 1939, there was nothing really close or particularly “special” about the relationship between Britain and the United States. The true measure of his achievement, therefore, is that, by the time of his premature death in December 1940, Anglo-American relations were much stronger and much closer. Although most Americans still desperately wanted to remain out of the war, they had a far greater appreciation that Britain’s survival was critical to realizing exactly that objective -- keeping the United States out of the war. In other words, in spite of continuing isolationist political strength, by the end of 1940, there had occurred a significant sea change in American public opinion. While British public relations and propaganda efforts by themselves certainly did not bring the United States into the Second World War, at the very least they helped to create a new climate of opinion, so that by the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, many Americans were in fact prepared to enter the war. Although not exclusively responsible, Lothian played a significant role in affecting this transformation in public opinion.

Lothian, who ultimately became a primary intermediary between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, particularly during the summer and fall of 1940, initiated and/or shaped three key developments within this transformation. First, Lothian established a British public relations apparatus and initiated a vigorous publicity campaign in the United States, primarily to generate more widespread awareness of Britain's increasingly dire military predicament and thus more widespread popular support for Britain. He understood that the Roosevelt administration, which confronted a powerful isolationist movement during a presidential election year, was highly reluctant for political reasons to undertake any definitive action to assist Britain's war efforts. He realized that the key to pushing the administration to action depended first and foremost on mobilizing American public opinion. As a former journalist, Lothian, unlike previous British ambassadors to the United States, understood the value and power of propaganda and public relations, particularly its effect on building consensus within popular opinion. Consequently, he established an easy and open relationship with the press, delivered speeches and gave press conferences to explain Britain's needs, worked closely with American interventionists in order to build support for Britain among the broader American population, and deliberately leaked sensitive information explicitly to help American opinion leaders stimulate debate and further apply pressure on the Roosevelt administration.

Second, Lothian helped to broker the celebrated Destroyers-for-Bases deal, by which the United States agreed to provide Britain with fifty overage and obsolete destroyers in return for land rights in various British possessions in the Western Hemisphere, including Bermuda, Newfoundland, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Trinidad, and St. Lucia, for the establishment of American air and naval bases. At three separate moments, Lothian took key initiatives. In late May 1940, aware of the concern in Washington for the security of British bases in the Western Hemisphere, Lothian urged the War Cabinet to make a unilateral offer of limited facilities in three British colonies. Then, in late June, he provided the Century Group, a pro-British and pro-interventionist pressure group in the United States, with a full statistical accounting of Britain's situation and needs, as the basis for a public relations campaign to win more widespread American support for the destroyers deal. The data Lothian supplied, without the approval or even the

knowledge of his superiors in London, helped to focus the attention of American opinion leaders on the real gravity of Britain's predicament. Finally, in spite of Churchill's opposition to one-sided concessions unless they involved tangible U.S. concessions, Lothian convinced the prime minister to make a direct and personal plea to Roosevelt on 31 July 1940. In the end, Lothian's efforts helped to create a far more favorable reception to the deal, which was finally announced on 3 September 1940. For many people in Britain, the conclusion of the deal represented a significant American commitment to the Allied cause.

Third, in November 1940, Lothian helped to lay the foundations for the Lend-Lease program. Following a brief visit to Britain, he intimated to the American press upon his return that Britain was running out of cash with which to purchase American manufactured products and military hardware. His comments effectively provoked widespread popular discussion in the United States about Britain's financial plight, which kept the issue on the front pages of American newspapers and thus in the public eye from late November 1940 to the spring of 1941. At the same time, Lothian urged Churchill to frankly and openly outline the urgent realities of Britain's strategic, economic, and logistic positions and needs in a long, detailed letter to Roosevelt. The prime minister proved reluctant to draft and dispatch such a letter, but Lothian aggressively and successfully argued that the letter was vital in order to overcome powerful American misperceptions that Britain possessed vast economic assets in the Dominions and the Empire. These two initiatives -- the leak and the letter-- presented the Roosevelt administration with a comprehensive view of Britain's increasingly desperate situation that compelled the equally reluctant president to take more direct and immediate action. The result was the Lend-Lease Act, which represented one of the great turning points of the war. Lend-Lease not only provided Britain with a program of American assistance that was hardly compatible with neutrality, it also became the essential foundation of the Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War.

. . . .

It is reasonable to ask why Lord Lothian's ambassadorship merits such analysis and attention. In one respect, as has been asserted, Lothian's vital contributions have largely been overlooked and generally overshadowed by the traditional focus on Churchill and Roosevelt. Equally fundamental,

however, this dissertation fills a considerable historiographical gap. There have only been two major biographies of Lord Lothian, by J. R. M. Butler [1960] and David Billington [2006]. Both are full-length biographies, which necessarily cover all aspects of Lothian's life and career, from childhood to death. Butler, who was given access to the ambassador's papers by the Lothian estate, and whose brother was Neville Butler, Counsellor of the British Embassy in Washington, portrays Lothian in a most sympathetic light. Billington, who was a bit more critical, adds little to Butler's study but additional detail and much more extensive documentation. Both works, however, provide only brief surveys of Lothian's ambassadorship; Butler devotes two chapters, while Billington devotes one.

The more recent scholarship on Lothian's career has focused on his outspoken support of supranationalist solutions to international problems -- specifically, on his support for world federalism, or at least a federal union of the western democracies. As a result, Lothian's career has been the subject of more interest in continental Europe than in Britain. European intellectual federalists, such as Altiero Spinelli, tend to regard Lothian as something of a progenitor of the European Union. Priscilla Roberts's essay in the *The Historian* [2004] focuses on Lothian's Atlanticism, which underlay his overriding interest in making Anglo-American cooperation the core of British foreign policy. Roberts does not, however, devote much more than two to three pages to Lothian's ambassadorship. In a similar way, *The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* [1988], a series of essays edited by John Turner, assesses important episodes in Lothian's career, but devotes almost half of the essays to the development of Lothian's ideas of federalism. As a result, similar to other recent scholarship, *The Larger Idea* devotes only minimal attention to his ambassadorship.

The only study that focuses exclusively and substantively on Lothian's ambassadorship is *Lord Lothian and Anglo-American Relations, 1939-1940* [1983] by David Reynolds. The bulk of Reynolds's study focuses primarily on the ambassador's key political accomplishments of 1940, the Destroyers-for-Bases agreement and Lend-Lease. Reynolds, however, devotes little more than passing attention to Lothian's relentless efforts to improve Britain's image and to publicize the dire reality of Britain's

military and financial situation, through publicity, propaganda, and his cultivation of relations with the American press and pro-British, pro-interventionist pressure groups.

This dissertation, while much inspired by Reynolds, endeavors to refocus attention, not simply on the political contributions made by this perpetually overlooked British diplomat, but on arguably his significant achievement, his role in helping to transform American public opinion. To a considerable degree because of Lothian's initiatives and efforts, American public opinion between the summer of 1939 and late 1940 moved from skepticism and detachment to support and affection. By the end of 1940, Americans had come to believe that their own security depended on Britain's survival.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MYTH OF THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

The history of the twentieth century, in many respects, is the chronicle of the United States' rise to global dominance, prompting some diplomatic historians to refer to the twentieth as the "American Century." Beginning with the Spanish-American War, through the Second World War and the Cold War, until its emergence as sole superpower following the fall of communism in the early 1990s, the United States exercised the most dominant and influential position in the world with respect to international power politics and the global economy. In the process, it assumed the role of military and economic powerbroker that Britain held during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, studies of Anglo-American relations during the twentieth century describe the same fundamental story -- a process of transition, from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana*.

Historians of Anglo-American relations during the twentieth century place much emphasis on the vital partnership forged during the Second World War, a partnership that led to the emergence of what is called the "Special Relationship." The term emerged immediately after the war, and was for many years seen through the viewfinder of Winston Churchill as he described it in his memoirs of the war.¹ Although Churchill's memoirs reflected his hopes for the future Anglo-American relationship during the Cold War more than the reality of this relationship between 1940 and 1945, his interpretation significantly shaped both the public perception and the academic history of Anglo-American relations. Underlying the evolution of the concept is the argument that the broad span of those relations have been characterized by a gradual and steady, even inevitable, development of friendship, based on a number of shared features -- a common language, a commitment to democracy and constitutional government, a high degree of industrialization, and a mutual interest in maintaining strong commercial relations.²

¹ John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship, 1940-1957* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995), 3; Ritchie Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 39.

² H. C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (London: Archon Books, 1969), 28-29; David R. Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 1-2.

Although much is made of the Special Relationship, diplomatic relations between Britain and the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, in spite of efforts to forge a close international partnership, in spite of continuing warmth in social and cultural terms, were in fact characterized by mutual suspicions and bitterness. This general discord was principally the result of the transfer of global leadership, in terms of their respective financial strength and military power, from Britain to the United States. One commentator noted that the “position of arbiter” in the European balance of power passed to the United States, leaving Britain increasingly to perform “in the old game on the old chessboard no longer as a queen, but as a pawn.”³

The Great War, The “Great Divide”

British global dominance had already begun to decline by the turn of the twentieth century. In one respect, it began to lose its traditional naval superiority, as Britain was increasingly challenged by Germany, the United States, France, and Japan, whose navies collectively outmanned and outgunned the Royal Navy.⁴ In addition, Britain began to lose its industrial edge, as its share of global manufacturing capacity declined from 32 percent in 1870 to 15 percent by 1910, while its share of global trade dropped from 25 percent to 14 percent.⁵ Furthermore, while the primary basis for Britain’s still immense global domination remained the Empire, its economic value was questionable⁶ and some began to suggest that, because it imposed security and financial burdens upon the mother country, the Empire was increasingly a distraction and an encumbrance of which Britain should relieve itself as soon as possible.⁷

³ Walter Layton of *The Economist*, 1 December 1928, quoted in Anne Orde, The Eclipse of Great Britain: The United States and British Imperial Decline, 1895-1956 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 89.

⁴ Howard Temperley, Britain and America since Independence (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 89.

⁵ Orde, 1; Temperley, 89.

⁶ The Empire was vastly rich in resources; with notable exceptions, however, very little had been done to develop these colonies. Furthermore, India as a field for British investment occupied a position well below the United States and slightly greater than Argentina. Economic development in the Dominions was always constrained by their lack of population and lack of settlement. Temperley, 91; Orde, 3.

⁷ H. G. Nicholas, The United States and Britain (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 75-76.

The First World War accelerated the decline of Britain as a great power and the corresponding rise of the United States. Consequently, the war is the single most important watershed with respect to Anglo-American relations in the twentieth century, the point at which Britain's global leadership and power began to pass to the United States. By the end of the war, the United States was acknowledged to be not merely a potential but an actual great power of the first rank.⁸

With the outbreak of war in 1914, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, called upon Americans to remain neutral in thought as well as deed. Maintaining neutrality, however, was far easier said than done. In the first place, a large number of Americans, many of whom could trace their cultural and ancestral heritage to Britain, openly favored the Allies, viewing Britain and France as liberal democracies confronting an autocratic, militaristic power. Furthermore, the men who surrounded and advised Wilson openly favored Britain and the Allied cause as well: his chief adviser, Colonel Edward M. House; the American Ambassador in London, Walter Hines Page, sometimes described as "more British than the British"; and Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who believed that an Allied victory was essential to the United States.⁹

In the second place, the war was good for business. While the war broke out for reasons that had nothing directly to do with its interests, the United States, as the world's leading mercantile power, claimed the right to trade freely with the belligerent states. Between 1914 and 1916, American exports to Britain quadrupled, from \$750 million in 1914 to \$2.75 billion in 1916, while trade with the Central Powers fell from \$345 million to a mere \$2 million. American business and industry boomed, in munitions, steel, shipbuilding, and textiles. Price, employment, and income levels all rose dramatically.¹⁰

⁸ Orde, 41; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 10-11; David Woodward, Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American Relations, 1917-1918 (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 8-10.

⁹ David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, An Ocean Apart: The Relationship Between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century (London: BBC Books, Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 45; Nicholas, 60, 62; Orde, 43-44; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 11; Temperley, 93-94.

¹⁰ Dimbleby and Reynolds, 46; Robert Ferrell, Woodrow Wilson & World War I, 1917-1921 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), 4-5; Temperley, 99-100.

As the war progressed, however, Britain's financial dependence on the United States increased. As a result, the war initiated a fundamental shift in the international financial balance of power from Britain to the United States. When the war began, Washington owed money to Britain. Initially, this source of revenue helped Britain pay for munitions, cotton, industrial raw materials, petroleum products, foodstuffs, and other commodities. As its financial resources became strained, London began selling British-owned securities in the United States. Increasingly, moreover, loans became necessary. Secretary of State Lansing warned that, without loans, Britain's trade would collapse, throwing the American economy into depression and distress: "Can we afford to let a declaration as to our conception of the 'true spirit of neutrality' made in the first days of the war stand in the way of our national interests which seem to be seriously threatened?" Between the first American loan in October 1915, from the Anglophile House of Morgan, and the end of the war, Britain borrowed \$3.7 billion.¹¹

In such a manner, New York City began to emerge as the world's leading financial center, as the United States, for the first time, found itself a creditor nation. In the process, moreover, as some commentators had warned, the impression began to emerge that market forces would dictate American policy. As William Jennings Bryan had warned in 1915, a symbiotic relationship seemed to have emerged between the British government and American financial interests.¹²

¹¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 45-46, 49; Steven Jantzen, Hooray For Peace. Hurrah For War: The United States During World War I (New York: New American Library, 1971), 114, 121; David M. Kennedy, Over Here: The First World War and American Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 100, 306, 312; Nicholas, 64; Orde, 47-48; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 12; Temperley, 99-100.

¹² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 49; Nicholas, 64; Temperley, 94-95. Bryan was Wilson's first Secretary of State. A religious fundamentalist and ardent pacifist, he did not share the administration's Anglophilia. When the war broke out, he had the State Department issue a statement to the effect that for American bankers to make loans to foreign nations at war would be inconsistent with the nation's policy of strict neutrality. He wrote:

Money is the worst of all contrabands because it commands everything else. . . . The powerful financial interests which would be connected with these loans would be tempted to use their influence through the newspapers to support the interests of the Government to which they had loaned because the value of the security would be directly affected by the result of the war. We would thus find our newspapers arrayed on one side or the other, each group supporting a financial group and pecuniary interest. [Quoted in Temperley, 94.]

In response to the tough talk of the Wilson administration in the wake of the *Lusitania* sinking, that the United States would hold Germany "strictly accountable," Bryan resigned and was replaced by the Anglophile Robert Lansing.

At the same time, however, the war began to strain Anglo-American relations, most seriously over maritime neutral rights. Although the United States, as a neutral, claimed the absolute right of freedom of the seas,¹³ it was evident from the outset of hostilities that one of Britain's principal weapons would be a blockade of the continent.¹⁴ The British enforced the blockade by traditional methods: the interception of shipments to neutral ports, confiscation of neutral cargoes, interference with the mails, and the exercise of sweeping powers of search and detention. The blockade, however, induced the Germans to respond with unrestricted submarine warfare. Faced with Britain's policy of starving it into submission, and in light of America's continuing trade with Allies, the Kaiser's government abandoned the legal niceties of search and seizure, and struck with the U-boats, a policy that culminated in the sinking of the *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915.¹⁵

The blockade also increased tensions between Washington and London. The British blockade seriously damaged American commercial interests, and the State Department lodged repeated protests. Although both countries worked through 1915 to prevent such incidents from precipitating a break in relations,¹⁶ by the summer of 1916, wholesale and blatant British violations of maritime law thoroughly exasperated Wilson. American mail passing through British ports was opened and inspected, and 87

¹³ Neither Britain nor Germany would concede the American claim to absolute freedom of the seas. With the war on land stalemated, it became essential for each side to try to strangle the other's economy. Each declared the waters around the other's coastline a war zone. Under international law, belligerents could search neutral ships and seize their cargoes if these were destined for the enemy war effort. This assumed the ability to stop a ship at sea, board it, and examine the contents. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 46-47.

¹⁴ John W. Coogan, The End of Neutrality. The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981), 167-168.

¹⁵ On 4 February 1915, the German government announced that all enemy merchant vessels encountered within the war zone would be destroyed on sight. In order to avoid attack, Britain authorized its merchant ships to fly neutral flags. Consequently, the German delegation added, "neutral vessels cannot always be prevented from suffering from the attacks intended for enemy ships." Dimpleby and Reynolds, 47.

¹⁶ Coogan, 173-191; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 48; Nicholas, 63; Temperley, 96-98. British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey made it a cardinal principle that no Allied action be allowed that might provoke a rupture with the United States. The United States, for its part, tended to ignore or condone British violations. Its response to German and British violations of neutral rights were revealing: American reactions to British violations were extraordinarily mild and restrained, while their reactions to the German decision to implement unrestricted submarine warfare were harsh and uncompromising, threatening to hold Berlin "strictly accountable" for damages and loss of American life. Coogan, 215, 252; Jantzen, 67.

American firms found themselves on a blacklist of companies suspected of trading with Germany, thus banning them from all commerce with Britain. British merchant ships, moreover, flew the American flag whenever they entered submarine waters, which contributed to the sinking of American ships.¹⁷ In late July 1916, Wilson wrote to House:

I am, I must admit, about at the end of my patience with Great Britain and the Allies. This black list business is the last straw . . . I am seriously considering asking Congress to prohibit loans and restrict exports to the Allies.¹⁸

At the same time, public opinion in Britain grew wary of the United States. During the first three years of the war, there existed a growing undercurrent of disappointment and even resentment that the United States did not actually enter the war on the Allied side. The British had expected the United States to enter the war, largely on the grounds of Anglo-American kinship.¹⁹ As early as 1914, some quarters of Britain condemned the American decision to proclaim strict neutrality as vacillation, moral insensitivity, or even “craven cowardice.”²⁰ This sentiment was strengthened by Wilson’s comment, three days after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915:

The example of America must be a special example. The example of America must be the example not merely of peace because it will not fight, but of peace because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world, and strife is not. There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right.²¹

Although the sinking of the *Lusitania* prompted expressions of sympathy throughout Britain, many greeted Wilson’s remarks greeted with contempt. American neutrality began to look more like cowardice than principle. Resentment grew, furthermore, over the periodic American protests against the British

¹⁷ Jantzen, 72-73; Kennedy, 304; Nicholas, 65; Orde, 46; Temperley, 97, 100.

¹⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 51.

¹⁹ Charmley, 3-4; D. Woodward, 5-6. In asserting that the British assumed too much in their relationship with the United States, David Woodward quotes Avner Offer: “The real assets of British security were the bonds and resources of the English-speaking world overseas: economic, social, political, sentimental, forming a complex but effective system of practical kinship.” Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 90.

²⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 43.

²¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 47-48; D. Woodward, 17, 56.

blockade. Music hall comedians and the British press alike mocked the president. In the trenches of France, dud shells that failed to explode were nicknamed “Wilson’s.”²²

Britain’s savage suppression of the 1916 Irish rebellion further strained Anglo-American relations. Irish leaders were summarily tried and shot, while Sir Roger Casement was hanged for treason, in spite of a plea of clemency from the United States Senate. Most Americans, not just those of Irish heritage, were outraged. “I doubt if the Germans have ever been as hopelessly stupid,” wrote a correspondent of Colonel House, Wilson’s chief political adviser. “Certainly everything for which British Liberalism has stood, as contrasted to Prussian Junkerism, has been brushed away.”²³

Wilson became particularly exasperated with the British because of their refusal to accept his offer of mediation. In February 1916, Colonel House reached an understanding with the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey: when Britain and France judged the moment to be opportune, Wilson would propose a conference to end the war. Should Germany refuse to participate or should it reject terms that both the president and the Allies considered reasonable, then, according to the House-Grey memorandum, “the United States would probably enter the war against Germany.”²⁴

Although Wilson considered this to be a significant concession toward possible American participation, the British were decidedly skeptical. Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith considered the president’s concession to be “humbug and a mere manoeuvre of American politics,” aimed at strengthening Wilson’s chances of reelection in November. In any event, over the spring and summer of 1916, the British opposition to mediation hardened considerably. The American ambassador in London, Walter Hines Page, told House in May: “The English do not see how there can be any mediation . . . this German military caste caused all the trouble and there can be no security in Europe as long as it lives in

²² Allen, 675; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 48; Orde, 42-43. Even Americans were embarrassed by Wilson’s statement. General John J. Pershing, who would ultimately lead the American Expeditionary Force in France, uttered, “Isn’t that the damndest rot you ever heard a sane person get off?” Ferrell, 50; D. Woodward, 56.

²³ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 50-51; D. Cameron Watt, Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain’s Place, 1900-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 31.

²⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 49-50; Nicholas, 65; Orde, 45-46; Temperley, 97, 100.

authority. That's the English view. It raped nuns in Belgium . . . it planned the destruction of the *Lusitania* . . . It'll do anything." From the British point of view, Wilson's apparent indifference to the moral issues at stake -- indeed, his inability to see that too much had been sacrificed -- seemed incredible and patently offensive.²⁵

Wilson, equally infuriated and disillusioned by the British failure to act on the House-Grey memorandum, became more determined than ever to bring about a peace settlement, with or without the support of Britain. Shortly after his reelection in November, Wilson decided, he would approach both sides impartially, as befitting a true neutral; after all, the failure of the House-Grey initiative had shown the folly of relying on London. House, however, protested, arguing that if Germany went along with such a peace proposal and the Allies did not, the United States might drift into war with Britain. Wilson, convinced of his own moral authority, remained defiant, noting that "if the Allies wanted war with us we would not shrink from it."²⁶ He further resolved to exploit Britain's growing financial dependence on the United States. By late 1916, American loans were covering close to one-third of Britain's war costs. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Reginald McKenna, summed up the implications of Britain's financial crisis: "If things go as at present, I venture to say with certainty that by next June or earlier the President of the American Republic will be in a position, if he wishes, to dictate his own terms to us."²⁷

Indeed, on 27 November 1916, immediately after the election, the Federal Reserve Board, with Wilson's approval, issued a warning to banks that it was not in the nation's interest to invest in foreign bonds.²⁸ The reaction was immediate; there occurred a run on sterling, which triggered an abrupt fall in the value of British treasury bills, and thus seriously damaged British credit. Wilson's apparent intention was to use American economic muscle to compel the Allies to negotiate; the British ambassador in

²⁵ Allen, 680-682; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 50.

²⁶ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 51; D. Woodward, 22-27, 29-30.

²⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 52; Kennedy, 319-324; D. Woodward, 27-28.

²⁸ The Federal Reserve Board had checked first with Wilson, who deliberately strengthened the wording. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 52; D. Woodward, 28.

Washington, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, told the Foreign Office that “the object of course is to force us to accept the President’s mediation by cutting off supplies.”²⁹ By this point, however, the British would not agree to a negotiated peace, nor to any arrangement that involved concessions to Germany. Moreover, they found Wilson’s assumption that there existed any sort of moral equivalence in the behavior of the two sides deeply offensive. King George V reportedly wept over the audacity of America’s belittlement of Britain’s sacrifices.³⁰

Wilson’s appeals met with no response in Britain. In December 1916, the Asquith government fell and a new coalition was formed under David Lloyd George, who for two years, had denounced the inadequacies of Britain’s war effort; the new prime minister thus felt little sympathy for Grey’s conciliatory attitude to the United States. To forestall a mediation attempt by Wilson in September 1916, he had insisted publicly that there could be no end to the war, “until the Prussian military despotism is broken beyond repair . . . It took England twenty years to defeat Napoleon . . . it will not take twenty years to win this war, but whatever time is required, it will be done . . . This fight must be to a finish -- to a knock-out.”³¹ After Washington broke off diplomatic relations with Germany in early 1917, following Berlin’s resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson’s refusal to declare war prompted Lloyd George to note sarcastically, “So he is not going to fight after all! He is awaiting another insult before he actually draws the sword.”³²

Even after the United States finally entered the war in the spring of 1917, strains and tensions between Washington and London continued. In part, disagreements over military strategy deepened tensions. While the United States and Britain cooperated successfully in the war at sea, their two navies collaborating in convoy duty, enforcing the blockade, and hunting for U-boats, there was much less cooperation on land. In the spring of 1918, for example, as the Germans mounted their great spring

²⁹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 52.

³⁰ Allen, 683; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 53; Orde, 48; Temperley, 101.

³¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 53; D. Woodward, 28-29.

³² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 54-55; Kennedy, 6.

offensive on the Western Front, and American forces were only beginning to trickle in, Lloyd George and the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, pleaded with Washington to send over as many combat troops as possible, for immediate amalgamation into hard-pressed British and French units. The American Commander-in-Chief, John Pershing, however, rejected the Allies' urgent demands in order to maintain an independent American army, to be used where and when American policy determined.³³

It was not until the Allied counter-offensive in mid-July 1918 that American troops, now organized into the First US Army, saw any significant action in large numbers. The brunt of the fighting, however, was still borne by the British and French. In London, the cabinet feared that the war would drag on into 1919 or 1920, and that by that time Britain would be exhausted and completely at the mercy of any terms that Wilson cared to impose. General Jan Smuts warned Lloyd George in August 1918:

It may well be that, by the indefinite continuance of the war, we shall become a second or third-class Power, and the leadership, not only financially and militarily, but in every respect will have passed on to America and Japan.³⁴

Similarly, Smuts circulated on 24 October a memorandum to the King and the War Cabinet:

The salient fact to remember is that, *as matters now stand*, this great result has been achieved largely by the unexampled war effort of the British Empire. On land and sea and in the air the great turn of the tide of war in the summer and autumn of this year has been due to the supreme British effort. If peace comes now, it will be a British peace, it will be a peace given to the world by the same Empire that settled the Napoleonic wars a century ago.

Conversely, he concluded, if this war were prolonged for another year, the “centre of gravity” would shift to the United States, which would become the “diplomatic dictator of the world.”³⁵

In the end, however, American resources clearly enabled the Allies to continue fighting, and in May and June 1918, the growing presence of American reinforcements helped to stem the second phase

³³ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 60-61; Nicholas, 67; Orde, 50-51; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 15; Temperley, 104; D. Woodward, 81-98, 157-165. Watt argues that it was Wilson's intention, particularly after the American entry into the war, to impose a peace settlement on not only the Germans, but the Allies as well. This required that America's allies were not defeated but weakened. Therefore, in 1917, the United States contributed little to relieve the desperate naval and shipping position of the Allies, focusing instead on trade with Latin America. Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 32-33.

³⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 62.

³⁵ D. Woodward, 214.

of the German spring offense, which had broken through Allied defenses on the Marne and at one point seemed poised to capture Paris. In September 1918, 1.2 million American troops took part in the last great battle on the Western Front, capturing Sedan and cutting off one of the key railroad links used for supplying the now-exhausted German forces. In October, as German positions gave way along the entire 200-mile front, from Alsace-Lorraine to the North Sea, its High Command urged the Chancellor to ask for an armistice. In doing so, however, the Germans appealed directly to President Wilson, rather than negotiate with the Allies, for an armistice on the basis of his Fourteen Points.³⁶ The Allied leaders were furious, but at that late stage, there was little they could do, particularly as Wilson threatened to withdraw American forces on the grounds that the United States could not support the efforts of countries that did not share American war aims.³⁷

One of the most considerable sources of strain in Anglo-American relations was the personality of the American president, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson was tense, self-righteous, and more or less permanently indifferent to other men's counsel, including that of his own advisers. He constantly extolled the purity of American intentions and the selfishness of all others: "Great power may be used either for good or for evil. If possessed by the United States we may be sure it will be used for good. To my mind, we are the only nation that has taken a completely unselfish position in the war." Wilson saw it as his, and America's, destiny to create a new liberal world order. He maintained that American participation in the war must be justified by higher, noble, moral principles. He implied that, as inhabitants of the New World, untainted by the sins of the Old, it was incumbent upon the United States to adopt a different approach from that of the other belligerents.³⁸ Therefore, Wilson made it clear that

³⁶ In January 1918, Wilson set out his "Fourteen Points" for a just peace. Among other things, it called for an end to secret diplomacy and its replacement by "open covenants open peace, openly arrived at," "absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas," "removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers," the maximum possible disarmament "consistent with domestic safety," and a "free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims," weighing the "interests of the populations concerned" equally with the rights of the governing powers. It called, in other words, for a moderate and reasonable peace.

³⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 62; Temperley, 105.

³⁸ Nicholas, 68; Orde, 57; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 15; Temperley, 106-108.

the United States would cooperate with Britain but would not sign a treaty of alliance. He explained to Arthur Balfour, Grey's successor as foreign secretary, that the United States would be an "associate power," remaining independent of the Allies, and thus retaining the freedom to make peace on its own terms when it chose. Although they were on the same side, Wilson was convinced that the United States and the Allies had fundamentally different war aims: the United States wanted a just peace and a new world order in which imperialism, arms races, and military alliances were a thing of the past, whereas the Allies, he maintained, wanted territorial gain, vengeance, and reparation for the damage they had suffered.³⁹ As early as December 1914, Wilson was sure that "Germany is not alone responsible for the war." Consequently, he did not want to associate the United States too closely with British policy.⁴⁰ Wilson believed, in any event, that he could bring the Allies to toe the American line; as he wrote in July 1917, "When the war is over we can force them to our way of thinking, because by that time they will, among other things, be financially in our hands."⁴¹

Wilson managed to provoke ill will even amid the public adulation that greeted him in London in late 1918. Unimpressed by the display of royal opulence at a dinner at Buckingham Palace on 27 December, Wilson deliberately dressed in an ordinary black suit, in contrast to the other guests, who were resplendent in dress uniforms, medals, and jewelry. He offended many with his after-dinner comments, which were cold and aloof, and failed to make even the slightest passing reference to the contribution of the British Empire in the defeat of Germany. Lloyd George noted that, "There was no glow of friendship or of gladness at meeting men who had been partners in a common enterprise." Furthermore, Wilson dismissed standard references to the bonds of language and history linking the two nations:

³⁹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 58; Nicholas, 66; Orde, 51.

⁴⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 44. Through 1917 and 1918, efforts were made on both sides to establish a formal naval alliance between Britain and the United States. While Colonel House favored such an alliance, Wilson did not. Wishing to retain a free hand, Wilson wrote to William Howard Taft, the former president, that he doubted the desirability of drawing the United States and Britain too closely together: "The United States must not be put in a position of seeming, in any way, involved in British policy." He insisted that the motives of the United States were unselfish, while those of the British Empire "seemed of a less worthy character." Orde, 55-56.

⁴¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 59; Orde, 69; Watt, Succeeding John Bull, 32.

You must not speak of us who come over here as cousins, still less as brothers; we are neither. Neither must you think of us as Anglo-Saxons, for that term can no longer be rightly applied to the people of the United States. Nor must too much importance in this connection be attached to the fact that English is our common language. . . . No, there are only two things which can establish and maintain closer relations between your country and mine; they are community of ideals and interests.⁴²

Wilson inspired the same personality backwash in Paris. While many people throughout Europe came to regard Wilson as a sort of “New World Messiah come to right the wrongs of the Old,” many inside the conference began to suspect that this was also Wilson’s view as well.⁴³ The French premier Georges Clemenceau famously snorted that “Mr. Wilson bores me with his Fourteen Points. Why, God Almighty has only ten.”

In spite of wartime tensions and personality clashes, Britain and the United States in fact shared fundamental similarities of long-range outlook and interest, particularly with respect to the terms of the peace. Both favored the establishment of the League of Nations as an international organization to limit the future production of armaments and reduce the chances of war.⁴⁴ Both wanted to eliminate Germany as a naval power, but intended to preserve the territorial integrity of Germany against French demands for dismemberment. Both sought to settle the issue of European boundaries on the basis of national self-determination, or, in exceptional cases, on natural economic units.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, they disagreed strenuously over the issue of reparations. After a long and bloody war, in which 750,000 Britons had been killed, the British demand for vengeance was overwhelming. During the general election campaign of 1918, Lloyd George initially appealed for moderation, calling on Britons to “relentlessly set our face against . . . squalid principles of either revenge or avarice.” The

⁴² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 64; Nicholas, 68; Temperley, 107.

⁴³ Nicholas, 68.

⁴⁴ The League of Nations, in conception, was as much British as it was American. The term itself was popularized by a Cambridge don, Lowes Dickinson, who helped found “The League of Nations Society” in Britain in 1915. Sir Edward Grey, the Liberal Foreign Secretary, pressed the idea on Wilson in the early part of the war, and after Grey’s fall, Lord Robert Cecil kept the idea alive in the British cabinet. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 65.

⁴⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 65; Nicholas, 69-70; Orde, 61-62; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 15; Temperley, 108.

prime minister, however, found himself quickly under great political pressure, from the public, the newspapers, and his own Conservative partners in the Coalition government, all of whom wanted Germany squeezed “until the pips squeak.” As a result, Lloyd George was soon calling for reparations from Germany “up to the limit of her capacity.”⁴⁶

The first month of the Paris Peace Conference was dominated by Wilson, whose overriding objective was to secure agreement for the League of Nations. After intense debate, a draft agreement provided for an international assembly, led by the great powers, which would come to the aid of any state whose territory was endangered or independence threatened, by either economic sanctions or direct military force. Lloyd George thought this last provision would place impossible obligations on the great powers to intervene in each and every dispute. Reluctantly, the British cabinet went along with Wilson’s grand design, principally to ensure the president’s cooperation on issues Britain regarded as vital.

After securing the consent of Lloyd George and Clemenceau, Wilson returned temporarily to the United States, where he discovered much opposition to the League of Nations in the Senate. First, Wilson’s commitment to the League, and therefore a commitment to automatic action whenever the League’s Covenant was violated, directly undermined two of the most hallowed traditions of American diplomacy: the avoidance of entangling alliances, and the basic constitutional foreign policy prerogative of the United States Congress to declare war. Second, Wilson’s commitment weakened the Monroe Doctrine, the basis of America’s claim that it could legitimately intervene in the affairs of South and Central America. Therefore, by the time he returned to Paris on 14 March 1919, Wilson had lost much of the initiative and much of the moral high ground, as the Senate insisted that the American sphere of influence in Central and South America, as defined by the Monroe Doctrine, be admitted as an exception. Such special pleading was deeply embarrassing, particularly as Wilson had argued previously that the new world order should be free of all taint of imperialism and “balance of power” politics.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 65; Nicholas, 70; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 16.

⁴⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 66-68; Ferrell, 165-167; Jantzen, 272-274; Kennedy, 358.

Over the course of March and April 1919, as central and eastern Europe seemed on the brink of anarchy and revolution, it became increasingly imperative that an agreement be reached. It was Wilson, gradually worn down by Lloyd George and Clemenceau, and for a while seriously ill from the influenza epidemic that was sweeping the world, who made most of the concessions. In order to satisfy Britain and France, Wilson agreed that greater reparations should be exacted from Germany than had first been proposed. To placate Clemenceau, Wilson and Lloyd George agreed to a temporary occupation of the Rhineland. They also offered an Anglo-American guarantee of French security; if Germany attempted to invade France, Britain and the United States would come to its assistance.⁴⁸

In the summer of 1919, and again in March 1920, the United States Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles and therefore the League of Nations.⁴⁹ The Senate voted against the treaty in part to move the United States back to its traditional foreign policy posture of isolationism. But, the Senate, controlled by the Republicans, also voted against the treaty for political reasons, to undermine the policies of an unpopular Democratic president. A resurgence of Anglophobia also heightened opposition to the treaty. Many of the groups who opposed the treaty had some grievance against Britain: German-Americans and Irish-Americans in particular long regarded Britain as the primary enemy of their respective homelands. Since the peace conference was being held at the same time that the British government was confronting the demands for the partition of Ireland, it is possible that the activities of the Irish-American lobby played a significant role in the vote.⁵⁰ In addition, Midwestern progressives and populists associated the British with the international bankers and businessmen from the American northeast, while liberals denounced the British Empire and Britain's suppression of nationalist movements, not only in Ireland, but also in India and Egypt. Many of these groups argued that the League of Nations itself was stacked in

⁴⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 69-70; Kennedy, 358-359.

⁴⁹ Allen, 716-718; Ferrell, 172-177; Kennedy, 360-362; John E. Moser, Twisting the Lion's Tail: American Anglophobia between the World Wars (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 9-13; Nicholas, 72-73; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 16.

⁵⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 71; Moser, 9, 12; Nicholas, 72-73; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 16.

Britain's favor, because in the League assembly, not only would Britain have a vote, but Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and India would have votes as well. Since all five were British dominions, some senators maintained that Britain would command not one vote but six. William Borah, one of the Senate's inveterate Anglophobes, called the League the "greatest triumph for English diplomacy in three centuries of English diplomatic life," a sentiment echoed by many others in the Senate and the press.⁵¹

In spite of the conclusion of the peace conference and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, therefore, the United States undermined the entire process, and contributed to a course that would, over the long-term, help to generate a second world war.⁵² In the short term, however, the American rejection of Versailles strained Anglo-American relations once more. Having followed Wilson's lead, and hoping for a continuation of a cooperative spirit into the post-war period, British leaders felt a profound sense of betrayal. Lloyd George complained, as would many others, that the League of Nations had been abandoned by the country whose president had been its architect: "America had been offered the leadership of the world, but the Senate had tossed the sceptre into the sea."⁵³

The American rejection of the peace treaties set the tone for Anglo-American relations in the period between the world wars in two significant ways. First, the Senate vote dramatically illustrated the fact that an American president had much less maneuverability in foreign affairs than did the British prime minister.⁵⁴ Second, as a result of what London regarded as a fundamental breaking of trust, the British government would find it difficult, throughout the entire interwar period, to place much confidence in the assurances of the United States.

⁵¹ Allen, 718-720; Moser, 11-12.

⁵² In November 1945, Churchill recalled that Franklin Roosevelt once asked him what the war should be called. Churchill had replied, "The Unnecessary War," and went on to explain: "If the United States had taken an active part in the League of Nations, and if the League of Nations had been prepared to use concerted force, even had it only been European force, to prevent the re-armament of Germany, there was no need for further serious bloodshed." Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and America* (New York and London: Free Press, 2005), 95.

⁵³ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 73; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 19.

⁵⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 78.

In a fundamental way, the First World War transformed the power relationship between Britain and the United States. The United States clearly emerged as the dominant power, in both military and economic terms. By 1919, it had replaced Britain as the leading creditor nation in the world, while its industrial production exceeded that of Britain, France, and Germany combined. The American army had grown from 379,000 in 1917 to almost four million men, while its navy, although still inferior to the Royal Navy, continued to grow, due to a massive and ongoing building programme.⁵⁵ In spite of this dramatic explosion in power and influence, however, Americans believed that they could turn their backs on the world and return to the comfort and security they had enjoyed prior to the war. In its rejection of the peace treaties and the League of Nations, the United States effectively attempted to shirk its new global responsibilities that resulted from having become one of the world's great powers.⁵⁶

By contrast, Britain emerged from the war with its powers much impaired, although it was not immediately apparent. Britain, after all, had been one of the victors. It had not been invaded. Its principal pre-war rival, Germany, would not be in a position to threaten its interests for many years. With the dismantling of the U-boats and the German High Seas Fleet, the Royal Navy appeared to be in a stronger position than ever.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Britain still had a relatively strong economy, overseas wealth, and a stable currency, and its participation in the League of Nations helped to sustain its international status as a Great Power. In the meantime, the British Empire had expanded by approximately 27 percent with the acquisition of vast new regions in the Middle East and Africa, including Iraq and Persia, both of which contained valuable oil reserves.⁵⁸ Some observers, however began to question its value. While some thought that the Empire might offer an alternative to European entanglements or perhaps relieve Britain of any future dependence upon the United States, many others began to argue that because it

⁵⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 85; Nicholas, 78; Temperley, 113.

⁵⁶ Nicholas, 76; Temperley, 113.

⁵⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 74; Orde, 41-42, 70; Temperley, 109.

⁵⁸ Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 19; Temperley, 113-114.

imposed excessive burdens of defense and finance upon the mother country, it had become a distraction and an encumbrance.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the Empire, over and above everything else, was what justified Britain's claim to Great Power status.⁶⁰

While the weakness of Britain's postwar position was not immediately apparent, however, the dramatic and largely unanticipated expansion of American power and influence in the world was crystal clear. Many British leaders, therefore, concluded that it would be vital to maintain the closest relations and cooperation with the United States in order to safeguard British interests. They were convinced, furthermore, that Britain could guide the United States along a course that would benefit Britain's interests, because American leaders were "almost exclusively Anglo-Saxons," who shared British political ideals. As Lloyd George asserted in 1921, "the people who govern America are our people. They are our kith and kin. The other breeds are not on top." Therefore, the hope of a special relationship with the United States, the "Old World discreetly managing the New," was to be at the center of British policy in the post-war years.⁶¹

The war, however, had already indicated that Britain would not so easily manipulate the United States. Furthermore, and far more serious, real sources of antagonism and rivalry began to emerge almost immediately; these conflicts would shape Anglo-American diplomatic relations during the 1920s and into the 1930s. The two most central issues, and the two chief sources of contention, involved a series of economic and financial disputes, and a rivalry over naval supremacy.

"Financially in Our Hands": Economic and Financial Strains

The fundamental economic fact of life during the early 1920s was that, largely due to the war, the British economy stagnated and sputtered, while the American economy boomed. Prior to 1914, Britain had been the pre-eminent commercial and financial center of the world. The City of London managed

⁵⁹ Nicholas, 75-76.

⁶⁰ Orde, 70-71; Temperley, 114.

⁶¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 76.

international money, and sterling was used as the principal trading currency. During the war, unlike France and Belgium, Britain had suffered a minimum of direct physical damage.⁶²

In other respects, however, it fared quite badly. The war cost Britain 750,000 men in combat, representing approximately 9 percent of all men under the age of 45 years, a significant proportion of the nation's youth, while another 1.5 million were wounded. Two-fifths of its merchant fleet had been lost to enemy action. The financing of the war increased the national debt from £650 million to £7.8 billion; throughout the 1920s, debt servicing would consume some 40 percent of the nation's budget. As a result of the debt, Parliament would be increasingly hard pressed to find the necessary funds to maintain the nation's defense capacity, improve infrastructure, and alleviate the lot of the unemployed. More important, the war severely damaged Britain's ability to earn invisible income, on which the economy had depended for decades, disrupted foreign markets, diverted foreign trade, and transformed Britain from a creditor to a debtor nation. Britain lost around 10 percent of its major capital investments abroad and sold off approximately £550 million of British assets in the United States. In addition, Britain had been forced to borrow £1.4 billion to finance its war efforts, most of it from the United States. Although London in turn loaned £1.7 billion to the Allies, much of that was never recovered.⁶³

Adding to Britain's problems was the fact that, during the war, Japan and the United States had taken over markets formerly regarded as British preserves. Japanese manufacturing had increased by 75 percent during the war; South Americans looked now almost exclusively to the United States rather than Britain for manufactures and investment capital. Canada, Brazil, and Argentina, formerly accustomed to importing manufactured goods from Britain, had begun to develop their own industries, while China and India had begun to manufacture their own textiles. As a result, by the mid-1920s, Britain's proportion of global exports had declined by one-third since before the outbreak of the war.

⁶² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 85; Kennedy, 297-298.

⁶³ Gerard De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), 331-332; Thomas William Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles: From 1870 to the Present* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, Inc., 2002), 129-130; Kennedy, 306-307; Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 290-291; Temperley, 123.

This decline of Britain's global economy undermined its domestic economy as well. Because of the loss of its overseas markets, the textile, steelmaking, shipbuilding, and coal industries, having expanded far beyond normal peacetime requirements, suffered from overcapacity, which drove up prices and made competition difficult. Unemployment grew and remained consistently high; only once during the 1920s did the unemployment rate drop below ten percent. Compounding the problem was an inherent conservatism in British society, which was reflected in the inability or unwillingness in several sectors of the British economy to adapt to changes brought about by science and technology. Therefore, Britain continued to rely on old traditional staple industries, mining, coal, iron, steel, shipbuilding, and textiles, and maintaining old habits and patterns, whereas the United States continued to revolutionize business methods, mechanize its factories, and invest in research and development.⁶⁴

By contrast, indeed, the United States economy enjoyed tremendous prosperity in the 1920s. Its most significant advantage was a much greater internal market, protected from overseas competitors, which led to the development of a full range of newer industries, based not on the use of coal and steam, but on electricity and oil. The single most impressive and characteristic divide between the economies of the United States and Britain was the manufacture of motor vehicles; whereas the number of cars on Britain's roads barely reached one million by 1929, the number on America's jumped from 8 million in 1920 to just under 23 million in 1929. Furthermore, American manufacturing output increased by nearly one-third. Unemployment and inflation remained low, generally below 5 percent.

Most important, however, particularly as it impacted Britain's global economic strength, the American share of world exports rose to 16 percent by 1929, while Britain's fell to 12 percent. While the United States exported approximately one-twentieth of its national production, Britain needed to export approximately one-fourth. For the United States, it appeared that foreign trade was the "icing on the cake," whereas for Britain, it was a matter of economic survival.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ De Groot, 331; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 97; Kennedy, 315-318, 337-338; Temperley, 123-125.

⁶⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 97; Kennedy, 337-338; Temperley, 124-126

Not only did Americans begin to displace the British in overseas markets, they began aggressively to take over large segments of Britain's own domestic markets, as large American companies, including Hoover, Ford, General Motors, General Electric, Firestone, Goodrich, and Goodyear, established subsidiaries in Britain and began dominating market share there.⁶⁶ For American corporations, such subsidiaries afforded an effective way to get around British tariff barriers and to penetrate the markets of the British Empire.⁶⁷

The American belief that Britain used unfair methods to protect its global commercial position exacerbated this growing rivalry. After the economic losses incurred during the war, London decided to exploit the resources of the British Empire to the fullest. Because the Empire still covered a quarter of the globe, and these possessions allowed Britain access to and control of much of the world's supplies of raw materials, such as rubber, tin, and oil, British policy aroused intense hostility within the United States. As a result, American businessmen demanded an "Open Door" policy of equal access to the world's markets and raw materials.⁶⁸

One particularly acrimonious example was a dispute over rubber, which directly affected the booming American automobile industry. In the United States, car production increased every year, from almost two million vehicles in 1920, to nearly four and a half million by 1929. This automobile boom of the 1920s made the United States the world's leading importer of rubber, consuming over two-thirds of total production. Britain, with plantations in Malaya and Ceylon, controlled about three-quarters of world supply.⁶⁹ In the early twenties, when overproduction caused the price of rubber to fall, the British government adopted the Stevenson Plan,⁷⁰ which was designed to raise the price of rubber by reducing

⁶⁶ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 101-103; Temperley, 124-126.

⁶⁷ Imported automobiles attracted a 33⅓ percent tax. Setting up in Britain, however, meant not only that an American company could avoid the tariff barriers protecting the British market, but that it could take advantage of tariff-free exports to all the countries of the British Empire. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 102-103.

⁶⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 97-98.

⁶⁹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 98.

⁷⁰ Stevenson was Sir James Stevenson, who led the Colonial Office committee that investigated the problem.

production, and, according to the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, stabilize the dollar exchange by making the Americans pay more for rubber. The effect on the prices of rubber in the United States was devastating for American tire and automobile manufacturers. In 1921, the price of rubber had been approximately 16 cents per pound; by 1925, however, the price had risen to \$1.21 per pound.⁷¹

In 1925, the United States Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, mounted a vigorous campaign against the Stevenson Plan, denouncing the price-fixing as a violation of Open Door principles and encouraging Americans to reduce their consumption of rubber. London responded by pointing out that the United States did exactly the same thing with cotton, manipulating output to keep the prices artificially high. The British also reminded the Americans that, although they might talk about the Open Door with equal opportunity in foreign markets, the United States maintained the highest tariffs in the world. A third of American imports were liable for duty and on these the average rate was 40 percent, making numerous staple British exports, such as steel and textiles, simply unsellable in the United States. Although Hoover appealed to a still powerful American Anglophobia by promoting a rubber conservation campaign with the emotive slogan “1776-1925,” in the end, market forces proved more effective. American rubber manufacturers not only shifted to Dutch suppliers in the East Indies, but also established control over rubber plantations in the west African state of Liberia, both of which led to a decline in Britain’s price and sales. Consequently, London abandoned the Stevenson Plan, much to the relief of the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Esme Howard, as this decision eliminated “a source of misunderstanding and continual bickering between the United States and ourselves.”⁷²

Just as serious as the American displacement of Britain as the leading financial power in the world, another significant and lasting source of tension involved the question of war debts. During the war, Britain supported its allies with loans, often raised on the American market. In total, the United States loaned the Allies approximately \$10 to \$12 billion. By 1920, Britain owed the United States

⁷¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 99; Moser, 45-46; Orde, 94.

⁷² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 99-100; Moser, 46-48; Orde, 94-95.

approximately \$4.3 to \$4.7 billion, while Britain's allies owed London between approximately \$7 and \$11 billion.⁷³

In earlier conflicts, in which Britain funded the war efforts of its allies, it often had been the practice to agree to a general cancellation of debts once the war was over. For the United States, however, fighting as part of a coalition was a new experience. Furthermore, American culture was largely a business culture. As Wilson, the bankers, and public opinion made clear, when they lent money, they expected it to be paid back.⁷⁴ Therefore, in the spring of 1922, Congress passed the Debt Funding Act, which stipulated that the loans had to be repaid within a 25 year period, and that the rate of interest charged was not to be less than 4.25 percent. Britain, in the Balfour Note of August 1922, suggested the cancellation of all the inter-allied war debts; Balfour offered to forgive all war debts owed to Britain, which were substantial, to the same extent that the United States forgave Britain's debts. In doing so, Balfour attempted to link the entire war debt question with the question of reparations. London argued that German war guilt, as established in Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty,⁷⁵ not only made the Germans ostensibly the aggressors, it also made them the debtors of last resort. In addition to the economic motivations, this argument also provided for an effective way of ensuring that, for want of resources, Germany would be unable to make trouble in the future.⁷⁶

The United States, however, stridently refused to acknowledge any connection between allied debts and reparations. In part, the abrasiveness of the American position was driven by American business culture; the debts had been incurred on a normal commercial basis. Business was business, and those who borrowed, regardless of the circumstances, were under an obligation to pay back. If others

⁷³ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 86; Nicholas, 81-82; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 20; Temperley, 117-118.

⁷⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 86; Nicholas, 70-71; Temperley, 117.

⁷⁵ Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, the "War Guilt Clause," forced Germany to accept full responsibility for starting the First World War. Article 231, which was the first article in Part VIII of the Treaty, titled "Reparations," served as the principal justification for the reparations and obligations placed upon Germany in the remainder of Part VIII, Articles 233 through 247.

⁷⁶ Moser, 31; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 99; Nicholas, 81-82; Orde, 77, 79; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 20; Temperley, 118.

owed money, that was their problem.⁷⁷ In addition, domestic politics helped to shape the American response as well. As London issued the Balfour Note in the midst of the 1922 congressional election campaign, both Republicans and Democrats sought to outdo each other in their denunciation of the British efforts to escape acknowledgement of their obligations.⁷⁸

In any event, American insistence that the Allies dutifully pay their debts triggered considerable resentment in Britain. “Uncle Sam” increasingly became “Uncle Shylock”; a senior Foreign Office official noted that the American position “made the average Englishman think that the Americans were dirty swine.”⁷⁹ At the same time, however, many in Britain believed that payment was necessary in order to restore the City of London’s position as the world’s banker. Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England, stated that foreign confidence in London as a financial center would collapse if Britain tried to avoid its obligations. The establishment of a payment plan, furthermore, would likely strengthen prospects for improved Anglo-American relations and longer-term cooperation. Otherwise, the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Auckland Geddes, argued in 1921, Britain must comply or risk being treated “as a vassal State so long as the debt remains unpaid.”⁸⁰

Nevertheless, British resentment and the growing ill will between the two countries intensified as a result of the debate over the settlement terms in the US Senate. One anti-British demagogue after another denounced the entire renegotiation process as a “Hoover-Morgan scheme” to defraud American taxpayers, and complained that Britain was getting the better end of the deal. The British Chancellor of

⁷⁷ Nicholas, 82; Temperley, 118.

⁷⁸ Moser, 31. Moser’s thesis is that, following the First World War, there occurred a reemergence of Anglophobia in the United States, and that a loosely organized coalition of anti-British forces remained potent until the late 1940s. At the core of this coalition were a number of anti-British groups organized along ethnic lines, such as the Friends of Irish Freedom and the Steuben Society. At the same time, numerous American politicians, including progressive and mainstream Republicans, southern Democrats, liberals, the Navy League, and Zionists, attacked the British for political advantage. “Twisting the lion’s tail” proved to be an effective method of winning political support and being elected to public office, and, once in office, of obtaining and maintaining support, or rallying opposition to a wide variety of foreign and domestic initiatives. Moser, 3, 6.

⁷⁹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 86; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 92-93.

⁸⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 85-86; Moser, 31; Orde, 80.

the Exchequer, Stanley Baldwin, added fuel to the fire when he pointed out that the “majority of the Members [of the Senate] come from agricultural and pastoral communities,” and were thus incapable of understanding the connection between the debts and the health of the international economy: “The people in the West merely sell wheat and hogs and other products and take no further interest in connection with the international debt or international trade.” Baldwin’s comments triggered a full-scale assault on Britain and its leaders. *The New York Times* characterized the debate on the Senate floor as the “liveliest two hours which that body has had since the present administration came into power.”⁸¹

In the end, the United States insisted that each debtor state negotiate separate agreements for repayment. In January 1923, Britain was the first to settle and, as it subsequently turned out, secured the hardest terms -- full repayment over 62 years with an annual interest of 3.3 percent.⁸² The severity of these terms, particularly compared with those ultimately granted to other debtors such as France and Italy, which were markedly more lenient, made them unpopular in Britain, and therefore a source of persistent ill feeling in both countries.⁸³

The British generally protested that the American point of view was wrongheaded and short-sighted, on two levels. First, it was unjust. Relative to its financial resources, Britain had contributed far more generously to the defeat of Germany than had the United States, which had actually profited from the war. Britain, and to an even greater degree France, had contributed far more than the United States in terms of human costs. In terms of their respective sacrifices, there was simply no comparison. The battle casualties of the American Expeditionary Force amounted to 49,000 killed in action, compared to the 750,000 Britons and over one million Frenchmen killed. For three years, the Allies bled and held the Germans at bay while the United States prospered, generally at the expense of Britain. Therefore, considering how long it took the United States to enter the conflict, and how much longer it took for

⁸¹ Moser, 32.

⁸² Nicholas, 82; Orde, 79-80.

⁸³ Moser, 31; Nicholas, 82-83; Orde, 79-80; Owendale, Anglo-American Relations, 20.

American troops to make a significant contribution in actual combat operations, it was exasperating and unbelievable to many Britons that, even when the war came to an end, Washington was in a position to dictate the terms of the armistice.

Second, London argued that the American position would exercise a disastrous effect on the world's economy. Britain argued that the health of the international economy depended upon the provision of easy credit and ready access to markets; after all, the long prosperity of the Victorian period had been made possible by Britain's adherence to free-trade principles, the gold standard, and the free circulation of money. Burdening Europe with debts that could not be paid, however, would undermine the ability for global economic recovery.⁸⁴

The United States, in possession of a far larger internal market, was far less concerned with issues of world trade. Furthermore, and most detrimental to Britain, the United States kept its markets tightly closed. In 1922, the United States passed the Fordney-MacCumber Tariff, which imposed the highest import tariffs in American history, particularly on both agricultural and manufactured goods, which made selling to Americans almost impossible. These tariffs in turn made it even more difficult for Allied debtors to repay their obligations.⁸⁵

Naval Rivalry

In addition to the economic differences and disagreements, one of the most significant sources of tension and misunderstanding between Britain and the United States throughout the 1920s was the rivalry over naval supremacy. The foundations of this naval rivalry began to emerge during the war. In 1916, when the United States took its first steps toward military preparedness, the Wilson administration made the expansion of the American fleet its most vital priority, with the president in February demanding a navy "incomparably the greatest in the world." When his adviser Colonel House suggested later that year, however, that the expansion of the navy was causing friction with the British, Wilson replied: "Let

⁸⁴ Temperley, 105, 118-119.

⁸⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 86; Nicholas, 82; Orde, 80; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 20; Temperley, 118-119.

us build a navy bigger than hers and do what we please.” The president sought to secure America’s ability to sail the oceans unimpeded, regardless of British sensibilities or strategic considerations.⁸⁶

The British concern over Wilson’s Fourteen Points was a case in point. London was most concerned about the call for “absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas.” In 1915, and again in 1918, London suspected that Wilson intended to destroy British sea power. In late October 1918, for example, House told Lloyd George that the United States would not allow Britain to dominate the seas and to determine the conditions on which American ships might sail them. Wilson threatened, moreover, not to participate in any peace negotiations that did not include freedom of the seas. Britain ultimately agreed to discuss, but refused to concede, the principle.⁸⁷

At the peace conference, Lloyd George continued to object, arguing that freedom of the seas represented a direct challenge to Britain’s sea power and its right of blockade. Colonel House, however, warned that if agreement could not be reached, the United States would launch an all-out race to build the most powerful navy in the world. In order to make that point unambiguously clear, Wilson approved a new naval appropriations bill in December 1918, providing for a fresh three-year building programme, on top of the ongoing naval construction from 1916. Lloyd George understood that, as the United States enjoyed far more resources and more money, Britain would lose any such contest. Nevertheless, he replied that Britain would spend her last guinea to maintain a navy superior to that of the United States or any other power, and that no cabinet official could “continue in the Government of England who took a different position.”⁸⁸

Although Wilson proved much more accommodating than expected, Lloyd George continued his efforts to crush “freedom of the seas” as an essential part of the peace agreement. In January 1919, according to the Admiralty Board, Britain had 42 capital ships in service, as opposed to the United States’

⁸⁶ Kennedy, 324-326; Orde, 46-47.

⁸⁷ Allen, 700-703; James R. Leutze, Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937-1941 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 4; Orde, 58-59.

⁸⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 62-63; Orde, 60.

sixteen and Japan's fourteen.⁸⁹ The Admiralty expected the current American programme to bring numerical equality by 1923-1924, as well as qualitative superiority, since a number of British ships would be obsolete, while all of the American ships were modern. In the end, after repeated rows with Lloyd George, Wilson stopped pressing Britain on the freedom of the seas.⁹⁰

For its part, the United States had two principal concerns. Although Washington did not seriously contemplate war with Britain, it nevertheless believed that trade rivalry was the root cause of international conflict, and that the coming of peace would lead to a trade rivalry between the United States and Britain, the world's two leading economic powers. Therefore, Washington believed that Britain would seek to defeat the United States by naval power, just as it had previously defeated, by naval power, the earlier challenges of Spain, the Netherlands, France, and most recently, Germany. Britain now had no more European naval rivals; Washington therefore believed that, in the future, every ship Britain built or acquired could have in mind only the United States Navy.⁹¹

At the same time, however, the United States remained concerned about Britain's naval alliance with Japan.⁹² Although Washington initially regarded the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as a cheap way to contain Russian expansion, by the early 1920s, Japanese imperial aspirations and its growing military power became a greater threat to American interests in the Pacific; namely, its colonies in the Philippines

⁸⁹ Capital ships were warships over 10,000 tons, such as battleships and aircraft carriers.

⁹⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 69-70, 79; Orde, 60-61, 64. By 1924, if current building programmes continued, Britain would have 43 capital ships, the United States 35 capital ships, and Japan 22 capital ships. Therefore, it was clear that the United States would soon overtake Britain in any calculation of naval power. Nicholas, 78.

⁹¹ Orde, 64-65.

⁹² Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 7-8; Temperley, 115. This alliance, negotiated in 1902, established the principle of neutrality in any conflict with a third power, and committed both Britain and Japan to support the Open Door and the territorial integrity of China. The benefit of the alliance to Britain was the presence of an ally in the Pacific that could help contain Russia and protect British commercial interests in China. It helped Britain's navy by providing coaling stations and repair facilities. For Japan, it provided a necessary step in achieving further recognition as an international power. It also gave Tokyo the confidence to challenge Russia's occupation of Manchuria and designs on Korea. In 1905, in order to assuage American concerns, the British revised the alliance, under which Japan and Britain bound themselves to maintain a force in the Far East superior to any "European" power, a change in wording from the original "outside" power. Furthermore, neither state was obligated to go to war with any country with which it had a general treaty of arbitration. Thus, London constructed this alliance in such a way that it would not incite hostilities between the United States and Britain.

and Guam. Therefore, Washington feared that, if war broke out between the United States and Japan, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance could possibly bring the Royal Navy into the war on the Japanese side.

In spite of Japanese encroachments into China during the war, many British policy-makers favored the alliance, due to expire in 1922, primarily to protect Britain's still considerable commercial interests in the Pacific, which were greater than those of the United States, and to avoid the need to maintain large naval forces in the China Seas. At the same time, however, they feared that American suspicions of Japan might trigger a renewed naval armaments race, which, considering the far greater resources at the disposal of the United States, Britain would certainly lose.⁹³

The United States clearly wanted to achieve parity with Britain and to destroy the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Although it had the wealth to outbuild Britain in a naval race, there were growing demands in Washington for economy in 1921 as the postwar boom began to fade. These dual necessities, therefore, led to the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922. The United States proposed a ten-year moratorium on the building of capital ships and the systematic scrapping of vessels already in commission. In more specific terms, the United States government wanted to establish a ratio of 5-5-3 in capital ships among the three principal naval powers, the United States, Britain, and Japan. Although the British Admiralty strenuously opposed the moratorium, due to the damaging effects it would have on the Royal Navy's modernization programmes, Lloyd George recognized that the proposal would relieve Britain of the strain and embarrassment of competing in a naval race that it could not possibly hope to win. A naval race with the United States would further weaken Britain's economy, already facing a severe postwar recession and governmental efforts to reduce not only the National Debt, vastly inflated by the war, but public spending as well. Therefore, London made it clear that it was prepared to accept the idea of naval parity.⁹⁴

⁹³ Allen, 733-735; Dimbleby and Reynolds, 79; Nicholas, 78-79; Temperley, 116.

⁹⁴ Dimbleby and Reynolds, 79-80; B.J.C. McKercher, The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924-1929: Attitudes and Diplomacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4-5; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 21; Temperley, 116-117.

The conference resulted in a number of agreements, including the Four-Power Treaty, the Nine-Power Treaty,⁹⁵ and the Five-Power Treaty, as well as a number of smaller agreements. The more important of the agreements was the Five-Power Naval Treaty, signed on 6 February 1922. It provided that the major naval powers of the world would retain capital ships in the approximate ratio of 5-5-3-1.7-1.7, which gave Britain and the United States ships of around 500,000 tons, Japan ships of around 300,000 tons, and France and Italy ships of around 175,000 tons each. The powers also agreed to halt the construction of capital ships for ten years and limit the construction of new strategic bases. Therefore, in place of a harmful armaments race, Britain achieved a relatively amicable settlement with the United States. The British accepted American equality in capital ships, while the United States secured recognition from Britain of its claim to equality at sea.⁹⁶

The Washington agreements applied only to capital ships, but not to cruisers or submarines. In a fundamental way, this reflected the very different strategic requirements each country demanded. Britain, with longer imperial lines of communication to defend, needed far more numerous, smaller, faster, and lightly armed vessels. The United States Navy, operating from home waters, needed fewer numbers of ships, but far heavier armor. These fundamental differences led to the calling of another naval conference at Geneva in 1927. The breakdown of this conference, however, led to a renewal of acrimony in the late twenties, which grew to nearly crisis proportions in 1928-1929.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ The Four-Power Treaty, signed on 13 December 1921, terminated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. By its terms, the United States, Britain, Japan, and France all agreed to maintain the status quo in the Pacific, by respecting the Pacific holdings of the other countries signing the agreement, not seeking further territorial expansion, and promising mutual consultation with each other in the event of a dispute over territorial possessions. The Nine Power Treaty of 1922, signed on 6 February 1922, which also included Italy, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, and China, essentially constituted a multilateral endorsement of the Open Door for China, pledging respect for China's administrative and territorial integrity, and abstention from the seeking or granting of special rights or privileges at each other's expense. Both the United States and Britain put pressure on Japan to give up its 1919 claims from China. While Britain surrendered the lease of its naval bases at Weihaiwei, Japan gave up Kiaochow. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 80; Moser, 26; Nicholas, 79; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 21-22; Temperley, 117.

⁹⁶ Allen, 741-744; McKercher, 55; Moser, 26; Nicholas, 79-80; Orde, 76-77; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 22. The agreements, however, imposed certain strategic disabilities; namely, the treaties were, if Japan ever chose to flout them, virtually unenforceable. Nicholas, 80.

⁹⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 81; Nicholas, 80; Orde, 81; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 22.

The conference was initiated by the American president, Calvin Coolidge, who was under political pressure to bring both armaments and defense budgets under control.⁹⁸ It was doomed from the beginning, however, breaking down over the fundamental differences regarding cruiser strength. In specific terms, American naval planners sought to extend the Washington ratios, of 5-5-3-1.7-1.7, to all classes of ships, including capital ships, so the United States could build about 30 large cruisers, able to cruise at long range and with sufficiently heavy armament in the event it might have to confront Japanese warships. The United States Navy maintained that since sea power consisted of warships, plus merchant ships, plus bases -- and since Britain was predominant in the second and third elements -- every limitation of warships weakened American sea power in relation to Britain: "With each further limitation of armament, this relative weakening will increase until, should all combatant ships by [sic] abolished, Great Britain, by reason of overwhelming superiority in merchant marine and bases, would completely dominate the seas." The British were far more concerned about the protection of their global commerce, and therefore claimed the right to maintain 70 cruisers, most of them smaller vessels, more suitable for protecting trade routes. They feared that, through such a building program, the US Navy would actually achieve supremacy, not parity, on the high seas.⁹⁹

This fundamental incompatibility of strategic requirements provoked mutual recriminations. Many Americans suspected that the British were trying to perpetuate their superiority over the United States in cruisers, a view driven by a chorus of insulting anti-British and pro-Navy agitation in the American press, even from typically pro-British newspapers such as *The New York Times*. Indeed, its Geneva correspondent, Wythe Williams, later recalled that his editor reminded him that he was reporting a disarmament conference, not a battlefield. Lord Bridgeman, head of the British delegation, complained

⁹⁸ Because a limitation of land armaments was of no practical importance to the United States, and because the Washington treaties did not include cruisers, destroyers, or submarines, Coolidge issued an invitation to the world's major sea powers, to attend a new naval conference, to be held at Geneva. Coolidge's intention was that the Geneva Naval Conference would be held as an extension of a League of Nations Preparatory Commission, with American participation, which was also preparing for a disarmament conference. Allen, 745; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 81; McKercher, 55-56, 59-61; Orde, 81.

⁹⁹ Allen, 745-746; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 103-104; McKercher, 56-58, 69-76; Moser, 53; Nicholas, 80; Orde, 82-83; Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 22.

in a letter to the King that it was “evident that no agreement which did not humiliate the British Empire was likely to find acceptance” on the American side.¹⁰⁰

In the meantime, anti-American sentiment within the cabinet further precluded any compromise. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin cancelled plans for an official visit to the United States.¹⁰¹ Winston Churchill, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had campaigned strongly against the Admiralty’s building programmes on the grounds that they conflicted with his aim of reducing taxation, nevertheless was appalled by the prospect of bowing to American pressure. In July 1927, he told his cabinet colleagues that “no doubt it is quite right in the interests of peace to go on talking about war with the United States being ‘unthinkable.’” But, he warned, “everyone knows that this is not true”:

However foolish and disastrous such a war would be . . . we do not wish to put ourselves in the power of the United States. We cannot tell what they might do if at some future date they were in a position to give us orders about our policy, say, in India, or Egypt, or Canada, or on any other great matter behind which their electioneering forces were marshalled. Moreover, tonnage parity means that Britain can be starved into obedience to any American decree. I would neither trust America to command, nor England to submit. . . . All the concessions that we made at the Washington Conference in giving up the Naval supremacy we had so long enjoyed, in parting with our faithful Japanese ally, and subsequently in paying these enormous sums, have only resulted in new assertions and demands on their part.¹⁰²

Churchill concluded that British concessions simply provoked more American demands. Consequently, amid mutual suspicions and accusations, the Geneva Conference broke up in August 1927. There was great resentment in Britain. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, wrote bitterly to Balfour:

Time after time we have been told that, if we made this concession, or that concession, we should secure good will in America. We gave up the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. We agreed to pay our debts and we have again and again made concessions on this ground. I have never seen any permanent results follow from a policy of concession. I believe we are less popular and more abused in America than ever before, because they believe we are weak.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Allen 746-748; McKercher, 85-86; Moser, 54; Nicholas, 80; Orde, 82; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 22; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 58-59.

¹⁰¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 81.

¹⁰² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 78-79; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 104-105; Orde, 82-83.

¹⁰³ Charmley, 6; Orde, 83.

There was much condescension on the American side as well. For example, Frank Simonds, the Anglophobic foreign editor of the *American Review of Reviews*, pointed out that, to the British, the American demand for naval equality struck at the very root of British insecurity:

If we have the ships to “wage neutrality” . . . then Britain is relatively helpless in the face of a Continental opponent with a large land force . . . On the day on which we actually attain real equality on the blue water, we and not the British will be in a position to determine the course of any new world conflict. Our fleet will not be used against the British, but the fact of our fleet in being will utterly transform the whole character of British action.¹⁰⁴

In response to the breakdown of the Geneva conference, the House of Representatives, in March 1928, passed the “Cruiser Bill,” which authorized the construction of 15 heavy cruisers and one aircraft carrier. Although the Senate opted to delay action on the bill until after the 1928 national elections, the debate was acrimonious.¹⁰⁵

More important, American suspicions of Britain exploded in the summer of 1928 as a result of the “Anglo-French compromise.” During the breakdown of discussions in Geneva, Britain turned to France, the principal land power in Europe, for a bilateral arms control agreement that could ultimately be enlarged to include the United States and any other interested powers. In the summer of 1928, they reached a compromise, by which Britain would support France’s position on land armaments, leaving the French free to build up their army in Europe, while the French would support the British in their dispute over cruisers with the United States, leaving the British free to construct the number of small cruisers they wanted. It gave the impression, however, that the United States would be limited in its construction of cruisers, while Britain would be free to build whatever it wanted, behind America’s back.¹⁰⁶

American comment on the Anglo-French compromise was uniformly hostile. American newspapers condemned the agreement, not only among those that were traditionally anti-British, such as

¹⁰⁴ McKercher, 86-87; Orde, 85.

¹⁰⁵ Moser 55-56.

¹⁰⁶ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 81-82; McKercher, 140-149; Moser, 56-57; Orde, 86; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 58.

William Randolph Hearst's *New York American* and the *Chicago Tribune*, but also among those that were traditionally pro-British and pro-Democrat, such as the *New York World*, edited by Walter Lippmann. The most serious effect, however, of the Anglo-French compromise was that President Coolidge, denouncing Britain as the chief obstacle to arms control, threw his support behind the "Cruiser Bill," which had been stalled in the Senate. Public outrage over British diplomacy swept aside nearly all opposition. As a result, the bill passed in the Senate with overwhelming support, 68 to 12.¹⁰⁷ Coolidge also ordered Secretary of State Frank Kellogg to cancel a scheduled visit to London on his return home from Paris, where he had just signed the Pact of Paris. Instead, Kellogg was to visit Dublin -- a calculated insult to the British Tories, many of whom were still smarting over Irish independence.¹⁰⁸

There was much criticism of the Anglo-French compromise within Britain as well. In the *Observer*, James L. Garvin criticized the "dull and obstinate mishandling of American psychology" and said that Britain had forfeited American confidence and respect. The *Spectator* denounced the government for its "abominable mismanagement" and for "providing one of the most perfect examples we can remember of how to defeat your own purpose." Lloyd George, now leader of the Liberal Party, introduced a motion in the House of Commons declaring that the Anglo-French compromise "endangers the prospect of peace in Europe and good relations with the United States."¹⁰⁹

From late 1928 to early 1929, the tensions stemming from the Anglo-French compromise grew so serious that many on both sides of the Atlantic feared the outbreak of an Anglo-American war, a prospect earlier dismissed as absolutely "unthinkable." In Britain, a Foreign Office official, Robert L. Craigie, maintained that there now appeared to be a danger of "drifting towards a situation of real gravity":

Except as a figure of speech, war is *not* unthinkable between the two countries. On the contrary, there are present all the factors which in the past have made for wars between States.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ McKercher, 151, 153-156; Moser, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 82; Moser, 57-58; Orde, 86.

¹⁰⁹ McKercher, 158-169; Orde, 87-88.

¹¹⁰ Orde, 88.

In the United States, the press suggested that war was possible. For example, the *New York World* asserted that war was, indeed, “thinkable,” while the *Washington News* wrote that “the specter of war hovers black and ugly in the background” of Anglo-American relations. In the meantime, the War Plans Division of the Navy Department, in its annual “Estimate of the Situation” for 1928, recommended the “development and refinement” of Plans Red and Red-Orange, which envisioned a war against either Britain alone or against a revived Anglo-Japanese alliance. Supporters of increased naval construction recalled how during the last war Britain had claimed the right of search and seizure of neutral vessels on the high seas. The British had been able to get away with this outrage, they argued, because the United States Navy had been too small to prevent it.¹¹¹ President Coolidge, in an Armistice Day speech, offended many in Britain, not simply by contrasting American idealism with European militarism, but far more outrageously, by claiming that the war had cost the United States more than any other belligerent.¹¹²

Some observers doubted that the crisis was serious enough to lead to war. For example, Churchill maintained that all that was necessary was “to sit quite quiet, to be independent and cool and polite . . . and the present ill-temper will gradually subside.” Leo Amery, the Colonial Secretary, agreed, pointing out that the Empire was four times as large as the United States and had greater resources.” In the United States, it was clear that the vast majority of Americans were opposed to a war against Britain. At the very moment the Cruiser Bill was being debated, the Senate also took up the Kellogg-Briand Pact for ratification, a bill that had overwhelming support among the American people; polls showed that some 95 percent supported its ratification. American businessmen opposed war because they believed that foreign markets and raw materials would eventually come under American control without armed conflict. Furthermore, even within the United States Navy and among its “Big Navy” advocates in Congress, many saw Japan, not Britain, as the principal enemy.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Moser, 58-59.

¹¹² Orde, 89.

¹¹³ Moser, 60-62; Orde, 88.

The continued haggling about the size and number of cruisers revealed a larger, more fundamental problem. Britain remained adamant that in any future war, it must be able to command the seas and blockade its enemies. At the same time, the United States insisted on its right as a potential neutral to unimpeded trade. This was the old issue of the “freedom of the seas” that had embittered relations in 1914-1918. What gave the issue a new twist, the Foreign Office believed, was the growth of the American navy, now approaching equality with Britain’s. In the future, the United States Navy might well be able to force the British to accept the freedom of the seas. While the Foreign Office believed that Britain must back down from its opposition to American demands for freedom of the seas, the Admiralty and the cabinet refused to shift their position. They saw the right to blockade as a vital national interest and were prepared to call America’s bluff, convinced that it would not retaliate. There was a growing feeling that, since 1919, Britain had appeased the United States too often for too little in return. Sir Maurice Hankey complained in 1928:

We played up to America over the Covenant of the League, abandonment of the Japanese Alliance, Washington treaties, debt settlement, Irish settlement . . . always making concessions and always being told that the next step would change their attitude. Yet they are, as the result, more overbearing and suspicious against us than anyone else.¹¹⁴

Toward the end of 1928, therefore, as a result of these continuing suspicions, observers on both sides of the Atlantic sought to lower the temperature.¹¹⁵ The most significant step toward easing Anglo-American tensions was a change of government in both countries. In March 1929, Herbert Hoover was sworn in as president, while Ramsay MacDonald became prime minister after elections in June. Unlike their predecessors, Coolidge and Baldwin, the new leaders took a keen, assertive interest in foreign

¹¹⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 82.

¹¹⁵ In the United States, Walter Lippmann suggested that when Congress passed the new American cruiser bill, as it did in February 1929, the two states should accept the situation as one of effective parity. Lippmann thus agreed with Philip Kerr, later Lord Lothian, an influential liberal imperialist and Atlanticist, that parity was a political idea and meant different things to the two countries. For Britain, Kerr wrote, parity meant “equal navies under conditions which would make it possible for Great Britain to protect its own trade and prevent America or anyone else from breaking through the vital communications of the British Commonwealth”; to the United States, however, parity meant “equal navies subject to its being able to protect its trade in every ocean in the world from British interference.” He wrote that the two meanings were, of course, incompatible, but that the new American cruiser programme offered some hope of an agreement that the ratios thus established should be maintained. Orde, 90-91.

affairs. In particular, they believed that disarmament was far too important to be left to the admirals.¹¹⁶ Hoover, while no admirer of Britain's class-based social structure or of the Empire, trusted the British and regarded them as friends.¹¹⁷ The British welcomed his election and were further encouraged when, in a conversation with Ambassador Esme Howard, Hoover spoke urgently of the need to improve relations. He appointed financier Charles Dawes, a man of well-known pro-British sympathies, as the new American ambassador to London, and immediately called for a new naval disarmament conference.¹¹⁸

MacDonald himself paid a very successful visit to the United States in October 1929, the first time that a British prime minister had visited the United States while in office. Highlights of the trip included a ticker tape parade through New York City, MacDonald's moving address to the US Senate, and several days of informal talks with Hoover, which culminated with a joint declaration of faith in the Kellogg Pact and affirmed that war was no longer possible between their two countries. Perhaps just as important, the visit also helped to improve Britain's image in the United States, for MacDonald did not fit the American stereotype of a British leader. He was not an aristocratic product of Eton and Oxbridge, but rather a Scot, a committed socialist, and an outspoken opponent of the war, and he made clear his sincere desire to end the arms race.¹¹⁹

The practical result of MacDonald's visit was the decision to convene another naval conference, to be held in January 1930 in London, once again among the world's three leading naval powers. In talks with the American ambassador earlier that summer, MacDonald indicated that he accepted naval parity and agreed to reduce the number of British cruisers to a figure well below that London claimed at Geneva two years earlier.¹²⁰ Unlike the previous conference, the governments prepared with far more care. In

¹¹⁶ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 82-83; Nicholas, 80-81; Watt, Succeeding John Bull, 60-61.

¹¹⁷ Hoover had long been well-disposed toward the British. His tough stand on the rubber issue was a reflection of his disdain for governmental involvement in the "bickerings . . . of the market." More important, it was also a political tactic, intended at the time to dispel rumors that he was excessively pro-British. Moser, 46.

¹¹⁸ McKercher, 193-194; Moser, 68.

¹¹⁹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 83; Moser, 70-71.

¹²⁰ Moser, 70.

particular, they managed to keep the naval establishments of both countries at arm's length, making it easier for the civilian delegates to reach some type of accord. Therefore, they agreed to extend the 1922 Washington ratio of 5-5-3 for capital ships to cruisers as well. The agreement was flexible enough to allow the United States to build more heavy cruisers, and Britain to build more smaller cruisers. Although Hoover forced the United States Navy to reduce the total number of cruisers it wanted, the British made the biggest concession. Under pressure from MacDonald, the Admiralty accepted a ceiling of 50 cruisers instead of the 70 it had demanded in 1927. The Labour government thus averted an Anglo-American arms race, but only by making concessions to the United States that were deplored by many Tories. The US Navy was still smaller than the Royal Navy, but the British now acknowledged America's right, in theory at least, to a navy as large as their own.¹²¹

In the broader view of Anglo-American relations, this London Conference not only resolved the cruiser issue once and for all, it also represented the end of the Anglo-American naval rivalry.¹²² The new American Secretary of State, Henry Stimson, wrote on 23 February 1930 that the treaty had "clearly accomplished one of our chief purposes, that of healing the serious friction which had arisen between America and Britain over cruisers."¹²³ Yet, it became clear to a growing number of observers that the power relations between the United States and Britain had shifted a bit further in favor of the former.¹²⁴

In spite of this significant transformation in the Anglo-American naval rivalry, relations between Britain and the United States did not radically improve as a whole. Many factors, after all, contributed to the resolution of the naval rivalry. While the leadership of Hoover and MacDonald, who were both

¹²¹ Allen, 749-750; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 83; Moser, 71-72; Nicholas, 80-81; Orde, 96-97; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 22, 24.

¹²² Orde, 97.

¹²³ Moser, 72.

¹²⁴ Orde, 97-98. A growing number of observers began to argue that wealth, power, and leadership were in the process of being transferred from Britain to the United States. Walter Layton of *The Economist* saw the "position of arbiter" in the European balance of power passing to the United States, and Britain coming to perform "in the old game on the old chessboard no longer as a queen, but as a pawn." Orde, 89. Walter Lippmann wrote the year before that "All that statesmen can do is to take measures which will render peaceable Great Britain's descent from supremacy to parity, and America's ascent to an equal share in world affairs." Orde, 90.

passionately committed to arms limitation, was certainly vital,¹²⁵ the real key was the state of the world economy. Within a few weeks of MacDonald's visit to the United States, the American stock market crash precipitated a general financial crisis in which policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic sought to reduce government expenditures on armaments. As the Great Depression covered the globe, however, international cooperation began to collapse and new sources of rivalry and tension appeared.¹²⁶

The Great Depression

Throughout the 1920s, ongoing economic tensions, whether over war debts, reparations, or protectionism tended to aggravate political pinpricks and annoyances. In a similar way, the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression helped to undermine the political healing and good will of the late 1920s, which had been set into motion by the rapprochement between MacDonald and Hoover and by the resolution of the naval rivalry. The intensity of the Depression in the United States had inescapable consequences for the economies of not only Britain but of all Europe because of the dominance of the American economy. By the early 1930s, the United States produced almost half of the world's manufactured products. Therefore, it remained the world's largest exporter, and, second to Britain, the largest importer as well. At the same time, New York City had become the center of capital and finance, the position previously occupied by London. The United States had become the world's principal source of new investment, lending \$6.4 billion abroad between 1924 and 1929. Nearly half of American new investment was in Europe, particularly in Germany, where it helped to pay for reparations and stimulate the Weimar economy, at least until the onset of the Depression.¹²⁷

With the spread of the Depression, however, Americans grew unwilling to continue lending the dollars needed for the repayment of war debts, largely in order to meet their own financial obligations at home. As most American investment in Europe had been private capital, not government loans, the Hoover administration could take no action in 1930-1931 to prevent American investors from

¹²⁵ Orde, 97-98.

¹²⁶ Moser, 75; Orde, 98.

¹²⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 88; Temperley, 127.

withdrawing funds from Europe. Most threatening and most troublesome was a strengthening of American protectionism. In 1930, with the passage of the Hawley-Smoot Act, American tariff rates on imports rose to new heights, shutting out foreign goods and raw materials from the American market, thereby intensifying the worldwide depression, and making it even more difficult, if not impossible, for Allied debtors to repay their obligations.¹²⁸

The Depression certainly exposed the absurdity of the continuing American refusal to acknowledge the connection between reparations and international debts. Over the course of the 1920s, Britain, France, Italy, and other former Allies struggled to keep up their payments, although Britain had been remarkably conscientious, paying the United States close to half of what it owed. With American markets effectively closed to the British because of American protectionism, they relied principally on tourism and the reparations paid to them by Germany, while Germany, in turn, obtained the currency it needed by borrowing dollars from the United States. Between 1924 and 1929, Germany borrowed considerably more from Britain and the United States than it had paid them in the form of reparations. So long as this cycle continued, payments could be made; if it stopped, so would the payments.¹²⁹ By June 1931, the Depression made further payments impossible. In order to revive the world economy and to sustain free-market policies, President Hoover called for a one-year moratorium on debt and reparation payments. He made it clear, however, that this was only a temporary measure and that he expected payments to be resumed as soon as the crisis abated.¹³⁰

Hoover's action, unfortunately, failed to stabilize the situation. In Britain, MacDonald's Labour cabinet tried to counter the effects of the Depression primarily by keeping interest rates low and welfare payments high. Nevertheless, these policies contributed to the massive budget deficit of over £100 million. As a result, an official committee, headed by Sir George May, recommended that the

¹²⁸ Dimbleby and Reynolds, 90-91; Temperley, 128-129.

¹²⁹ Nicholas, 83; Orde, 78; Temperley, 127-128.

¹³⁰ Moser, 78-79; Nicholas, 84; Owendale, Anglo-American Relations, 24-25; Temperley, 130.

government balance the budget mainly by imposing a 20 percent cut in unemployment insurance. Montagu Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England, and the City agreed, arguing that only such action would revive foreign confidence; specifically, the only way Britain could continue to borrow from the United States was to show some specific plan to restore financial stability.¹³¹

In late August 1931, although he was opposed by the majority of his cabinet, MacDonald reluctantly conceded that Britain's position as a financial power was more important than the well-being of its citizens. Nearly half of the cabinet disagreed and resigned on 24 August 1931. The King persuaded MacDonald to form a National Government, including both Tories and Liberals, which adopted the cuts, and as a result, were able to raise loans in France and the United States. These loans, however, failed to check the outflow of sterling. London made further requests to New York City, but at a time when the United States was sliding into depression, further financial assistance, from either private lenders such as J.P. Morgan or the United States government, was out of the question.¹³²

It was easy to blame the United States for what had happened and many in the Labour movement did so. The day after the Labour cabinet resigned, the *Daily Herald* denounced "the virtual ultimatum from New York bankers" and claimed that they had been allowed to "dictate, as the condition for a further credit to the Bank of England, the policy to be pursued in relation to unemployment benefit."¹³³

Faced with the sterling crisis and tighter protectionism in the United States, Britain decided to follow the American example, thereby embarking upon a revolutionary shift away from its own hallowed tradition, maintained since the middle of the nineteenth century, of relying upon free trade. The new National Government, although led by Ramsay MacDonald, was dominated by Conservatives, such as Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary John Simon, who began to

¹³¹ In July 1931, the German government imposed exchange controls, which shifted the crisis to Britain, since its foreign lending was three or four times the size of its gold reserves. Investors, in huge numbers, sold sterling and the Bank of England was forced to spend large sums to support the \$4.86 exchange rate for the pound. The result was a mounting deficit of over £100 million. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 88-89.

¹³² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 88-89.

¹³³ Ibid, 90.

advocate tariff protection. Therefore, at the 1932 Commonwealth Conference in Ottawa, it was agreed to establish a system of Imperial Preference; members would levy higher tariffs on goods imported from outside the Empire, and lower tariffs from each other.

This new policy deeply offended Americans, particularly Cordell Hull, the new Secretary of State, who denounced British policy, ironically, as protectionist. Having always argued for the open door, except with respect to its own domestic market, Americans were furious at finding the tables turned.¹³⁴ In large part, after all, London conceived Imperial Preference in part as a way of fighting off the challenge from the United States, by providing a secure base from which Britain could compete.¹³⁵ In spite of repeated American protests, London refused to give way unless the United States changed its own tariff policy, which it adamantly refused to do; so far as Congress was concerned, opening American markets to foreign competition in the depth of the Depression was unthinkable, not just economically, but politically as well. That did not, however, stop the United States from expressing deep resentment and indignation over Britain's refusal to admit American exports or to allow American manufacturers easy access to the Empire's resources of rubber, zinc, and other essential raw materials.¹³⁶

Americans may have been justified in their complaints. After all, Britain fared less poorly during the Depression than did the United States. Banks did not collapse as in the United States and very few wealthy families found themselves suddenly broke. Although wage earners in traditional industries like coal mining, textiles, and shipbuilding clearly suffered, salaried workers and the middle classes fared relatively well. Over the decade as a whole, average real income per capita rose by 17.7 percent and labor productivity improved. Many areas, most notably the midlands and the southeast, recovered quickly and experienced the demand for houses, automobiles, and consumer goods that had fuelled the American economy in the twenties. Although the proportion of the unemployed never fell below ten percent, the

¹³⁴ Nicholas, 84; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 25; Temperley, 130-131.

¹³⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 92.

¹³⁶ Temperley, 131.

workforce itself expanded as more people entered the labor market, including a large number of women, although at significantly lower rates of pay. By the end of the decade, therefore, more people were at work than ever before.¹³⁷

In an effort to deal with the seemingly endless economic crisis, Hoover and MacDonald planned the World Economic Conference, to meet in London in 1933, with the intention of stabilizing international currencies. The prospects of success, however, were never very strong, as each country put its short-term national interest first and adopted stringent protectionist policies. The Conference failed to reach any agreement, principally due to the refusal of the newly-elected American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, to make any commitments that might limit future policy options. Specifically, he announced that the United States would not support any permanent stabilization of world currencies until the American economy was back on its feet. Roosevelt's intransigence strengthened British frustrations about the United States. Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, grumbled, "I should think there has never been a case of a conference so completely smashed by one of the participants."¹³⁸

In June 1933, in the wake of the failed World Economic Conference, the British announced that they would make a "token payment" of ten million dollars, pending a final settlement.¹³⁹ In response, US Senator Hiram Johnson revived a piece of legislation that he had sponsored back in February 1932, which proposed to ban all loans to countries that had defaulted on previous debts. The Johnson Act, as it came to be called, made no distinction between those who were in complete default, such as France, and those who, like Britain, were making token payments on the debt. Although the bill immediately triggered opposition in the Departments of State and Treasury, both of which hoped to use debt remission as a lever to win a more favorable trade agreement from London, there was strong support in Congress and the bill

¹³⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 111; Temperley, 129-130.

¹³⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 92; Moser, 86; Nicholas, 84; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 25.

¹³⁹ Moser, 86-88. At the Lausanne Conference the previous year, in June 1932, the European powers agreed to write off 90 percent of Germany's debt on condition that their own creditors, namely the United States, agreed to a satisfactory settlement. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 90-91; Temperley, 130.

passed easily by a voice vote. In spite of warnings by the British ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay of “repercussions,” Roosevelt signed the bill on 13 April 1933. In response, the British, who viewed the legislation as a decidedly unfriendly gesture, made a few more token payments and finally defaulted in 1933. London argued that the United States had made repayment virtually impossible, by accumulating much of the world’s gold reserves and imposing ever-higher tariffs against British goods.¹⁴⁰

In the end, Britain had paid \$2.2 billion out of an original debt totaling \$4.3 billion, a far higher proportion than was paid by France, Belgium, or any of America’s other major debtors. Moreover, Britain’s payments mostly came primarily from German reparations, thus substantiating the connection the United States would not recognize.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Britain’s default would long be resented in the United States. While many Americans attributed the Depression to Britain’s failure to manage to global economy effectively, most blamed the refusal of Europeans to pay their debts. Once again, it seemed, Perfidious Albion was up to old tricks.¹⁴²

The Growing Question of Security

The suspicions and bitterness stirred up by the Depression likewise precluded cooperation between London and Washington as the international situation became increasingly dangerous in the early and middle 1930s. In response to the first significant international crisis of the early 1930s, in spite of the political good will generated by the London Naval Treaty of 1930, Britain and the United States acted independently and ineffectually.

In the winter of 1931-1932, Japan, the third member of the naval triumvirate, and anxious to become a great power in its own right, invaded and overran the Chinese province of Manchuria and set up a puppet state. Under a treaty signed in 1922, the United States and Britain were the guarantors of China’s integrity. In spite of that treaty, however, neither took any substantive action to punish Japan,

¹⁴⁰ Dimbleby and Reynolds, 90-92; Moser, 87-88; Temperley, 130.

¹⁴¹ Dimbleby and Reynolds, 87; Nicholas, 82-83; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 20.

¹⁴² Moser, 76; Temperley, 130.

either individually or collectively. Both Britain and the United States, although they possessed substantial foreign investments in China, maintained equally close commercial connections with Japan. Therefore, at a time of anxiety over the balance of payments, both Hoover and MacDonald refused to countenance sanctions against the Japanese.

The American Secretary of State, however, Henry L. Stimson, wanted to put forward a moral protest. On 7 January 1932, he proclaimed the “Stimson Doctrine,” which warned that the United States would not recognize territorial changes brought about by force. He called upon Japan to remove its troops, invoking the Open Door agreement and the Kellogg-Briand Pact.¹⁴³ The fact that the United States had taken any initiative at all was new and aroused expectations in Britain that Stimson’s declaration about non-recognition might be a prelude to firmer action.¹⁴⁴

In February 1932, as the Japanese remained unmoved, Stimson called upon the British Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon to join him in a condemnation of Japan under the 1922 treaty. At that particular moment, however, the British were already engaged in efforts, through the League of Nations, to negotiate Japan’s peaceful withdrawal from Shanghai. Simon, who saw little point in provoking Tokyo gratuitously, was therefore evasive; indeed, it would likely be quite difficult to combine cooperation with Washington and action within the League of Nations. Besides, Simon believed that the United States was not prepared to do anything more than upbraid Japan and leave Britain to bear the brunt of any repercussions. Recalling Wilson’s 1915 speech, Simon uttered, “I am afraid America is ‘too proud to’ do anything.”¹⁴⁵ For Britain to fight Japan on its own, over events in far away Manchuria was plainly out of the question. Stimson, however, interpreted Britain’s response as pusillanimity, convinced that he had been betrayed by what he called the “soft and pudgy” members of the British cabinet.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 83-84; Nicholas, 84-85; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 23; Temperley, 132.

¹⁴⁴ Orde, 104.

¹⁴⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 84; Nicholas, 85; Orde, 104; Temperley, 132.

¹⁴⁶ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 84; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 23; Temperley, 133.

Simon ultimately pushed the non-recognition doctrine through the League of Nations, which eventually agreed to condemn Japan's actions. He also developed his own account of the Manchurian crisis, which, in spite of British protests, somehow became the orthodox version -- that Britain failed to follow the American lead and refused an offer of cooperation. The implication was that Stimson was actually prepared to do something concrete. In fact, the only action he contemplated was a joint representation to Japan.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the episode became so overblown that it gradually spun its own mythology throughout the decade. As a result, in 1939, the eminent American newspaperman, William Allen White went so far as to claim that "Munich became inevitable when England refused to join Stimson in the protest against the Japanese invasion of continental Asia."¹⁴⁸ In 1940, Lord Lothian would complain of "the universal conviction in America that Manchuria would have been saved if it had not been for Simon's opposition."¹⁴⁹ Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Undersecretary for State in the Foreign Office and himself married to an American, later wrote that Stimson accused Simon of "blocking a proposal never made":

The Japanese, not Stimson, proposed a conference to legalize their gains at Shanghai, and we in close contact with the Americans evaded the trap. Stimson later imagined that he had in mind an embargo on Japanese goods, but that was another of his delusions. To my knowledge he harped only on moral force, and harps are the instruments for those who rely on it. . . . He let the public believe that he had asked us to join in a firm stand, and that we had run out. When non-recognition proved futile Stimson used Simon as a scapegoat.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 84; William Langer and S. Everett Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 1937-1940 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 746-748; Owendale, Anglo-American Relations, 23; Temperley, 133.

¹⁴⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 84; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 15. Langer and Gleason maintained that Stimson "made a valiant effort to establish joint action between Britain and the United States to check Japanese aggression in Manchuria." They also made the incredible assertion that it was "altogether probable that positive action at that time would have been approved by the American public and that thereby the system of collective security might have been saved. The British Government, unfortunately, failed to make the most of the opportunity and thereby assumed the chief responsibility for what in retrospect appears as little short of a tragedy." Warren Kimball points out, however, that Langer and Gleason, who had access to documents that remained closed to the general scholar for years, were clearly sympathetic toward the Roosevelt administration, although they "strove valiantly to achieve objectivity." Warren F. Kimball, The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 264.

¹⁴⁹ Moser, 78.

¹⁵⁰ Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession: The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart (London: Hutchinson of London, 1958), 437.

Following this Anglo-American failure to respond to Japanese aggression, relations between Britain and the United States grew even more bitter and more distrustful. While American opinion about Britain remained condescending, British opinion grew more cynical. Since 1919, through economic and naval rivalries, and following one disappointment after another, from the American rejection of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919-1920, to the Geneva Naval Conference in 1927, and to the London Economic Conference in 1933, London increasingly asserted that no faith could be placed in the United States, particularly when its presidents exercised so little control over Congress.¹⁵¹ For example, during the Japanese crisis, Neville Chamberlain noted:

We ought to know by now that the USA will give us no undertaking to resist by force any action by Japan short of an attack on Hawaii or Honolulu. She will give us plenty of assurances of goodwill especially if we promise to do all the fighting, but the moment she is asked to contribute something she invariably takes refuge behind Congress.¹⁵²

The British ambassador in Washington, Sir Ronald Lindsay, admitted:

I know the Americans are dreadful people to deal with -- they cannot make firm promises, but they jolly you along with fair prospects and when you are committed they let you down. Taking a short view it is hard to remember a bargain with them that has been really satisfactory to us in itself.¹⁵³

Sir Robert Vansittart, who had called for accommodation of the United States during the naval crisis of 1927, had come to believe by 1934 that:

we have been too tender, not to say subservient, with the U.S. for a long time past. It is we who have made all the advances, and received nothing in return. It is still necessary, and I desire as much as ever, that we should get on well with this untrustworthy race. But we shall never get very far; they will always let us down.¹⁵⁴

In 1932, Stanley Baldwin summed up conventional British wisdom: “You will get nothing from Americans but words, big words, but only words.” He later confessed that he came to “loathe the

¹⁵¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 93.

¹⁵² Temperley, 132-133.

¹⁵³ C.A. MacDonald, The United States, Britain and Appeasement, 1936-1939 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 20; Orde, 104.

¹⁵⁴ Norman Rose, Vansittart: Study of a Diplomat (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978), 126-127.

Americans so much,” he hated even meeting with them. The Foreign Secretary John Simon noted that although “America expresses great surprise if we do not act with them . . . if we do they will leave us with the brunt of work and the blame.”¹⁵⁵

The feelings were mutual on the other side of the Atlantic. There occurred a powerful resurgence of anti-British opinion within the United States, among more or less traditional quarters: Irish-Americans, German-Americans, American liberals, who remained hostile to the British Empire, and Italian-Americans, many of whom were sympathetic to the regime of Benito Mussolini and therefore outraged by British opposition to Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia.¹⁵⁶ More significantly, however, Americans were alienated not merely from Britain but from Europe as a whole. While it remained customary to blame the Depression on the failure of Britain and others to repay war debts, there emerged a growing conviction in the early 1930s that American involvement in the Great War had been a mistake. Many argued, for example, that the United States had been dragged into war in 1917 by the so-called “merchants of death” -- armaments manufacturers, bankers, and financiers such as J. P. Morgan.¹⁵⁷ In 1934, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and immediate best seller, *Merchants of Death*, by H. C. Engelbrecht and F. C. Hanighen, described the role of munitions makers and arms dealers in promoting a militarist foreign policy in general, and the chain of events leading to the First World War in particular.¹⁵⁸

The emotions aroused by *Merchants of Death* led to the formation of a Senate investigation, headed by Senator Gerald P. Nye, which sat between September 1934 and February 1936. The committee interrogated Morgan and his partners at length amidst intense publicity about their wartime activities as Britain’s chief bankers and arms buyers. In addition, the committee subpoenaed the files of the Guaranty Trust Company, taking particular interest in its loans made to Britain. The Foreign Office

¹⁵⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 93; MacDonald, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Moser, 93-95.

¹⁵⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 94; Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 26; Temperley, 111.

¹⁵⁸ Moser, 89-90.

protested loudly, and the British ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay complained that the committee was treating his government “as a circus animal which would be made to perform tricks for the spectators.”¹⁵⁹

Although Nye’s committee produced very little hard evidence to justify the popular claims that Wall Street and the munitions manufacturers had dragged the United States into the war, the highly publicized hearings sensationalized findings about the lobbying activities and profits of the munitions industry, as well as international bankers and financiers. The conclusion was indeed that the United States had been drawn into the war by financial interests.¹⁶⁰

In spite of such suspicions and distrust, however, the intensification of international developments over the course of the 1930s forced Britain and the United States to begin seriously considering the possibility of future war and to confront the question of rearmament -- and to move closer together, however grudgingly. In 1933, two years after Japan invaded Manchuria, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Before the end of the year, Hitler pulled Germany out of the League of Nations and the League’s disarmament conference, and embarked upon a programme of rearmament in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, emboldened by Hitler’s defiance of the League of Nations, invaded Ethiopia virtually unchallenged in October 1935, in defiance of the League of Nations. In one respect, the Italian action threatened the Suez Canal and the British position in the Middle East. More important, however, it weakened Britain’s diplomatic position with respect to Nazi Germany. It was clear to many that in order to confront Hitler, Britain needed a strong, united League of Nations. Consequently, although Ethiopia was deemed not worth the trouble, and although London had hoped to conclude an alliance with Mussolini, Britain chose to rally the League of Nations, which condemned Italy as the aggressor and voted overwhelmingly to impose economic sanctions against Rome. The League vote proved inconsequential, however, as a full-scale seven month war ensued between Italy and Ethiopia, which effectively destroyed the League of Nations as a force for peace once and for all.

¹⁵⁹ Allen, 772; Moser, 90.

¹⁶⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 94; Moser, 90; Owendale, Anglo-American Relations, 26; Temperley, 111.

More important, however, British hopes for an Italian alliance vanished, as Mussolini, enraged by the League vote, turned increasingly to Hitler in the spring of 1936, resulting in the Rome-Berlin Axis by November. During that same year, 1936, Hitler and Mussolini intervened on the side of Francisco Franco and the fascists in the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶¹

Initially, Britain and the United States watched these events from the sidelines. Both were preoccupied with the Depression. Both were inhibited by a popular backlash against the slaughter of the Great War. Both shared a suspicion of the motives of the armaments industry. Therefore, in both states, rearmament was slow, while diplomacy was hesitant and indecisive.¹⁶²

Historians of American diplomacy have long acknowledged that it is almost impossible to penetrate with any degree of certainty the intentions, reasoning, and attitudes of Franklin Roosevelt beyond certain generalities. In the 1930s, it appears certain that Roosevelt hoped to prevent the United States from ever descending into another world war. But it also appears that he hoped, particularly after 1935, to bring American power to bear against the armed aggression that was obviously spreading around the world. The principal question, and therefore the principal source of uncertainty, involved the means to be employed and the possible political risks that might restrain the president. While Roosevelt had at his disposal a broad array of opinions about the proper course of American policy toward Europe in general, or toward Britain in more specific terms,¹⁶³ his most fundamental problem was and would always

¹⁶¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 116; William Manchester, The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill. Vol. 2: Alone, 1932-1940 (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 157-163; Orde, 116.

¹⁶² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 116.

¹⁶³ Secretary of State Cordell Hull saw disarmament, free trade, and peaceful change as the foundation stones of world peace. He thus not only took a dim view of American involvement in European affairs, he was particularly suspicious of Britain's intentions and regarded Imperial Preference as detrimental to a healthy world economy. Others in the State Department, Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, Adolf Berle, and Jay Pierrepont Moffat, shared Hull's view of Britain and doubted its trustworthiness as an ally. Rather, they favored a largely independent policy based upon a limited conception of America's own interests; moreover, they tended to see the United States as a potential neutral arbiter set apart from entanglements in Europe. At the same time, however, several members of the cabinet, notably Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, saw the State Department as unduly cautious. In contrast, they increasingly perceived the emergence of a global struggle between dictatorship and democracy from which the United States could not and should not stand aside. William R. Rock, Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States, 1937-1940 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 16-17, 133-134; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 27-29.

remain practical politics. He felt that he had to be particularly sensitive to political realities, having watched the disintegration of Wilson's policies in the confrontation with Congress in 1919. For Roosevelt, diplomacy had to be tailored carefully to the public mood. Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce sarcastically caricatured his political posture as an index finger wetted and held up in the air.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, given the ongoing economic problems, his priorities were and had to remain domestic. Moreover, the Congress was unshakably isolationist, committed to ensuring that the United States would not be dragged into another war in the same way as it had been in 1917. During the mid-1930s, indeed, a powerful isolationist lobby emerged in the United States, galvanized by the intensity of international events -- most recently, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶⁵

Against this background, Congress, over the next two years, passed a series of Neutrality Acts. The first Neutrality Act in August 1935, passed primarily as a response to the Italian aggression, banned the export of arms to any belligerent country in time of war and permitted American citizens to travel on belligerent passenger vessels only on the condition that they did so at their own risk; this was intended largely to avoid any future *Lusitanias*. It also gave the president power and discretion to define munitions of war and to bring the embargo into effect; but he was not, as Roosevelt had wished, allowed to discriminate between aggressor states and victims.¹⁶⁶

While Americans could remain aloof from international affairs, behind the comfort and protection of two oceans, the British could not afford to take such a detached view of the growing international

¹⁶⁴ James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom, 1940-1945 (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 606; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 116-117.

¹⁶⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 94; Orde, 103, 110; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 26-27; Rock 17-18.

¹⁶⁶ Allen, 772; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 94; Orde, 110; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 26-27. A second Neutrality Act in February 1936 added a mandatory ban on the provision of loans, and a third Neutrality Act in May 1937 included prohibitions against American citizens traveling on belligerent passenger vessels and against American vessels carrying arms to belligerents. It also included the "cash and carry" clause, which meant that any belligerent could purchase war materials in the United States provided that it could pay for them in cash and transport them in their own ships. It was a clause that aided Britain as it had command of the sea and the largest purse. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 122; Orde, 110; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 27; Reynolds, 31-32.

tension. For Britain, its power and wealth depended on the survival of the Empire and the protection of trade routes. The problem, however, was that Britain no longer possessed the means for a firm policy that would deter worldwide aggression. The Royal Navy, the principal military instrument for protecting British trade and the Empire, was no longer adequate for its responsibilities, particularly after the reductions of the 1920s and successive arms control agreements. Britain's own internal domestic realities undermined military preparedness as well. Rearmament was not popular with the British electorate, nor with the Treasury, which feared that it would damage economic recovery.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, British foreign policy in the 1930s concentrated on finding a way, given strained military and financial resources, to achieve two principal objectives: to preserve Britain's position and defend its interests in the Pacific, and to help preserve security in Europe.

For Britain, one of the principal lessons of the Far Eastern crisis was that its Pacific position was weak. Even before the crisis erupted, London was aware that if the fleet had to be sent to the Pacific, there would not be enough ships left in home waters to meet a European emergency; if the Royal Fleet were needed in the Pacific, the Mediterranean Fleet would have to sail for Singapore, at the expense of Britain's position in the Suez Canal and in the Middle East. On 22 February 1931, the Chiefs of Staff reported that their position was "about as bad as it could be . . . the whole of our territory in the Far East, as well as the coastline of India and the Dominions and our vast trade and shipping lies open to attack."¹⁶⁸

Consequently, in late 1933, London concluded that, because, there appeared little it could do to protect its interests in China, Britain should seek an understanding with Japan; not necessarily reviving the former alliance, but restoring terms of cordiality and mutual respect. London realized, however, that any understanding with Japan would have to overcome two substantial obstacles. First, it seemed certain that an Anglo-Japanese understanding would arouse Chinese resentment. Thus, the inevitable damage to British interests in China would likely outweigh the possible benefits from Japanese favor. Second, an

¹⁶⁷ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 117-118; Heyck, 183-184.

¹⁶⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 118; Orde, 105.

Anglo-Japanese agreement was certain to stir up hostility in the United States, which remained suspicious of Japan and anything that resembled the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The British believed, however, that Japanese naval policy was driven by a fear of Anglo-American cooperation, which might be eased if that combination were dissolved. Some British leaders, including Neville Chamberlain and Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, were prepared to sacrifice strong relations with the United States in order to achieve accord with Japan. They maintained that the United States was always anxious to push Britain to the forefront in the Pacific and ready to leave it to bear the brunt of Japanese hostility. They could not, moreover, be relied upon to support Britain in Europe, in spite of what Fisher denounced as the American “braggadocio of Yahoodom.” Others, however, including Sir Robert Vansittart, while agreeing that the United States was not reliable, argued that recent advances in Anglo-American relations should not be jeopardized. Some degree of American support in Europe, or at least benevolent neutrality, was necessary and possible. Furthermore, public opinion would criticize any government that allowed relations to deteriorate. In the short term, at any rate, the prospect of a renewed Anglo-Japanese understanding collapsed when Japan announced in late December 1935 that it would terminate the Washington Treaty, the Five Power Treaty of 1922.¹⁶⁹

By the mid-1930s, therefore, Britain faced three potential threats simultaneously -- from Germany in Europe, Italy in the Mediterranean, and Japan in the Pacific. It was increasingly clear that Britain simply no longer possessed the naval forces sufficient to provide a deterrent; principally, the Royal Navy could no longer respond to a crisis in one part of the world, while retaining sufficient ships to deal with a threat elsewhere. This unfavorable strategic position, governed Britain’s military and diplomatic options. In 1934, for example, the Treasury opposed a tough line against Japan, citing British naval weakness as justification. In 1935-1936, the cabinet chose not to impose oil sanctions against Mussolini over Ethiopia on the grounds that the possibility of war against Japan made tough action against Italy imprudent.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Orde, 105-108; Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations, 25.

¹⁷⁰ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 118; Orde, 113-114.

Since a policy of deterrence seemed impossible, British leaders continued to pursue a policy of appeasement. Although appeasement emerged in the early 1920s, following the war and the conclusion of the peace treaties, driven by economic pressures for disarmament and the public's passion for peace,¹⁷¹ it was most closely associated with Neville Chamberlain, who became prime minister in May 1937 and effectively seized control of Britain's foreign policy. He and his colleagues endeavored to reduce the number of potential enemies by satisfying their grievances in return for guarantees of peace and disarmament, and therefore sought relentlessly to reach personal agreements with Hitler and Mussolini.¹⁷² In one respect, and in the most fundamental terms, it was clear that the British military was not strong enough to address threats to its interests throughout the world. On 12 November 1937, the Chiefs of Staff warned of the "increasing probability" that a war started in Europe, the Mediterranean, or the Pacific might extend to one or both of the other areas. They could not, however,

foresee the time when our defence forces will be strong enough to safeguard our territory, trade and vital interests against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously. We cannot, therefore, exaggerate the importance, from the point of view of Imperial defence, of any political or international action that can be taken to reduce the numbers of our potential enemies and to gain the support of potential allies.¹⁷³

In similar terms, economic pressures also compelled the government to pursue appeasement. In the early 1930s, Germany began to rearm, forcing Britain to follow suit. British military expenditures rose to 5.6 percent of gross national product in 1937-1938, up from 2.5 percent in the late 1920s, placing heavier pressures on the economy, already strained by the ongoing demand for social spending and the massive trade deficit. Even that, however, came nowhere close to providing the sort of global capability required if Britain were to meet the challenges posed by Germany, Japan, and Italy at the same time. As Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for Coordination of Defence told the cabinet in early 1938:

¹⁷¹ For the emergence of appeasement, see Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930s (London: Edward Arnold, Inc., 1977).

¹⁷² Dimpleby and Reynolds, 118; Orde, 99-100.

¹⁷³ Orde, 116.

The plain fact which cannot be obscured is that it is beyond the resources of this country to make proper provision in peace for the defence of the British Empire against three major powers in three different theatres of war. . . . I therefore repeat with fresh emphasis the opinion which I have already expressed as to the importance of reducing the scale of our commitments and the number of our potential enemies.¹⁷⁴

Appeasement also stemmed from Britain's perception of its diplomatic isolation. Chamberlain remained pessimistic about the chances for effective help. The British Dominions were isolationist and focused on regional concerns, France remained paralyzed by endless political turmoil, and Russia was engulfed by the Stalinist purges. Like most of his colleagues, furthermore, Chamberlain was particularly skeptical about the prospect of any assistance from the United States. After the bitter experiences of the twenties and early thirties, he observed that, "It is always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans except words."¹⁷⁵

At the same time, however, Roosevelt in fact had made specific gestures toward a policy of appeasement even before Chamberlain rose to leadership. According to C. A. MacDonald, toward the end of 1936, Roosevelt began trying to use the influence of the United States in order to advance peace, stability, and the expansion of international trade, but also to stimulate domestic recovery in the United States. Specifically, he was convinced that political tensions were closely connected with economic problems, such as Germany's introduction of exchange controls and autarky to stimulate recovery and to speed rearmament. Therefore, Roosevelt endeavored to promote European peace by restoring global trade, and thus facilitate a settlement that would satisfy the economic necessities of Germany without resorting to war or leaving Germany paramount in Europe. In doing so, he hoped to appeal to German moderates, who sought to solve Germany's problems by negotiation, rather than by military action, and who might therefore influence Hitler in a more moderate direction. Roosevelt also sought Britain's cooperation, which he believed essential to the success of such a settlement. The British, however, proved less than encouraging. Their objection was not to the concept, but to the American approach. The

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 116-117.

¹⁷⁵ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 118; Moser, 102.

United States favored reducing economic barriers, and the grievances that arose from them, in order to reduce political tensions and the threats of violence. In Washington's view, political stability was dependent upon prosperity. In contrast, the British preferred to discuss political issues before considering economic adjustments, arms limitation, or colonial concessions. In London's view, political assurances, such as guarantees of European security, were the necessary prelude to other concessions, in order to prevent giving away valuable bargaining chips without any assurance of substantial return, or, alternatively, encouraging a dangerous German belief in British weakness.¹⁷⁶

Consequently, Anglo-American relations, even into the latter 1930s, remained somewhat schizophrenic. In one respect, the tone did improve during 1937. To British visitors, such as Walter Runciman, president of the Board of Trade, Roosevelt was full of friendly words and hopes for promoting exchanges of information. Similarly, the British ambassador, Sir Ronald Lindsay, noted that the administration was currently well-disposed to Britain and that any offer of cooperation should not be refused, in spite of the perennial danger that the Americans "lead you down the garden path until you are committed, and then you suddenly find yourself left all alone."¹⁷⁷

At the same time, however, ongoing sources of tension continued to frustrate any improvements in relations. The United States, for example, remained irritated by British discrimination against American products. In 1937, 16 percent of all the goods exported by the United States went to Britain, making Britain America's most valuable trading partner. For Britain, which was expanding its trade within the Empire, the importance of the United States as a trading partner was declining. By 1937, only 11 percent of British imports came from the United States, whereas 39 percent came from the Empire. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, alarmed by the effects of this trend on American farmers and manufacturers, denounced Britain's policy of Imperial Preference as unfair. For the British, building up the Empire's trade seemed the best way out of the Depression. Chamberlain, for one, never wavered in

¹⁷⁶ MacDonald, 1, 3-15, 16-18; Rock, 20-21.

¹⁷⁷ Orde, 117-118.

his own devotion to Imperial Preference, and many in the cabinet, the civil service, business, and finance shared his view. Besides, they argued, they were not willing to reduce Imperial Preference until the United States made drastic cuts in its own tariffs. The political damage from this stalemate, which dragged on between 1934 and 1938, was considerable. It became a State Department axiom that there could be no cooperation with Britain on other matters until a trade agreement had been reached. A senior American diplomat, Jay Pierrepont Moffat, complained in 1936 that, “At present, [Britain] thinks she can count on our help politically and yet hit us below the belt commercially all over the world.” At the same time, Britain remained skeptical of America’s political reliability and its ability to follow up inspiring words with practical action.¹⁷⁸

This lack of Anglo-American cooperation was particularly apparent in East Asia. In July 1937, Japan, encouraged by the lack of effective reaction to its invasion of Manchuria, once again attacked China. Britain’s chief objective, given its economic and military constraints, and given the failure of its efforts to affect a new Anglo-Japanese agreement, was to act in concert with the United States. The British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, in particular, hoped to involve the United States alongside Britain in coordinating their diplomatic and military policies. He believed, as did many in the Foreign Office, that if this happened, Washington would almost automatically become involved with Britain in any war in Europe. The Roosevelt administration, however, suspected a British plan to shove the United States to the fore and to campaign for action on the grounds that Washington was already committed. As a result, the administration refused to participate in any joint action and indicated that it would only take parallel action. Claiming that joint action would mobilize Japanese opinion behind army extremists, Roosevelt simply restated the sanctity of the treaties Japan had signed and refused to approve its infringements of Chinese territory, but took no real action. In the meantime, Cordell Hull complained of embarrassing British pressure on the United States for joint cooperation.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 118-119; MacDonald, 19-22; Orde, 118-119; Rock, 22.

¹⁷⁹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 119; Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 538-541; MacDonald, 34-36; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 28-29; Rock, 36-37.

Roosevelt's hesitation to take more vigorous action, was exclusively the result of political considerations; specifically, by the growing strength of the isolationist movement in the United States. The power of this movement became evident by the harsh reaction to the president's "quarantine speech" at Chicago on 5 October 1937. Roosevelt, believing that public opinion was ready to support a more activist foreign policy, denounced the "present reign of terror and international lawlessness," and called for positive measures to preserve peace, including an international "quarantine" of aggressors. The president even wrote the controversial paragraph:

It seems to be unfortunately true that the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in the quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease.¹⁸⁰

While Roosevelt's precise intentions remained uncertain, reaction throughout the United States was immediate and vociferous, at the very least because of his hint at potential American participation. A poll of Congress revealed a majority of two to one against common action in the Pacific. Representative Hamilton Fish called the speech "sheer hysteria," and accused Roosevelt of trying to involve the United States in an Asian war "to pull British chestnuts from the fire." Many argued that Britain had more at stake in the Pacific than did the United States.¹⁸¹ The *New Republic* wrote that:

What Japan is doing is merely to continue on a larger scale and with more brutal candor what the Great Powers did in China for a hundred years. The British are not so far removed from the Amritsar massacre that they can afford very much righteous wrath about the bombing of Shanghai.¹⁸²

Confronted with such strident public reaction, Roosevelt backtracked and, on 12 October, informed the British government that:

- (1) It should not speak or think or act as though it were possible for me to be in any way an exponent of British foreign policy.
- (2) It should never forget I cannot march ahead of our very difficult and restive American public opinion; and

¹⁸⁰ Allen, 771; Hull, 544-545; Moser, 104-105; Orde, 119; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 29.

¹⁸¹ Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: Into the Storm, 1937-1940. A History* (New York: Random House, 1993), 132-133; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge of Isolation*, 23-24; Leutze, 14-15; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 30-31.

¹⁸² Moser, 105.

- (3) It must not try to push me in any way to the front or to thrust leadership upon me. . . . I cannot and shall not try to impose anything upon our people or the world. I will seek most earnestly to co-operate with all nations that are working for freedom and for peace.¹⁸³

The speech aroused mixed feelings in Britain as well. Many obviously welcomed any prospect of closer Anglo-American cooperation, but did not seriously expect any substantive action. London was highly conscious of Roosevelt's political difficulties in rallying public opinion behind him. Some suspected that having encouraged anti-Japanese enthusiasm, but especially in Britain, the Americans would pull back. Chamberlain, although he welcomed the speech as a sign that the United States might be abandoning the attitude of complete detachment, wrote to his sister: "Britain simply cannot afford to quarrel with Japan and I very much fear that after a lot of ballyhoo the Americans will somehow fade out and leave us to carry all the blame and the odium." Moreover, he resented the American refusal to make a joint demarche at the very beginning of the dispute, when it might have stopped the whole thing: "Now they jump in, without saying a word to us beforehand and without knowing what they mean to do." Chamberlain also feared that one effect of the speech might well be to push the Germans and the Italians closer to the Japanese.¹⁸⁴

Frustration between London and Washington intensified in November 1937. During a conference of the Pacific powers, which met at Brussels, Eden and the American delegate, Norman Davis, established a rapport. Eden hoped to follow one of Davis's suggestions that Britain and the United States should boycott Japanese products. He proceeded to bypass Chamberlain and the cabinet in order to pursue this directly with Sir Ronald Lindsay in Washington, in the hope that joint Anglo-American action along the lines suggested by Davis might lay the foundation for later cooperation in Europe.¹⁸⁵ For a brief moment in December 1937, when the Japanese attacked the *USS Panay* and the *HMS Ladybird* in the Yangtse River, London became optimistic that Roosevelt might agree to a joint naval demonstration

¹⁸³ Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 29-30.

¹⁸⁴ MacDonald, 42-43; Orde, 119-120; Rock, 35, 37-38.

¹⁸⁵ Davis, *Into the Storm*, 133, 144; Leutze, 16-18; Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 30; Rock, 42-45, 46-47.

in the Pacific. Roosevelt even spoke of a blockade of Japan. Before it could be considered, however, Japan apologized for the incident and the crisis receded.¹⁸⁶

In the most significant sense, the American reluctance to act firmly and aggressively in the Pacific, in concert with Britain, reflected the power of isolationist sentiment in the United States. At the same time, it also reflected the persistence of an underlying mistrust in the United States for Britain. There was widespread agreement with the opinions of A. Whitney Griswold, professor of international relations at Yale, who maintained, in his 1938 book *Far Eastern Policy of the United States*, that there was no community of interests between the United States and Britain in Asia.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the reopening of tension in the Pacific and the *Panay* incident reawakened a majority in Congress to the need for a larger navy. While this was welcomed in Britain as a possible indication that the United States had not abandoned all interest in the outside world, much of the debate in Congress focused on the concern that the navy would in fact become an auxiliary of the Royal Navy, and that American foreign policy was being directed not by the State Department but by Downing Street.¹⁸⁸

Furthermore, American suspicions of Britain continued to increase in 1937 and 1938 due to its policy of appeasement of Germany and Italy. As early as the spring of 1936, following Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland, the American ambassador in London, Robert W. Bingham, wrote that the Tory leadership was "so lacking in strong and courageous leadership" that Germany would be tempted toward greater acts of aggression. A visit by Lord Halifax to Berlin in November 1937 convinced the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, William C. Bullitt, that Chamberlain would "finally, deviously, by silences and tacit approvals," allow Hitler to take Austria and the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. Numerous commentators took the position that Britain's inclination to appease Hitler and Mussolini was a sign that the Chamberlain government was actually sympathetic to fascism.

¹⁸⁶ Davis, *Into the Storm*, 154-158, 144; Dimbleby and Reynolds, 119; Leutze, 18-28; MacDonald, 43-48, 55-62; Moser, 105-106; Orde, 120; Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 30; Rock, 47-49.

¹⁸⁷ Moser, 106-107.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 107-108.

Congressman Herbert S. Bigelow argued that the only difference between British and Italian imperialism was that “Italy is less hypocritical. Italy makes no professions of democracy, while England boasts of liberties for herself which she denies to others.”¹⁸⁹

On 12 January 1938, Roosevelt put forward a proposal, suggested by his Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, for a peace conference to be held under the auspices of the United States. He hoped it would establish the basic principles for the conduct of international relations, reduce the level of armaments, and open up world trade and access to raw materials. He also hoped to appeal to German moderates, such as Hjalmar Schacht, the president of the Reichsbank. In making his overture, Roosevelt secretly asked for Chamberlain’s support, urging him to reply within a week, adding that if Chamberlain did not express wholehearted support within five days, he would abandon it. Sir Ronald Lindsay asserted that this presidential “initiative” was “invaluable” and that any rejection or reservations might do great harm to Anglo-American relations that the Foreign Office had been struggling to improve. He believed that the proposal would win the support of American public opinion, which was vital to any hope of averting disaster. Chamberlain, however, was not impressed. He wrote in his diary that, “The plan appeared to me fantastic, and likely to excite the derision of Germany and Italy. They might even use it to postpone conversations with us.” He believed, indeed, that he could preserve peace without American involvement in Europe. Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office, recorded in his diary that Chamberlain “hates R’s idea.” Consequently, in a short but polite reply sent on 13 January, he asked whether the president could not hold his hand for a short while to see what progress the British could make in talks with Germany and Italy.¹⁹⁰

Chamberlain drafted his reply, without consulting Foreign Secretary Eden, who was on a brief holiday in France. Unlike the prime minister, Eden increasingly felt that it was futile to try to reach

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 108, 110-111.

¹⁹⁰ Allen, 775-776; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 186, 191-192; Sir Alexander Cadogan, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M.: 1938-1945*, ed. David Dilks (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 36, entry for 13 January 1938; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 119-120; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 28-29; MacDonald, 63-66; Nicholas, 87; Orde, 120; Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 28, 31; Rock, 55-59; Temperley, 135.

agreement with the dictators, and thus regarded Anglo-American cooperation and American involvement in Europe as absolutely essential to averting war, or possibly even preparing for it. Therefore, upon hearing the news, Eden was furious. He ultimately managed to persuade the cabinet to reconsider Roosevelt's suggestion, compelling the prime minister to propose that the president continue to explore his plan for an international conference while Britain tried direct and parallel negotiations with the dictators. By this point, however, Roosevelt's enthusiasm for the idea had cooled, and he was willing to let Chamberlain act alone. The president was "sorely disappointed" and took Chamberlain's weak proposal as an indication that he placed no great stock in cooperation with the United States.¹⁹¹

Largely as a result of Chamberlain's rejection of the Roosevelt proposal and continued preference for negotiations with Mussolini, Eden resigned on 20 February 1938. The choice, as Eden saw it, was "either Europe or the United States."¹⁹² While many would later condemn Chamberlain's decision as a missed opportunity to preserve peace through the powerful influence of the United States,¹⁹³ and others would suggest that Roosevelt's proposal was probably not meant to be taken altogether literally,¹⁹⁴ the German annexation of Austria in March effectively ended any possibility of Roosevelt's plan being set into motion. During the *Anschluss*, Chamberlain and the cabinet, in formulating Britain's position toward

¹⁹¹ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 120; Oliver Harvey, The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940, ed. John Harvey (London: Collins, 1970), 73-77, entries for 18 January, 19 January, 20 January, and 21 January 1938; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 27-29; MacDonald, 68-70; Nicholas, 87; Owendale, Anglo-American Relations, 28, 31-32; Rock, 59-68.

¹⁹² Davis, Into the Storm, 194; MacDonald, 71-73; Nicholas, 87; Owendale, Anglo-American Relations, 32; Rock, 78-83.

¹⁹³ Winston Churchill described the failure of the Roosevelt initiative: "The loss of the last frail chance to save the world from tyranny otherwise than by war." Lord Home, then Chamberlain's parliamentary private secretary, later maintained that the prime minister's reply was a mistake: "It was the first indication that America was beginning to take some interest in the terrible situation that was developing in Germany. Chamberlain ought not to have turned it down." Dimpleby and Reynolds, 120; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 162.

¹⁹⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds argue that Roosevelt's ideas were vague and utopian, standing even less chance of success than Chamberlain's own appeasement. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 120. Anne Orde argues that Roosevelt would not object to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement because "he wished for appeasement himself." Orde, 121. H.G. Nicholas argues that there is nothing to suggest, either in the terms of the proposal or elsewhere, that with respect to Germany, Roosevelt was any less of an appeaser at the time than Chamberlain. Most likely, he simply sought to "buttress the attempt of Britain to reach agreement with Germany." Nicholas, 87-88. Even Langer and Gleason concede that the Roosevelt administration never "even remotely envisaged" any serious stand by the United States Government." Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 31-32.

Central Europe, and Czechoslovakia in particular, did not consider the policy and position of the United States as a factor of any consequence. They continued to assume that Washington could be depended upon for very little, if anything at all, and was therefore best discounted.¹⁹⁵

American opinion grew progressively more skeptical of Britain as the situation in Europe continued to deteriorate in the spring of 1938. The resignation of Anthony Eden convinced many in Washington that Chamberlain was the agent of selfish City interests, who were purported to believe that Britain would benefit financially and commercially from coming to terms with Berlin. More to the point, the Eden resignation convinced many that the City now controlled British policy -- "peace at any price." When the Chamberlain cabinet, along with the French government, took no action in response to the *Anschluss*, irate American citizens deluged the British Embassy with letters, accusing London of "bolstering up the European dictatorships." Nor did the situation improve the following month, when Chamberlain announced Britain's recognition of Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, in spite of Roosevelt's warnings of a "serious effect upon public opinion." In Congress, Hiram Johnson claimed that the British willingness to deal with the dictators laid bare "the realistic policy of Britain in all its nakedness." Oswald Garrison Villard blamed Britain, "a great empire ruled at present by cold-blooded imperialists," for creating an international environment in which Hitler and Mussolini were able to thrive. This anti-British sentiment translated into even greater resistance to the idea of cooperation with Britain. There was, for example, a growing desire on the part of some legislators to lift the arms embargo on Spain, at a time when Britain was calling for international nonintervention in the civil war.¹⁹⁶

Roosevelt's attitude toward appeasement was far more ambiguous. He often seemed eager to criticize what he called the "national selfishness" that underlay British policy. On one occasion, he suggested to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau that Britain and Germany had reached an agreement for the joint domination of Europe. In an exchange of letters with the American minister to Dublin, John

¹⁹⁵ Nicholas, 87; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, 32; Rock, 90-91.

¹⁹⁶ Davis, *Into the Storm*, 197-198; MacDonald, 72-73, 76; Moser, 109, 111-112; Rock, 76-77, 91.

Cudahy, Roosevelt acknowledged that, while Britain's rearmament was not far enough along to risk war, a policy of retreat might be fatal in encouraging the dangerous activities of both Hitler and Mussolini. On 9 March 1938, immediately before the German annexation of Austria, he wrote:

If a Chief of Police makes a deal with the leading gangsters and the deal results in no more hold-ups, the Chief of Police will be called a great man, but if the gangsters do not live up to their word, the Chief of Police will go to jail. Some people are, I think, taking very long chances.¹⁹⁷

Yet, even as he continued to fault the British for not standing up to Hitler, Roosevelt refused to consider, much less take, any concrete action that might have encouraged them to do so. In 1936, for example, he did not lodge a protest over Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland. He steadfastly refused to suggest any modification of the neutrality laws in 1938, nor would he consider the renegotiation of war debts. He resisted public demands for an accelerated rearmament program, and went so far as to advocate a new round of arms control agreements.¹⁹⁸

Anglo-American relations grew further estranged by the crisis over Czechoslovakia. Over the summer and fall of 1938, Chamberlain sought to resolve the Czech crisis through a general settlement with Germany, again, without reference to the United States or to Roosevelt. If war erupted, Britain was absolutely ill-prepared to fight Germany, least of all in Eastern Europe, and might well be defeated. Furthermore, because of the priority given to building up its own air force and navy, the British would be able to afford France little assistance. London, therefore, proceeded throughout the crisis without significantly considering the United States into any of their plans. While any statement of support would have always been welcomed, it would still have been peripheral to British deliberations and actions. For example, as the Czech crisis intensified in August and word reached Washington of extensive German military preparations, both Roosevelt and Hull, in well-publicized speeches, issued warnings against international lawlessness, in an attempt to exercise at least some effect in Berlin by creating at the very

¹⁹⁷ Davis, *Into the Storm*, 185-186; MacDonald, 73-74, 76; Moser, 109; Rock, 85-86.

¹⁹⁸ One poll taken in January 1938 showed 69 percent in favor of a large army, 74 percent in favor of an increased navy, and a whopping 80 percent in favor of an expanded air force. Moser, 109-110.

least a condition of doubt about American policy, sufficient to help deter Germany from extreme provocation. Chamberlain and Halifax appreciated the American gestures, but thought that the principal usefulness of those speeches was in educating American public opinion. After all, they could not be certain what, or if, the United States would truly do in the event that the worst occurred.¹⁹⁹

In the United States, too, the desire to stay out of war remained virtually universal, in spite of American sympathy for Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, many Americans believed that Britain would sell out Czechoslovakia. Ambassador Lindsay warned the Foreign Office in the midst of the crisis that any new capitulation to Hitler would result in “a certain letdown of American friendliness.” Roosevelt described Chamberlain as “slippery,” and accused him of “playing the usual game of the British, peace at any price.” If negotiations failed, he predicted, the prime minister would find some way to blame the United States. Roosevelt believed that Chamberlain should adopt a firmer line in the face of German military preparations. On 31 August, he wrote: “I do wish that our British friends would see the situation as it seems to be -- but as you know they are doing everything to stall off controversy and possible war.” In mid-September, Roosevelt openly despaired that Hitler would simply take whatever he wanted from Czechoslovakia, while Britain and France “washed the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands.” Even Lindsay was impressed, noting on 12 September, that American opinion was in favor of “making a strong stand against German aggression.” In the event of war, he believed, the United States would eventually become involved. Roosevelt’s comments, however, made little impact in London.²⁰⁰

It remained clear that Roosevelt could do nothing more than offer words of support or reproach. He toyed with the idea of mediation, issued general appeals for peace, offered to arbitrate, suggested the convening of a conference of the interested parties at some neutral site, and assured a French visitor that the United States could be relied upon for everything except troops and money.²⁰¹ When Hitler invited

¹⁹⁹ Davis, *Into the Storm*, 321-322; Hull, 587-588; MacDonald, 96-98; Orde, 121-122; Rock, 102-103, 105-107, 112-113, 114-116; Temperley, 135.

²⁰⁰ MacDonald, 94-95, 104; Moser, 112; Rock, 110-111; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 41.

²⁰¹ Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 32-34; Orde, 122; Rock, 113-114, 120-123.

Chamberlain, at the eleventh hour on 28 September 1938, to meet the next day at Munich, Roosevelt sent a telegram of congratulations to Chamberlain, which contained just two words: “Good Man.” He wrote to the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King several days later: “I can assure you that we in the United States rejoice with you, and the world at large, that the outbreak of war was averted.” American public opinion, very much relieved, celebrated the agreement as well. A poll taken in early October 1938 showed that 59 percent of those surveyed believed that Britain and France had done the best thing giving in to Germany instead of going to war. Even some notorious Anglophobes had nice things to say about Neville Chamberlain. The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, rejoiced that Munich had removed all cause for war in western Europe.²⁰²

American support for the agreement, however, was short-lived. After the initial relief had passed, it became clear that Hitler would not be satisfied merely with the Sudetenland. As a result, the agreement began to damage British prestige. On 9 October 1938, Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, noted in his diary that “the Czechoslovak solution was a totally disgraceful thing and the President may want to dissociate himself from too close a connection before he is through with it.” Indeed, within weeks, Roosevelt expressed embarrassment about it, and began to describe it as only a lull in a gathering storm, which signaled an imperative need for the democracies to rearm. Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith called the agreement a “cynical sellout of principle.” Claude Bowers, the American ambassador to Spain, called it “the most shameless thing that has happened since the partition of Poland.” Another Assistant Secretary of State, Adolf A. Berle, maintained that the United States had no choice but to “go it alone,” since the British government obviously could not be trusted. These growing perceptions of British perfidy grew louder and stronger when it became known in October that London was preparing a proposal of economic cooperation with Germany, as part of an overall Anglo-German settlement. Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, Chief Economic Adviser to the British government, told a German trade delegation

²⁰² James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox, 1882-1940* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956), 387-388; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 342; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 34-35; MacDonald, 102-104; Moser, 112-113; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 33-34; Rock, 123-125.

on 19 October that Britain was interested in reaching an agreement with Berlin because Europe was in danger of American trade domination unless the four great powers learn to work with each other.²⁰³

Roosevelt backed away from his earlier endorsement of the Munich agreement. He now accused Chamberlain and other British leaders of suffering from an inordinate fear of communism that kept them from appreciating the extent of the German threat, the result, he quipped, of “too much Eton and Oxford.” He nevertheless rejected the suggestion that the United States should take over Britain’s international role, arguing that the danger of the current situation stemmed from a lack of nerve, not a lack of power. “What the British need today,” he wrote in February 1939, “is a good stiff grog, inducing not only the desire to save civilization but the continued belief that they can do it. In such an event they will have a lot more support from their American cousins.”²⁰⁴ He hinted that he was willing to help Britain in a war against Germany, but would not take any action if Britain “cringed like a coward.” By late 1938, this had become a favorite tactic of Roosevelt’s, using public suspicion of Britain as a club with which to force London into doing what he wanted. Sometimes the tactic worked: after four years of trying to achieve an Anglo-American trade agreement in the face of Britain’s Imperial Preference, Roosevelt’s warnings that failure to compromise might move Americans “toward political and economic isolation” ultimately led the British to a less intransigent position. Many in London believed that the Americans were taking advantage of Britain’s political need for an agreement to drive an unfair bargain. Even Lindsay, who argued that Britain’s failure to meet American terms would constitute a “first-class political crime,” grew bitter and exasperated over American delays and equivocations. Nevertheless, they signed an agreement on 17 November 1938. The reaction on both sides of the Atlantic was at best reserved.²⁰⁵

Although Anglo-American relations remained strained throughout the remainder of 1938, the events of the following spring and summer clarified the situation considerably. Hitler’s invasion and

²⁰³ Hull, 595; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 36-37; MacDonald, 106-110; Rock, 130-131, 138.

²⁰⁴ Dimpleby and Reynolds, 121-122; Moser, 115-116; David Reynolds, From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt’s America and the Origins of the Second World War (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 44.

²⁰⁵ Moser, 115-116; Orde, 122-123; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 42-43; Rock, 137-139.

occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, in March 1939, removed any remaining doubts about Hitler's intentions. Until March 1939, while there had been extraordinarily little sympathy for the Nazi regime in the United States, there had been, at the very least, a willingness to accept his foreign policy goals as nothing more than a reversal of Versailles. Many Americans, as well as the Chamberlain cabinet, saw the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, the annexation of Austria, and demands for the Sudetenland as justified. What Hitler appeared to be doing was simply making adjustments to the Treaty of Versailles, bringing Germans together, under German authority, which was consistent with the ideals of national self-determination. In March 1939, however, when Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia, a land not inhabited by Germans at all, many on both sides of the Atlantic finally understood that Hitler was simply another German thug. The final dismemberment of Czechoslovakia exposed once and for all Hitler's desire to dominate, if not the entire world, at least Central Europe, and a willingness to extend his rule over non-German populations.²⁰⁶

It suddenly became clear, therefore, that war was once again inevitable. This realization stirred many people, on both sides of the Atlantic, out of complacency and over-confidence that peace could be preserved through the appeasement of Nazi Germany. One such individual was the British ambassador-designate to the United States, Philip Henry Kerr, the eleventh Marquis of Lothian. After a period of almost twenty years since the previous war, during which the diplomatic relations between the two former allies had descended into suspicion, cynicism, and distrust, it was Lord Lothian who took the first significant steps in pushing Britain and the United States toward more open communication and a renewal of cooperation.

²⁰⁶ Moser, 119.

CHAPTER THREE: LORD LOTHIAN -- A DIPLOMATIC APPRENTICESHIP

In August 1938, Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, offered the post of British ambassador to the United States to Philip Henry Kerr, the eleventh Marquis of Lothian. Lothian's was a curious appointment, one that provoked much consternation, among both the permanent functionaries of the Foreign Office, and British opponents of appeasement. Not a professional diplomat, he had never held such a high position, and was regarded as an amateur who did not possess much experience -- or sometimes, much judgment. Yet, Lothian proved to be one of Britain's most distinguished and effective ambassadors. His tenure of office was relatively brief -- August 1939 to December 1940 -- but it coincided with a crucial period in relations between Britain and the United States, the first year of the Second World War, when Britain faced Nazi Germany essentially without allies, while the United States remained neutral and noncommittal. During his brief embassy, Lothian became the principal intermediary between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, and in that capacity, he helped to broker the Destroyers-for-Bases deal and lay the foundations for the Lend-Lease program.¹

A fundamental dedication to strong Anglo-American relations underlay much of Lothian's career. His public service and his varied semi-public activities were in many ways an apprenticeship for both the job and the moment of his embassy, the pinnacle of three decades of effort dedicated to the realization of closer Anglo-American relations.² This chapter is not so much a comprehensive biography as a survey of the key phases of his career, which shaped his approach to the United States.

South Africa and the Round Table

Kerr was born in London on 18 April 1882, the eldest of five surviving children of Lord Ralph Drury Kerr [1837-1916], the third son of the seventh Marquis of Lothian, and his wife, Lady Anne Kerr

¹ David Reynolds, Lord Lothian and Anglo-American Relations, 1939-1940 (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1983), 1.

² Priscilla Roberts, "Lord Lothian and the Atlantic World," The Historian, 66, no. 1 (April 2004), 103; Philip Henry Kerr, Marquis of Lothian, The American Speeches of Lord Lothian: July 1939 to December 1940 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), vii-viii (hereafter cited as Speeches).

[c.1857-1931], the youngest daughter of Henry Granville Fitzalan-Howard, fourteenth Duke of Norfolk. Kerr's father enjoyed a distinguished army career, mainly in India, but also, from 1891 to 1896, as major-general in Ireland. After his retirement, in 1898, the family settled at Woodburn, on the Lothian family estate of Newbattle, near Edinburgh, where Philip enjoyed a happy childhood with his siblings, three younger sisters, Cecil, Margaret, and Minna, and his brother, David.³ Both Kerr's parents were devout Roman Catholics. Although for many years, he considered entering the Church, his studies at New College, Oxford University, beginning in October 1900, exacerbated religious doubts.⁴ He also considered joining the army, particularly while the South African War was at its height, but ultimately was dissuaded by his parents. Following his graduation from Oxford in 1904 with a first in Modern History, Kerr secured a civilian post in the reconstruction of the former Boer republics. Fortuitously, Sir Arthur Lawley, who had served under Lord Ralph Kerr, and was now Lieutenant-Governor of the Transvaal, offered Kerr a post as his assistant private secretary and aide-de-camp.⁵

Kerr spent the years between 1905 and 1909 in South Africa, during "a period of apprenticeship to the causes which were to occupy him for the rest of his life."⁶ He served on Lawley's staff for only two months before Robert Brand, whom Kerr had known at Oxford, took him on as assistant secretary to the Inter-Colonial Council for the Transvaal and Orange River Colony.⁷ Here he joined the famous

³ David P. Billington, Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), 5; J. R. M. Butler, Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr): 1882-1940 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1960) 1-4; John Turner, "Introduction: Lord Lothian and His World," in The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, ed. John Turner (London: The Historians' Press, 1988), 3; Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 2004), 416 (hereafter cited as DNB).

⁴ Billington, 6-8; Butler, Lord Lothian, 7-9; Norman Rose, The Cliveden Set: Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity (London: Pimlico, 2000), 50-52.

⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 9-13; Kenneth Ingham, "Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa," in The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, ed. John Turner (London: The Historians' Press, 1988), 22, 26; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 52.

⁶ Ingham, 20. For overall discussion on Kerr's years in South Africa, see Billington, 8-15; Butler, Lord Lothian, 11-34; Ingham, 20-32.

⁷ Billington, 10; Butler, Lord Lothian, 13; Ingham, 22, 26. Kerr was also secretary to the standing committee on the South African constabulary in December 1905, and secretary to the Indigency Commission in September 1906, appointed to investigate the problem of poor whites in the Transvaal. Ingham, 27; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 52.

“Kindergarten,”⁸ a group of young men, predominantly products of New College and All Souls, who went out to assist the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, in the reconstruction of South Africa after the Boer War.⁹ Following the war and the granting of self-government to the Transvaal and Orange River colonies, Kerr and his colleagues became passionately committed to the creation of a federal union of the South African colonies, and subsequently drafted in January 1907 the elaborate Selborne Memorandum, which stated the case for such a union.¹⁰

Shortly after the publication of the memorandum, Kerr left the Inter-Colonial Council to edit a new monthly journal, *The State*, established to promote the unification of the South African colonies. The first issue appeared in December 1908, by which time the four colonies in fact began moving toward union.¹¹ Over the next fifteen months, the Kindergarten played a considerable role in the unification of South Africa.¹² In turn, the success of the South African Union exercised an enormous amount of

⁸ For further information on the Kindergarten and British policy in South Africa, see Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007); Walter Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men: The "Kindergarten" in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970); J. Lee Thompson, *Forgotten Patriot: A Life of Alfred, Viscount Milner of St. James's and Cape Town, 1854-1925* (Madison New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007); and J. Lee Thompson, *A Wider Patriotism: Alfred Milner and the British Empire* (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2008).

⁹ Viscount Milner was British High Commissioner in South Africa from 1897 to 1905. During that time, he tried to bind the colonies and republics of South Africa into one dominion, independent in the management of its own affairs, but remaining a member of the British Empire. This included the two coastal British colonies, the Cape Colony and Natal, and two independent republics higher inland, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which were ruled by Dutch-speaking white settlers known as Afrikaners or Boers. Milner was even prepared to go to war to achieve his objective. Kerr served directly under Lord Milner for only a week before the latter returned to England, to be succeeded by Lord Selborne. Billington, 8-9; Ingham, 20-22; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 2, 52.

¹⁰ The Kindergarten believed that the key to maintaining South Africa within the British Empire was British immigration. The key to attracting settlers, they argued, was prosperity, which would be facilitated by the political union of the four colonies. The Kindergarten collected evidence in order to make an irrefutable practical argument in favor of close union and present it to the public in the form of a memorandum. Lord Selborne made some major amendments before presenting it to the governments of South Africa in January 1907. Billington, 11-12; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 23-24; Ingham, 25-26; Turner, 3-4.

¹¹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 28-33; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 53-54.

¹² In November 1908, the four colonial governments held a convention to negotiate terms. In February 1909, the delegates adopted a constitution drawn up by the former Boer General Jan Christian Smuts, with the help of Robert Brand of the Kindergarten. In March 1909, the Kindergarten held a meeting of Closer Union societies in Johannesburg that endorsed the new constitution. The four colonies adopted the constitution in June 1909 and the British Parliament enacted it to take effect in May 1910. The resulting Union of South Africa became a self-governing Dominion of the British Empire. Billington, 12; Ingham, 30.

influence upon the Kindergarten. Their experience in South Africa convinced them that a well-placed pressure group could orchestrate events from behind the scenes.¹³ It also inspired members of the Kindergarten to think increasingly in terms of something more ambitious: a union or federation between London and the Dominions, a bloc sufficiently powerful to ensure that Britain retained its status as a great power.¹⁴ Just as significant, however, the Kindergarten also envisaged an Anglo-Saxon union, involving closer ties between the United States and the British Empire.¹⁵ Kerr was particularly provoked by the prospect of such an alliance -- the realization of which he would devote the better part of his career.

Kerr benefited a great deal from his experience in South Africa. His administrative role on the Inter-Colonial Council sharpened his organizational abilities. The responsibility for drafting the statement on railway policy, which accompanied the Selborne Memorandum, shaped his rhetorical skills. His brief role as the editor of *The State* introduced him to the art of journalism. Above all, he not only sharpened his intellect and his critical faculties, but also became convinced that the notion of federation was essential to the achievement of international peaceful co-existence.¹⁶ In particular, Kerr increasingly grew convinced that the close association of the British Empire with the United States must be the core of any world federalism, or at least a federation of western democracies, and that this Atlantic alliance should be the bedrock of any international system designed to preserve peace.¹⁷

In June 1909, following the South African Union, Kerr resigned the editorship of *The State* and returned to Britain, as did many of his Kindergarten colleagues. Although he gave careful consideration to standing for Parliament,¹⁸ Kerr joined his former colleagues,¹⁹ in September 1909, in setting up the

¹³ Billington, 28.

¹⁴ Ibid, 11.

¹⁵ Rose, The Cliveden Set, 2-3.

¹⁶ Ingham, 31; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 54.

¹⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 115; Roberts, 102.

¹⁸ Kerr was in fact offered the Unionist candidacy at Midlothian in April 1910, but turned it down. Butler, Lord Lothian, 40-41; DNB, 417.

Round Table, principally a study group whose object was to promote a closer union within the British Empire.²⁰ Driven by the realization that London could no longer carry the burden of defending the Empire alone, its members sought a federation of the four Dominions of Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand with Britain to share the burden of defense. The alternative for each was a solitary independence that risked defeat by stronger powers. Lionel Curtis proposed a directly elected Imperial parliament, with an upper house to represent equally the five countries and a lower house to represent their populations. A cabinet responsible to this parliament would take charge of foreign relations, defense, and the dependent empire, and would support these activities through taxation. All other powers of government would remain in the hands of each country.²¹ In order to publicize their efforts, the Round Table prepared and published a scheme of union, on the pattern of the Selborne Memorandum, and issued a quarterly journal of imperial and international affairs, *The Round Table*. The objective of the journal was to strengthen, in Britain and the Dominions, a sense of common imperial identity, as a way of laying the intellectual groundwork for a federal movement. Kerr became the editor of *The Round Table*, which became his principal activity until he joined Prime Minister David Lloyd George as an assistant private secretary in January 1917.²²

Almost immediately, the Moot, as the group began calling itself,²³ dispatched Kerr, Curtis, and William Marris to Canada, Britain's largest Dominion, in order to assess sentiment for closer imperial

¹⁹ His close colleagues included Robert Brand and Lionel Curtis from the Kindergarten, along with Leopold Amery, who became a Birmingham M.P., F. S. Oliver, a businessman and author, and Edward Grigg, another former New College man who was a journalist on *The Times*. These men were to be Kerr's closest colleagues and friends for most of his career. Turner, 4.

²⁰ For further information on the Round Table, see Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); D. George Boyce, ed., *The Crisis of British Unionism: Lord Selborne's Domestic Political Papers, 1885-1922* (London: Historians' Press, 1987); and John E. Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

²¹ Billington, 20.

²² Max Beloff, *Imperial Sunset. Volume One: Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897-1921* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 135; Billington, 2, 15, 19-21; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 35-37, 43-48; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 55; Turner, 4-5.

²³ The word "moot" was originally Anglo-Saxon for a meeting, or assembly. Billington, 172, note 31; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 3.

union. Over their travels, however, interviews with Canadians in business and professional life revealed deep reservations about closer ties to Britain. Kerr was particularly struck by the growing strength of Dominion nationalism. As a result, he began to doubt the possibility of an Anglo-Dominion federation, and wrote to Robert Brand that a central sovereign authority might break up the Empire. He correctly noted that London could not offer Canada any real incentive for union with Britain that the United States could not offer as well. Curtis, however, continued to regard anything short of “organic union” as apostasy from the original ideal.²⁴ It became apparent that Round Table members in the Dominions were deeply divided. All of the groups agreed that their countries needed to take more responsibility for their defense and foreign relations. But, while a majority of Round Table members in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand endorsed federation, a significant number of the Australian groups dissented and most of the Canadians objected to such a drastic choice of union or independence.²⁵

In the wake of this North American trip, Kerr undertook his first significant effort to explore the United States. In the fall of 1909, on his way home from Canada, Kerr toured the southern United States, in large part to learn whether American race relations could serve as any guide to South Africa. He visited the presidents of several black universities and colleges, including Howard University in Washington D.C., the Hampton Institute in Virginia, Atlanta University in Georgia, where he met with Professor W. E. B. DuBois, and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where he met with its founder Booker T. Washington. Kerr also met a range of black doctors, journalists, business leaders, land agents, and clergy, as well as a range of white officials, business leaders, professors, and planters.²⁶

²⁴ Beloff, 134; Billington, 20; Butler, Lord Lothian, 37-39; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 55.

²⁵ Billington, 25-26. In 1912, the Moot called for India’s promotion to Dominion status. In the September 1912 *Round Table*, Kerr wrote that, “The ideal goal is clear. It is that someday or other India should acquire the status of a self-governing Dominion, independent in the control of her own internal affairs, a loyal and willing partner with the other parts of the Empire in their common concerns.” While the Round Table did not truly expect this outcome anytime soon, their call for the goal of Dominion status was clearly unprecedented at the time. Billington, 2, 23-24.

²⁶ In the February issue of *The State*, Kerr noted that “the negro race . . . has within it the capacity to reach, and will reach, the same stage of development as the average white man.” At the same time, he pointed out that whenever white and black come into contact, “race prejudice springs up and runs blindly athwart all the laws which regulate society, politics and economics in an ordinary white community.” Billington, 13-14; Butler, Lord Lothian, 40.

More important, the prospect of an Anglo-American alliance compelled Kerr to send a memorandum in 1909 to former Conservative prime minister Arthur Balfour, recommending that Britain and the United States should join together to form “an Anglo-Saxon Federation,” which would dominate the seas, guarantee peace, and check German imperialism. He urged Balfour to forward this proposal to former president Theodore Roosevelt, who was about to embark on a tour of the world. Kerr hoped that Roosevelt would be “inspired to lay the foundation of an Anglo-American alliance” that would also lessen the prospect of a German-American alliance.²⁷ There is no evidence, however, that Roosevelt ever read the memorandum. Kerr therefore made a second approach to the former president in 1912. From 5-7 August 1912, Kerr attended the Progressive Party convention in Chicago. Following the convention, Kerr had lunch with Roosevelt at the latter’s Oyster Bay estate on Long Island, New York. The meeting, however, appears to have been inconclusive.²⁸

During the same 1912 visit to the United States, Kerr also met and befriended several other young progressive Americans through Lord Eustace Percy, a British diplomat in Washington. Percy belonged to a dinner circle that included Robert Grosvenor Valentine, the Commissioner of the United States Indian Service, Assistant Attorney-General Winfred Denison, Interior Department aide and future Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, Solicitor-General Loring Christie, a naturalized Canadian who would ultimately return to Canada to serve as secretary to Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, Herbert Croly, whose 1909 book, *The Promise of American Life*, inspired the “New Nationalism” on which Roosevelt campaigned in 1912, and Walter Lippmann, a young journalist who helped found *The New Republic* magazine with Croly in 1914. The circle’s father figure, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, presided over Monday evening gatherings. All were American progressives who would later support close American ties with Britain.²⁹

²⁷ Beloff, 168; Billington, 24; Roberts, 105.

²⁸ Billington, 24; Butler, Lord Lothian, 48.

²⁹ Billington, 24-25.

From the beginning, there existed a fundamental conflict of opinion within the group over whether to adhere to the rigidly esoteric methods of the Selborne memorandum³⁰ or to mount a semi-public campaign of propaganda. Kerr's close friend Lionel Curtis insisted on an esoteric movement, which would proceed almost in secret to persuade more educated and influential men across the empire to support plans for federal unity. Kerr preferred to use the journal as an organ of instruction, and thus seek large numbers of subscriptions.

The Round Table was essentially committed to "bringing about a revolution by dinner party."³¹ Indeed, they found themselves welcome in some of the great town and country houses of Britain and had access to influential figures at home and abroad. The group also obtained connections to two of the leading newspapers in the country. The first was *The Observer*, owned by William Waldorf Astor, heir to part of the American Astor fortune, and whose editor, James L. Garvin, was an admirer of Lord Milner. The Round Table Moot drew Garvin and Astor's son, Waldorf, a Unionist MP, into their circle. Waldorf and his American wife Nancy soon began having the young men to Cliveden, the Astor country home, for weekend moots and tennis parties. Kerr formed an especially close friendship with Nancy. The Round Table circle acquired an even more important connection to Britain's most prestigious newspaper, when in 1912, one of its members, Geoffrey Dawson, became the editor of *The Times* of London.³²

The objectives and methods of the Round Table movement began to attract criticism from some of the few outsiders who knew of its existence. On the one hand, its efforts to be politically neutral stirred some discontent. For example, the Round Table had pledged in its first issue to be free from party politics. For that reason, the journal did not take a position on the question of tariffs. This neutrality,

³⁰ While in South Africa, the Kindergarten had wished to keep their enterprise concealed, believing that any suggestion of Milner's influence would stir up opposition among the Boers. Therefore, following their collection of evidence and drafting of the memorandum, principally to avoid any direct connection with the undertaking, they induced Starr Jameson, the Cape prime minister, to invite Lord Selborne to make his own pronouncement on the need for closer union. Ingham, 25-26; Turner, 3-4.

³¹ Billington, 27; Christopher Sykes, *Nancy: The Life of Lady Astor* (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1972), 123-127; Turner, 5.

³² Billington, 28-29; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 45.

however, antagonized the Unionists for whom an imperial trading bloc was as important as a combined imperial defense. Moreover, Kerr's effort to edit the journal in an unbiased manner could not entirely suppress the Unionist sympathies of its founders. On the other hand, and far more fundamental a flaw, the Round Table assumed that the defense needs of Britain and the Dominions were one and the same. While Canada was completely safe and in no danger that the United States would ever try to conquer it, Australia and New Zealand needed a defense that Britain was increasingly unable to guarantee; the two Pacific Dominions demanded naval forces that British admirals wanted to concentrate in home waters against Germany. Consequently, each part of the proposed federation placed the needs of its own local defense ahead of imperial considerations.³³

Kerr's work in the Round Table movement was interrupted in the fall of 1911 by a nervous collapse which rendered him exhausted, depressed, and unfit for sustained work for most of the following three years. He consulted a neurologist in New York, who diagnosed "chronic overextension," and in September 1912, went to a German sanatorium in Bad Kissingen. When he returned home in November uncured, Kerr consulted Sir Bertrand Dawson, a physician to the Royal Family, who recommended that he rest at a variety of sanatoria and resorts in Europe. At one, St. Moritz, he renewed his acquaintance with Waldorf and Nancy Astor; it was during a visit in April 1914 to Rest Harrow, the seaside house of the Astors, that Kerr had appendicitis and only the quick action of a nearby doctor prevented complications that could have proved fatal.³⁴

It was during this period of illness that Kerr turned to Christian Science. His doubts about Roman Catholicism had grown in the years since he left Oxford. He explored other faiths, including Hinduism and Buddhism during an Asian journey in 1911-1912, but did not find them to be particularly satisfying. Following his appendicitis, however, Nancy Astor, who had converted to Christian Science after her own illness in 1913, gave Kerr a copy of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy,

³³ Beloff, 133; Billington, 27-28; Turner, 5.

³⁴ Butler, Lord Lothian, 49-55; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 57; Turner, 5-6.

the founder of Christian Science. Eddy held that physical and emotional healing was possible through faith.³⁵ To heal themselves, Christian Scientists tried to rely on religious faith rather than on modern medicine, and literalists refused all medical treatment for themselves and their families. Although conventional medicine had just saved his life, Kerr found Eddy's prescription for his ongoing health problems liberating and thus converted in the spring of 1914. Although his conversion did not in fact relieve him of his intermittent bouts of fatigue, Christian Science gave new meaning to his life by transforming his illness from a condition to be endured into a challenge to be overcome.³⁶

Kerr returned to the editorship of *The Round Table* in July 1914, a month before the outbreak of the First World War. He did not enlist, although his immediate instinct was to do so, principally because of his medical history and the persuasion of his Round Table colleagues. The death in October 1914 of his younger brother, David, a lieutenant in the Royal Scots, affected him severely and further increased the pressure from his parents not to serve. Over the next two years, Kerr agonized over the issue of military service. He was troubled by the appearance of evading a duty that other men his age were volunteering to perform. By the fall of 1915, after all, he had recovered sufficiently from appendicitis to begin drilling with the London Volunteer Rifles, a reserve unit. Yet, he was clearly unfit for military service. After the introduction of national service in January 1916, when he was in fact called up, his colleagues persuaded Kerr to seek an exemption,³⁷ on the grounds that editing *The Round Table*

³⁵ Human suffering, Eddy wrote, was not the result of an intrinsic condition of sin, but a false state of consciousness engendered by material existence. The healing of physical and mental illness, and ultimate salvation, lay in a person knowing and feeling a sense of oneness with an antimaterial God. This oneness could be cultivated through faith and good conduct in life. Billington, 76.

³⁶ Billington, 75-79; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 85-101; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 57-59; Sykes, 127-130, 137-138, 142-144.

³⁷ Billington, 39, 42-43; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 56-62; DNB, 418; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 91-92; Turner, 6. Under the Military Service Act of 27 January 1916, all unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41 became liable for service. While Kerr, an unmarried man at age 33, was eligible for service, a provision in the Act allowed exemption for civilian work deemed in the national interest. Kerr's friends urged him to seek exemption on the grounds that his work as editor of *The Round Table* served the war effort. In a letter to his father the year before, Kerr wrote of his editorship, "Unfortunately nobody can really do that but me and that's why I'm not now at war." Applications for exemption were judged by local tribunals and adverse decisions could be appealed to a central tribunal in London. Kerr's application to perform civil work in the national interest was turned down by a local tribunal. He ultimately appealed to the central tribunal, which reversed the lower board and granted his exemption. Billington, 42-43.

was a vital contribution to the war effort, at the very least to urge support for Britain, in the Dominions, as well as the necessity for federation. Under his wartime editorship, *The Round Table* reached the height of its circulation, approximately 13,000 in September 1914. Many articles were reprinted as pamphlets for distribution in the United States and other neutral countries.³⁸

Kerr dedicated himself to convincing readers of *The Round Table* at home and abroad why the British Empire had to fight. He described the war's origins, Britain's decision to enter the war, and British war aims in highly idealistic terminology: the war was a struggle for world freedom. In December 1914, he declared that, "If Germany is defeated the vision of the democratic peoples will begin to prevail"; in June 1915, he wrote that the "permanent cure for the evil is democracy."³⁹

Kerr's principal objective, however, was to help win support for Britain in the United States. The outbreak of the war intensified his conviction that Anglo-American cooperation must be at the core of any plan to preserve world peace.⁴⁰ He conscientiously sought to persuade American policy makers that the United States should follow pro-Allied policies and should take a far larger role in world affairs -- in collaboration with Britain. In November 1915, when Woodrow Wilson issued a note championing the cause of neutral rights, Kerr warned that if the president pushed this policy of neutrality, he would "hinder the triumph of that national liberty of which the American people are themselves among the foremost champions." He urged the United States to reconsider its abstention from the war, to stop screening itself "behind the fiction of neutrality" and declare as the basis of its policy the undoubted determination of the American people to vanquish tyranny in Europe.⁴¹ In the March 1916 *Round Table*, he wrote:

³⁸ Billington, 39; DNB, 418; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 91-92; Turner, 6.

³⁹ Billington, 39-40; Butler, 56-57.

⁴⁰ For further information on Anglo-American relations during the First World War, see Kathleen Burk, *Britain, America and the Sinews of War* (London and Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1985); John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality. The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981); David F. Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993); and David R. Woodward, *Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American Relations, 1917-1918* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993).

⁴¹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 57; Roberts, 106-107.

Neutrality is in essence a failure of duty towards humanity. Either a war is a struggle between right and wrong. . . . Or it is a quarrel in which no great principle is at stake, in which case all nations ought to combine to insist on its being settled by judicial means. In principle, there ought to be no neutrals or no war.⁴²

In June 1916, after a German submarine torpedoed the *Sussex*, a channel steamer, resulting in the death of several American civilians, Kerr applauded the tough American ultimatum to Germany and its demand that Berlin abandon unrestricted submarine warfare against merchant shipping on the grounds that it was inconsistent with common humanity. “It means,” Kerr wrote, that the United States “may have to go to war to vindicate the principles for which she stands.”⁴³

Kerr often sought to make his point more pertinent to his American readers by drawing historical analogies. He compared the issues at stake in the Great War, as well as the domestic and international problems it generated, with those Abraham Lincoln encountered during the American Civil War and “the experience of the great sister-democracy in the United States in its struggle for existence half a century ago.” In similar ways, he referred to the early state of lawlessness in the American West and the disobedience of antebellum Americans to the Fugitive Slave Law.⁴⁴

Kerr continued to advocate the establishment of a supranational organization as a means to maintain world peace. In June 1915, he recommended “an organic union of the world” as a solution to anticipated post-war problems. “The cure for war,” he wrote in September 1915, was “not to weaken the principle of the state, but to carry it to its logical conclusion, by the creation of a world state.” After all, London could pursue a more coherent and resolute foreign policy if the government’s attention was not persistently divided between both foreign and domestic affairs.⁴⁵ Although he wavered periodically from this commitment to a world state, Kerr recommended, in December 1915, a “permanent conference of the powers” as a peace keeping mechanism. In another shot aimed at Washington, he argued that

⁴² Billington, 41.

⁴³ Roberts, 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 106.

⁴⁵ Billington, 40; Butler, Lord Lothian, 57-59.

international noninvolvement was selfish, and that “[t]he problems of humanity will only be solved if all civilized powers co-operate in finding the solution.” This, he believed, “involves the establishment of a permanent conference of the great powers.”⁴⁶

Kerr urged the United States not just to support the Allies, but also to participate actively in the postwar settlement. As early as mid-1915, the pro-Allied American ambassador to London, Walter Hines Page, reported that Kerr was “red hot for a close and perfect understanding between Great Britain and the United States.”⁴⁷ In December 1915, Kerr appealed specifically to the United States to assume the central role and become “a member of the Peace Conference, and of the Concert [of Nations] into which it may grow,” warning that,

on her decision all the hopes of human unity will hang. By breaking with her long established national tradition and assuming common responsibilities for maintaining right and justice throughout the world she can probably save the world from another Armageddon. By clinging to the policy of isolation she can condemn mankind to another era of estrangement and war.⁴⁸

In the summer of 1916, Kerr reiterated: “The creation of a new international order depends mainly upon the Allies and America.” While the British Empire would still bear the heaviest burden, he stressed that it was fundamental and essential that the United States should take part in the work of international reconstruction. Furthermore, Kerr called for a strengthening of American and British naval power, a theme that would recur throughout his career. In March 1916, he implicitly suggested that American and British sea power be enhanced and restrictions upon its effectiveness removed, since “sea power is and must be the chief sanction behind international liberty and right.”⁴⁹

During these months of his editorship, in the spring and summer of 1916, Kerr met with many important individuals, such as Arthur Balfour, Austen Chamberlain, Sir Edward Grey, and Lord Robert

⁴⁶ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 57-58; Turner, 6; Roberts, 108.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 59; Roberts, 107-108.

⁴⁸ Roberts, 108.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 108.

Cecil. In particular, he was closely in touch with the so-called “Ginger Group,” which brought together several of the conservative opponents of the Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, including Alfred Milner, with members of the Moot. The group dined together on Monday evenings with the intention of working for “the more effective conduct of the war,” and, above all, “somehow or another, to secure a change of government.” Their endeavors assumed a heightened sense of urgency particularly after the disastrous offensive at the Somme River in the summer and fall of 1916.⁵⁰

Kerr at Downing Street

In December 1916, the Liberal-dominated coalition of Herbert Asquith fell and was replaced a new coalition government, dominated by Unionists under David Lloyd George.⁵¹ In order to prosecute the war more effectively, Lloyd George established, over the regular Cabinet, a five-member War Cabinet, composed of himself, Andrew Bonar Law, the leader of the Unionists, Arthur Henderson of the Labour Party, Lord Curzon, former Viceroy of India, and Lord Milner. In addition, he established two distinct secretariats. One consisted of seven assistant secretaries to the War Cabinet under Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hankey, while a second smaller secretariat under W. G. S. Adams served the prime minister directly. Milner’s influence ensured that a number of his acolytes found staff positions of some influence, including Kerr, who was appointed in January 1917 as a member of Lloyd George’s private secretariat, the so-called “Garden Suburb.” This “Garden Suburb” was set up to keep Lloyd George in touch with the expanding wartime administrative system.⁵²

⁵⁰ Butler, Lord Lothian, 62-63.

⁵¹ For further information on Lloyd George and British politics during the First World War, see Kathleen Burk, War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919 (London and Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1982); David French, The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); John Grigg, Lloyd George from Peace to War, 1912-1916 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); and Robert J. Scally, The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social-Imperialism, 1900-1918 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁵² The term referred to the offices of the secretariat, which were housed in barracks in the Downing Street garden, behind the Prime Minister’s office-residence. Beloff, 214; Billington, 44; John Turner and Michael Dockrill, “Philip Kerr at 10 Downing Street, 1916-1921,” in The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, ed. John Turner (London: The Historians’ Press, 1988), 33; Butler, Lord Lothian, 63.

From the very beginning, Kerr's service at Downing Street was politically controversial. Because Kerr and another early member, his close friend Waldorf Astor, were associated with the Round Table, Radicals in Parliament and in the British press seized on their presence to condemn the Garden Suburb as a revival of the South African Kindergarten.⁵³ In addition, supporters of the ousted Asquith ministry singled out Milner and his followers as a way to attack the new regime's concentration of power and staff at the top:

A new double screen of bureaucrats is interposed between the War Directorate and the heads of Departments, whose responsibility to Parliament has hitherto been direct, and transmits to them the decrees of the Upper Five. The first is the so-called Cabinet Secretariat, almost a ministry in itself. The second is a little body of illuminati, whose residence is in the Prime Minister's garden. These gentlemen stand in no sense for a Civil Service Cabinet. They are rather of the class of traveling empirics in Empire, who came in with Lord Milner, and whose spiritual home is fixed somewhere between Balliol and Heidelberg.⁵⁴

In this particular attack, which appeared in the *The Nation* on 24 February 1917, the editor, H. W. Massingham, caricatured Kerr as "Narcissus," upon whom "was imposed the . . . duty of rapidly assimilating the popular ideas or tendencies of the day, and presenting them to his chief, as it were, in concentrated pellets."⁵⁵

Lloyd George gave Kerr responsibility for advice on imperial and foreign affairs. They rapidly developed such a close relationship that Kerr ultimately served as Lloyd George's chief adviser and even intermediary in foreign affairs. Consequently, Kerr rapidly ascended into a position that was, he later observed, "almost as close to the centre of world affairs as it was possible for a man to be."⁵⁶ In this position of unprecedented influence, Kerr endeavored to put into effect the Round Table's wider objective of a reformed world order. He devoted much of his effort to two fundamental concerns: the future of the British Empire and the strengthening of British relations with the United States.

⁵³ Turner and Dockrill, 33.

⁵⁴ Billington, 44.

⁵⁵ Billington, 44; Turner and Dockrill, 33.

⁵⁶ Billington, 45; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 64-66.

By 1917, one of Kerr's principal objectives was to win support for accommodating nationalism within the Empire itself.⁵⁷ Kerr took part, for example, in initiatives to share power with the Dominions. During the spring of 1917, at the urging of Lord Milner, the War Cabinet invited the Dominion prime ministers, who were in London for an Imperial War Conference, to join it as full members, thereby creating an enlarged "Imperial War Cabinet." As a step toward possible federation, Kerr and the Round Table Moot had hoped to turn the Imperial War Conference into an annual assembly of parliaments where opposition parties could attend. They began to move away from that goal, however, as it became obvious that the Dominions were openly hostile to the idea. Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, for example, warned Kerr "in the strongest possible manner the inadvisability of trying to force any system of Imperial Federation . . . immediately following the war."⁵⁸ Kerr thus wrote to Curtis in July that the Dominions would come to the peace conference "in the spirit which will more and more resist the assertion of any superior authority or influence on the part of the British Government."⁵⁹

Kerr had greater success with two subsequent initiatives. In 1916, Kerr had been part of an Indian Moot, consisting of Lionel Curtis and several British officials from the India Office in London, which agreed on a plan to move India closer to self-government. Their proposal called for Britain to transfer certain executive responsibilities at the provincial level to Indians, who would be accountable in these roles to elected Indian legislators. The nucleus of their proposal, as well as their continuing efforts in 1917, ultimately became enacted into law in the Government of India Act of 1919.⁶⁰ In addition, Kerr

⁵⁷ For further information about the British Empire during the First World War, see Glen Balfour-Paul, The End of Empire in the Middle East – Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); John Darwin, Britain, Egypt and the Middle East – Imperial Strategy in the Aftermath of the War, 1918–1922 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); George Egerton, Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations: Strategy, Politics, and International Organization, 1914–1919 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1978); David Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-22 (London: André Deutsch, 1989); Hew Strachan, The First World War in Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ Billington, 47-48.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 65.

⁶⁰ Beloff, 216; Billington, 48-49.

also urged Lloyd George to support the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He saw Zionism as a way to secure an ally for Britain in the Middle East, where he and others hoped that a Jewish presence in Palestine would block German-Turkish, as well as French and Russian, influence. Furthermore, Kerr believed that British support for Zionism would strengthen pro-Allied sentiment in the United States. When British leaders finally committed themselves to a Jewish homeland, although not independence, it was Lord Milner who worded the statement, issued on 2 November 1917, known as the Balfour Declaration, which pledged Britain to establish a Jewish national homeland in Palestine after the war.⁶¹

The unfolding of events convinced Kerr that the war should have a higher, noble purpose. He thus persuaded Lloyd George to emphasize the moral character of the war. The overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II in the February Revolution of 1917,⁶² for example, convinced Kerr that Russia was moving toward parliamentary democracy, and prompted him to write Lloyd George that “It has been extraordinarily difficult” for the British government to stand for democracy, “as long as it was in alliance with autocratic Russia. That difficulty no longer exists.” Kerr also began to see evidence for the existence of democratic peace movements in Russia and Germany. Accordingly, he thus advised Lloyd George to make democracy in Europe a primary objective of the war, an end in itself. After all, he observed, although incorrectly, “it was not until Abraham Lincoln added the emancipation of the slaves to the preservation of American unity . . . that the tide began to turn.”⁶³

By the fall of 1917, however, as it became clear that the Russian revolutionaries simply wanted to proceed with their own internal revolution, Kerr began to descend into the “defensive pessimism” that

⁶¹ Billington, 50.

⁶² For further information about British attitudes toward the Russian revolution and subsequent British-Soviet relations, see Robert P. Arnot, The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1967); Sir Curtis Keeble, Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-89 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990); Keith Neilson, Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); F.S. Northedge, Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution (London: Macmillan, 1982); and Richard Ullman, Britain and the Russian Civil War, November 1918 - February 1920 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁶³ Billington, 50.

characterized his advice to Lloyd George for the rest of his service as private secretary.⁶⁴ In July 1917, for example, he confided to his close friend Lionel Curtis his opinion that “having broken away from autocracy the world is now rushing headlong toward the abyss of anarchy under the guidance of such phrases as ‘self-determination’, ‘nationalism’, ‘Home Rule’, and so forth.”⁶⁵ At the same time, Kerr began to see Allied military problems and British political troubles as the result of German intrigue. He thus wrote to Lloyd George on 18 October 1917 that “Germany is now transferring her attack more and more to the internal fronts of the Allies. As her chances of military victory decline her efforts to carry on the war by dividing the Allies, or breaking up the national unity of her enemies, increase.”⁶⁶ Kerr advocated a policy of complete victory over Germany, on the grounds that a premature peace would make it impossible to reestablish a sound international order.⁶⁷ While he maintained his core belief that the cure for war was the creation of the world state, Kerr insisted that before a permanent conference of the powers could be convened, Germany would have to be beaten to its knees.⁶⁸ By late 1917, Kerr flatly rejected any consideration of a negotiated peace. On 29 November 1917, Lord Lansdowne, former Unionist Foreign Secretary, published a letter in *The Daily Telegraph*, calling on the Allied and Central Powers to consider a compromise peace. In an emotional memorandum, Kerr implored Lloyd George to “refute and break with the Lansdowne point of view.” He suggested that Lansdowne wanted a “bad peace without victory,” which would lead to “hell for every man, woman and child for years and years.”⁶⁹ In January 1918, Lloyd George delivered an address, written by Kerr, which demanded enemy withdrawal from Belgium, France, and Serbia, reparations for war damages, independence for the subject nations of

⁶⁴ Turner and Dockrill, 39-40.

⁶⁵ Beloff, 246; Turner and Dockrill, 40-41.

⁶⁶ Billington, 51.

⁶⁷ Turner and Dockrill, 41.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 38-39.

⁶⁹ Billington, 52; Turner and Dockrill, 40.

Eastern Europe, and a postwar association of nations to limit armaments and prevent future conflict. Only thorough Allied victory, the prime minister declared, could achieve these aims.⁷⁰

Arguably Kerr's most important responsibility was to facilitate Anglo-American cooperation. During the war, his already numerous American contacts expanded dramatically, as he met with visiting officials, bankers, journalists, and academics, with some of whom he developed lifelong friendships. He advised Lloyd George how to fashion his speeches and public pronouncements, especially on such matters as liberal war aims and on even more controversial issues, such as Ireland, so as best to accord with American sensibilities. He alerted Lloyd George, moreover, to shifts in the American position. For example, on 22 January 1917, as the Germans began to step up their submarine campaign, Wilson stressed the American right as a neutral to trade freely. Kerr suggested to the prime minister that, because the United States could not "possibly tolerate a murderous hold-up of the world by sea," Wilson's speech should be considered a "warning to Germany" and a step to unite the American people in case war became necessary. A few days later, Germany announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Later, in the spring of 1917, Kerr helped Lloyd George draft a letter to Wilson, welcoming the American president into the war. In doing so, the prime minister celebrated the special relationship of close cooperation between Britain and the United States, the two powers upon whom, he argued, the primary responsibility both for winning the war and devising an acceptable postwar settlement would ultimately rest.⁷¹

Kerr's overriding concern for winning over American opinion did not, however, compel him to advocate a moderation of British policy toward Ireland.⁷² Kerr maintained a draconian attitude toward Irish policy for two fundamental reasons. First, he believed in the overriding moral claims of the British

⁷⁰ Billington, 52-53.

⁷¹ Billington, 47; Roberts, 109.

⁷² For further information on Britain's problems with Ireland, see D.G. Boyce, Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making Policy, 1918-1922 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT University Press, 1972); Thomas M. Coffey, Agony at Easter (New York: Macmillan, 1969); Sheila Lawlor, Britain and Ireland, 1914-23 (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983); Charles Townshend, The British Campaign in Ireland, 1916-1921 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Desmond Williams, ed., The Irish Struggle, 1916-1926 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

state, which excluded consideration during an emergency of the sectional interests of a minority. In the June 1918 *Round Table*, he wrote:

If self-determination means that all educated citizens ought to share in the rights and responsibilities of the village, of the county, the state, and the empire to which they belong, it is a sound doctrine. If it means that every community has a right to think only of itself and to set up on its own . . . whenever it chooses, it is the apotheosis of selfishness and the highway to war.⁷³

Second, Kerr dismissed the sincerity of the Irish resistance movement.⁷⁴

In early 1917, therefore, following the British suppression of the 1916 Easter Rising, and in response to the demands of the Irish Nationalist party for Home Rule, Kerr urged Lloyd George to assume a conciliatory position but yield nothing. “In the long run,” he wrote, “the only possible settlement is ‘a united Ireland in a United Kingdom, in a united Empire.’” Later, under pressure from the German Offensive in the spring of 1918, the British War Cabinet on 8 April extended conscription to Ireland, which had hitherto been exempt. While many opposed the decision, Kerr supported it with enthusiasm. He argued that for Ireland to resist conscription would be tantamount to secession: “Lincoln had the same difficulty to meet and had met it by force.”⁷⁵

At the end of the war, the Garden Suburb dissolved, but Kerr stayed on as Lloyd George’s sole private secretary. He accompanied Lloyd George to the Paris Peace Conference and remained in his service, principally to advise on foreign policy, until March 1921. During this period, Kerr’s influence on the prime minister reached its peak. At Paris, he saw all the official correspondence relating to the conference and advised Lloyd George about questions that were either pressing or which particularly interested him. He occasionally served as Lloyd George’s representative on *ad hoc* committees, and he cooperated with other staff members of the British Empire delegation in advising ministers. The prime minister’s return to London, from 10 February to 7 March 1919, to deal with domestic problems further

⁷³ Billington, 68.

⁷⁴ Some attributed this suspicion to his exaggerated distaste for the Catholic Church. Turner and Dockrill, 36.

⁷⁵ Billington, 68; Turner and Dockrill, 36.

enhanced Kerr's influence. Given Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour's somewhat insouciant attitude to the proceedings, Kerr was able to guide British policy on a number of occasions, although his main task was to keep Lloyd George informed of the progress, or lack of progress, of the conference. Sir Maurice Hankey described Kerr as being left behind in Paris as the prime minister's "watch dog."⁷⁶

Although Kerr's advice to Lloyd George reflected the traditional objectives of British diplomacy and defense -- the preservation of British naval supremacy and the establishment of a balance of power on the European continent -- his advice also reflected the priorities of the Round Table.⁷⁷ Kerr advocated the creation of a new world order, to be achieved through the "democratization of Europe." He even tried his hand at drafting a constitution for the proposed League of Nations, shortly after his arrival in Paris. More important, Kerr hoped that the United States and Britain could continue to cultivate their partnership in the postwar years. Cooperation between Washington and London, he believed, would draw the United States into a wider peace-keeping role that Britain could no longer perform on its own.⁷⁸ He also believed, however, that it would be necessary to educate Americans to these larger responsibilities. In an October 1918 letter to Curtis, Kerr wrote.

The extent of this work after the war . . . will be so vast that it will never be accomplished at all unless it is shared in proportions equal to their strength by the . . . allies now united in fighting the Germans. Yet America not only has no conception of this aspect of the problem but has been led by shibboleths and labels to believe that the assumption of this kind of responsibility is iniquitous imperialism.⁷⁹

In more specific terms, Kerr took the lead in defining the British position on a number of vital questions that arose during the conference. Although he had long been an advocate of a system of mutual defense treaties, by the end of the war, Kerr and his Round Table colleagues had turned against the

⁷⁶ Billington, 54; Turner and Dockrill, 43.

⁷⁷ For further information about British defense and strategic policies, see Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars (London: Clarendon Press, 1980); John Ferris, Men, Money and Diplomacy: The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-1921 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); John Lowe, The Great Powers, Imperialism and the German Problem, 1865-1925 (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Robert P. Shay, British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁷⁸ Billington, 55; Turner and Dockrill, 42-43.

⁷⁹ Billington, 55; Butler, Lord Lothian, 69.

concept of binding ties and commitments. He thus warned Lloyd George against the kind of League advocated by Woodrow Wilson, in which member states would make binding obligations to each other. Kerr explained that the impact of including such obligations in the constitution of the League of Nations “will be to make it impossible for any nation to join the League, for no nation will commit itself in so vital a matter [as going to war] except . . . after an examination of the facts at the time the decision has to be made.” Kerr thus submitted to the prime minister an outline for a more modest League, with less extensive powers, which would reconvene the peace conference as an annual and purely consultative gathering. Consequently, with Kerr’s memorandum in hand, Lloyd George instructed Lord Robert Cecil on 31 January 1919 to make the draft Covenant less binding.⁸⁰

Kerr also took the lead, with Lloyd George’s approval, in opposing French demands.⁸¹ Kerr correctly observed that the French were hoping to take advantage of the temporary absence of both Lloyd George and Wilson from the conference to force through decisions favorable to France. His suspicions of French ambitions and obstructionism, which were shared by Lloyd George and most members of the British delegation, increased as a result of his dealings with French officials in Paris. Kerr was not unsympathetic to French concerns for their future security *vis-à-vis* Germany, and in fact proposed that Britain and the United States should provide France with a genuine guarantee against the future renewal of the war.⁸² Yet, he remained uneasy about what he considered to be the unreasonable nature of French demands.⁸³ He wrote Lloyd George that a less radical peace would be easier to keep:

⁸⁰ Billington, 56-57; Roberts, 109.

⁸¹ For further information about Anglo-French relations in the interwar period, see Philip A. Bell, France and Britain, 1900–1940: Entente and Estrangement (London: Longman, 1996); Eleanor Gates, End of the Affair: The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1939-40 (London and Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1981); Elizabeth Keir, Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and William Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt, The Burden of Victory: Britain, France and the Enforcement of the Versailles Peace, 1919-1925 (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1995).

⁸² In a meeting with Colonel House on 18 February 1919, in contrast to his adamant opposition to a League Covenant that promised binding commitments, Kerr proposed that Britain and the United States should provide France with a genuine guarantee against the future renewal of the war, which would be designed to strengthen the League of Nations in French eyes. He appreciated that Paris regarded the League “as little more than a scrap of paper,” and thus proposed that Washington and London promise that, if Germany increased the quota of arms allowed under the treaty, and League economic sanctions failed to force Germany to respect its treaty obligations,

One of your first tasks, I think, will be to insist on a sane policy towards Germany both in the military and economic spheres. I am all for imposing stiff terms on Germany but they must be terms which give the German people some hope of independence.

“If the French have their way,” he maintained, the treaty will give Germany neither hope nor independence and “we shall probably be driven to occupy the country.”⁸⁴

Kerr was similarly active in economic discussions. He maintained that the industrial unrest afflicting all countries would grow worse unless industrial production was re-started. Furthermore, Britain could hardly forego stiff reparations as long as the United States insisted on the repayment of Allied war debts. In his opinion, the attitude of the United States to reparations and other related economic questions was crucial. If Washington either cancelled the Allied debts owed to the United States, or granted a reconstruction loan to the Allies, the reparations bill could be reduced. He wrote:

I am in favour of restricting our commitments abroad until we set our country thoroughly in order. I think that it is America’s turn to take on some of the burden of developing and financing the backward parts of the earth. We must see that she makes her money available for this.⁸⁵

In probably his most audacious initiative, Kerr assumed control of British policy with respect to the chaotic situation in Russia. He saw the Bolshevik Revolution as a fundamental threat to liberal civilization: “You have now got started . . . an active, aggressive religion of social destruction -- Bolshevism,” he wrote in an October 1918 letter to Curtis. “It seems pretty clear that the peoples of South America, Africa, and China will be quite incapable of resisting these destructive forces unless the

the two countries would build ship for ship and raise division for division against Germany. House welcomed this suggestion, a possible precursor of the later and more substantial Anglo-American guarantee of the French border. House further suggested that the two countries agree to maintain military and naval preponderance from the outset so that, if necessary, the League could take immediate steps to force Germany to comply with the League. Turner and Dockrill, 43-44.

⁸³ On 3 March 1919, the Military Commission under French Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch proposed that Germany’s armed forces should be sufficient only to maintain internal order inside the country. Kerr, in a letter to Lloyd George on the same day, made it clear that German acceptance of the disarmament clauses depended on its ability to defend German borders against attack, but at an army size that would not prove dangerous to its neighbors. Turner and Dockrill, 44-45.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁵ Billington, 60; Turner and Dockrill, 45.

Western Powers help them to do so.”⁸⁶ In 1919, however, he opposed Allied military intervention in Russia, and supported Woodrow Wilson’s call for a ceasefire and a proposal for a conference of all the Russian parties, on the Prinkipo Islands in the Sea of Marmara, in order to achieve some settlement.⁸⁷ On 14 February 1919, Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, and Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, arrived in Paris, claiming Lloyd George’s authority to find out what the Allies were prepared to do if, as seemed likely, the Prinkipo talks collapsed. Kerr discovered that Churchill favored far more dramatic action to resolve the question, namely the dispatch of Allied military assistance and volunteers to the anti-Bolshevik forces if the Bolsheviks refused a ceasefire. Because Churchill was proposing a course of action already vetoed by the War Cabinet,⁸⁸ Kerr immediately sent a telegram regarding the nature of Churchill’s schemes to Lloyd George: “Mr. Churchill is bent on forcing a campaign against Soviet Russia. I am against such a policy because . . . it must lead to the Peace Conference taking charge of Russian affairs, and if they do that it will end in revolution in the West.”⁸⁹ In response to Kerr and to two further telegrams from Churchill, the prime minister sent two telegrams of his own to the War Secretary on 17 February opposing any increased Allied intervention in Russia, which would involve Britain in further expenditure for a doubtful cause. Much to Churchill’s fury, Lloyd George authorized Kerr to show copies of the telegrams to Colonel House, who joined Balfour on 17 February in securing the abandonment of Churchill’s scheme. Wilson described Kerr’s action as “a low down trick,” and Churchill returned to London angry and bitter.⁹⁰

Kerr’s role in policymaking did not diminish after Lloyd George returned to Paris. As peace terms with Germany dominated the remainder of the conference, he encouraged the prime minister to

⁸⁶ Billington, 57; Butler, Lord Lothian, 69, 75.

⁸⁷ Turner and Dockrill, 45-46.

⁸⁸ Billington, 57-58; Butler, Lord Lothian, 75; Turner and Dockrill, 46. On 13 December 1918, Lloyd George and the War Cabinet overruled an appeal by Churchill to intervene more forcefully in the Russian Civil War.

⁸⁹ Billington, 58.

⁹⁰ Billington, 58; Turner and Dockrill, 46.

resist French pressure for a harsh and vindictive peace, especially the French proposal for the creation of an autonomous Rhineland under Allied occupation.⁹¹ On 26 February 1919, André Tardieu, an adviser to the French Premier Georges Clemenceau, presented a memorandum that called for the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France and the occupation of the Rhineland. On 11 March, in a meeting with Tardieu and Sidney Mezes of the American delegation, Kerr objected to the stationing of British troops, even token contingents, on German territory:

The experience of the Hanoverian connection with its experience of wars in Europe and the separation from America was still very strong and that these national feelings would unquestionably be aggravated by propaganda not only from within England itself but from residents of the occupied territories in Germany, who would probably provoke continual incidents with the object of making the position intolerable.⁹²

Kerr insisted that French security would be adequately provided for by German disarmament and the demilitarization of the Rhineland, and argued that if the German army were limited to 100,000 troops, the combined peacetime forces of the three Allied powers would be enough to meet any future German challenge. Concerted action to enforce peace terms on Germany “would obtain the wholehearted support of the public opinion of the British Empire and America.”⁹³ Therefore, Kerr appealed to Tardieu to recognize that the “real security of France lay in maintaining a complete understanding with Great Britain and America,” and that the “real danger” to the preservation of peace was an Anglo-French estrangement, resulting from additional burdens being imposed on Britain by a commitment to enforce the separation of the Rhineland from the rest of Germany, which would not be supported by British public opinion.⁹⁴

When Tardieu continued to press for at least a temporary Allied occupation of the Rhineland, and sought

⁹¹ For further information about the Treaty of Versailles and Lloyd George’s role, see Michael Dockrill, Peace Without Promise: Britain and the Peace Conference, 1919-1923 (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1981); Antony Lentin, Lloyd George and the Lost Peace: From Versailles to Hitler, 1919-1940 (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Antony Lentin, Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson and the Guilt of Germany: An Essay in the Pre-history of Appeasement (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Margaret MacMillan, Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War (London: J. Murray, 2001); and Alan Sharp, The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991).

⁹² Billington 59, Turner and Dockrill, 47.

⁹³ Billington, 59.

⁹⁴ Beloff, 288; Turner and Dockrill, 47-48.

to refer the question to Woodrow Wilson, Kerr wrote to Lloyd George that “I would resist the Tardieu proposition to the end.”⁹⁵

The entire British delegation grew more alarmed by the ever-increasing harshness of the peace terms. Lloyd George, Hankey, Sir Henry Wilson, and Kerr met at Fountainsbleu on 22-23 March 1919 to alleviate the terms of the draft treaty, which might convert Clemenceau to a more judicious and balanced peace. This “Outline of Peace Terms,” among other things, pressed for German access to world markets and raw materials “to enable the German people to get upon their legs again. We cannot cripple her and expect her to pay.” It called for the disarmament of Germany as a first step to the limitation of the armaments of all nations, an effective League of Nations, in which Germany might soon participate, the reduction of Poland’s territorial demands on Germany, continued German sovereignty over the Rhineland, and an equitable reparations settlement. Clemenceau, however, regarded this document as a prime example of “British selfishness” and sent back an icy response: Appease Germany, but not at France’s expense.⁹⁶ Kerr advocated a tough, not vindictive peace. No stable peace could be based on the “mutilation or permanent coercion” of Germany, by political, economic, or military means. Otherwise, he feared, the new German democracy could not survive the burden and might be driven to communism.⁹⁷

The secretary of the British delegation, Sir Maurice Hankey, wrote Lloyd George on 19 March 1919:

Mr. Philip Kerr has several times pointed out to you and to me that, while every exaction on Germany can be justified on its merits, the accumulation of these will put Germany in an utterly impossible position. Is there not the gravest danger that the Peace, as it is at present developing, may drive Germany to desperation and force her to make common cause with the Bolsheviks?⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Billington, 60; Turner and Dockrill, 46-48. Following the return to Paris of Lloyd George on 8 March, and Wilson on 14 March, the Anglo-American leaders each offered France a treaty to guarantee French security, if France would abandon its demand for an occupied Rhineland. A compromise in April finally gave France a fifteen-year Allied occupation of the Rhineland, along with two Anglo-American treaties of guarantee. The two treaties, however, contained an escape clause, by which both treaties would lapse if either the United States or Britain failed to ratify their own. Billington, 60.

⁹⁶ Billington, 61; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 111-112; Turner and Dockrill, 49.

⁹⁷ Billington, 60-61; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 109; Turner and Dockrill, 49.

⁹⁸ Billington, 61.

In spite of his own growing concern over the vindictiveness of the peace terms, Kerr was nevertheless closely involved in the events leading to the signature of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. His most significant and infamous contribution was to draft a note to the German government in November 1918, that “compensation will be made by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air.” This note ultimately served as the basis for Article 231 of the treaty.⁹⁹ The Allied leaders also appointed Kerr and four other secretaries to write a covering letter to accompany the Allied reply to the German dispatch of 29 May 1919, the “German Observations,” which consisted of a litany of German objections to the draft treaty. Kerr, who had by this time largely reconciled himself to the draft treaty, wrote the letter himself and summarized the Allied case against Germany. The treaty, he wrote, marked the end of a moral conflict to defeat “the greatest crime against humanity and the freedom of peoples that any nation, calling itself civilized, has ever consciously committed.” Therefore, Germany had to acknowledge sole guilt for the war and the “savage and inhuman manner in which it was conducted.” Germany must further agree to restore the occupied territories, pay reparations, and supply adequate guarantees of its future good conduct:¹⁰⁰

If the German people themselves, or any other nation, are to be deterred from following the footsteps of Prussia, if mankind is to be lifted out of the belief that war for selfish ends is legitimate to any State . . . it will be because those responsible for concluding the war have had the courage to see that justice is not deflected for a convenient peace.¹⁰¹

The Allied leaders accepted Kerr’s letter without amendment and presented it under Clemenceau’s signature with the Allied reply on 16 June 1919.¹⁰² The German delegation signed the treaty on 28 June.

Kerr would, in time, deeply regret his role in the drafting of the treaty. Initially, however, he defended it. When asked about the possibility of revision, for example, he countered, “Which features of

⁹⁹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 72; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 111.

¹⁰⁰ Billington, 62; Butler, Lord Lothian, 73-74; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 111; Turner and Dockrill, 42-43, 50.

¹⁰¹ Billington, 62.

¹⁰² Butler, Lord Lothian, 76-77.

the Treaty do you think require modification? . . . Certainly the Treaty is very stiff, but apart from the fundamental question of reparation, I have always found it difficult to see where it could really be revised.”¹⁰³ As early as 1920, however, away from the “hothouse atmosphere” of Paris, Kerr concluded that the Treaty was in fact full of defects. He feared that the French would demand the most preposterous, entirely impractical reparations demands, which might give Germany incentive to repudiate its consent to the peace. Moreover, as an advocate of national self-determination, Kerr was disturbed by the millions of Germans that the settlement cut off from the central German state; specifically, the Germans in an independent Austria, Poland, Danzig, and the Sudetenland. Here, he feared, was fertile ground for disrupting the new framework of Europe.¹⁰⁴

In the meantime, Kerr remained in Paris for most of the summer and kept Lloyd George informed about the progress of the peace negotiations with the other ex-enemy states. He returned to London in the fall, and while he remained preoccupied with the unfinished business of the conference, Kerr grew concerned, as did many other British officials, that American reservations to the Covenant would so emasculate the League as ultimately to destroy it. He worried in fact that the entire settlement might subsequently fall apart. As soon as the United States Senate rejected the League, Kerr drafted tentative strategies whereby the Allies might be able to accept American entry with such reservations as the Senate might require, even though such strategies generally involved the abandonment of British obligations under the Treaty of Versailles, notably its obligations to the French. Such modifications, however, would mean that the League would “sooner or later secure the whole-hearted support of American opinion,” and thereby enhance its prospects of success. Without full United States participation, he argued, the League had no future.¹⁰⁵ Kerr even began to reconsider the British commitment to the organization, since Britain

¹⁰³ Butler, Lord Lothian, 77; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, The Cliveden Set, 110. In part, Kerr tended to change his mind quite easily and frequently. Many people, including his own friends, often compared his mind to a weathervane, spinning around according to the weather. His friend Robert Brand noted that Kerr was “very impressionable . . . rather like a pendulum swinging from time to time perhaps too far in one direction or another.” Butler, Lord Lothian, 242; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Billington, 60; Butler, 79; Roberts, 110; Turner and Dockrill, 50.

could not possibly uphold the Covenant alone. He recognized, however, that the League's disappearance might lead to the rearmament and to renewed division of Europe into hostile alliance systems. Therefore, he suggested that Britain give two years' notice to leave the League, during which time it might reconstitute the Covenant to reflect the changed circumstances caused by the American refusal to join.¹⁰⁶

Kerr's service to the prime minister demonstrated quite clearly that, within Lloyd George's immediate circle, Kerr had considerable influence over the tone and direction of policy.¹⁰⁷ With respect to Kerr's future diplomatic career, this experience had two significant results. First, the exposure to the realities of diplomacy made Kerr more skeptical of human goodness; it gave his analyses of international politics a more pragmatic edge and tempered his enthusiasm for idealistic solutions. He acknowledged that there were practical limits to the kind of moral world for which the Allies had recently fought. For example, while he loathed Bolshevism, he ultimately saw no alternative to coexistence with Soviet Russia; hence his deflection of Churchill's ambitions to intervene in the Russian Civil War. In a similar way, while he agreed with the moral demands for retribution from Germany, he continued to believe that harsh peace terms were counterproductive. Although he never altogether abandoned his interest or his confidence in supra-national organizations to preserve peace, he emphasized idealism less and international machinery and the use of power more.¹⁰⁸

The second most significant result of Kerr's service as the prime minister's private secretary was a legacy of distrust and friction between himself and the foreign policy apparatus, particularly in the Foreign Office. Lloyd George used Kerr on several occasions as an intermediary and emissary, in the process bypassing the senior Foreign Office hierarchy under Lord Hardinge, the Permanent Under-Secretary, and Sir Eyre Crowe. In the winter of 1917-1918, for example, Lloyd George dispatched Kerr to Vienna and Berne in order to carry out secret negotiations with minor Turkish and Austrian diplomats,

¹⁰⁶ Turner and Dockrill, 51-52.

¹⁰⁷ Turner and Dockrill, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Billington, 59; Turner and Dockrill, 34, 59.

in an effort to induce those powers to make peace in return for more lenient terms. In this instance, Kerr went with the knowledge of the War Cabinet, with formal instructions from the foreign secretary, and with the cooperation of the British Legation in Berne.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, Kerr's apparent consent in late February 1919 to a new American peace initiative in Russia, undertaken by a junior American diplomat William Bullitt, took the Foreign Office by surprise when the news of the Bullitt mission became public in April.¹¹⁰ More egregiously, in March 1921, at an Allied conference in London, Lloyd George had called for an armistice between the Greeks and the Turks. Intercepted Greek telegrams between London and Athens, however, made it clear to the foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, that the prime minister had secretly encouraged the Greeks to undertake an offensive in Asia Minor against the Turks. Moreover, the cables also revealed that it was Kerr who made contact with the Greeks, on Lloyd George's instructions -- contacts that were deliberately concealed from Whitehall.¹¹¹

Senior Foreign Office officials also complained that Kerr maintained close control over the prime minister's official correspondence. They accused him of suppressing Foreign Office recommendations and concealing advice from Lloyd George when it conflicted with his own views. "Since when is Mr Ker [sic] the Prime Minister?" minuted Crowe testily on one occasion, and on another, "I gather . . . that Mr

¹⁰⁹ Billington, 52-53; Butler, Lord Lothian, 67; Turner and Dockrill, 58.

¹¹⁰ In February 1919, Colonel House sent William Bullitt to Kerr with a proposal that Allied troops already in Russia withdraw in return for an armistice that would leave existing factions in control of their respective areas of occupation. After meeting several times, Kerr wrote Bullitt on 21 February, outlining peace terms along the lines proposed by Bullitt, adding that "these have no official significance and merely represent my own opinion." On a secret trip to Moscow, Bullitt obtained the consent of Vladimir Lenin, while Wilson and Lloyd George did not bother to reply. News of the Bullitt mission became public in April 1919, at a time when the prime minister faced mounting criticism in the Unionist party, on whose support he depended, for being lenient with Russia and Germany. Moreover, Bullitt claimed that Lloyd George and Balfour had approved the terms. Kerr wrote the Foreign Office that "Throughout I made it clear to Mr. Bullitt that any opinions which I expressed were purely my own." Billington, 58-59; Butler, Lord Lothian, 76.

¹¹¹ Billington, 70; Turner and Dockrill, 57-58; Vansittart, 217-218. In 1920, Lloyd George, with Kerr's enthusiastic support, encouraged the Greek leader Eleftherios Venizelos to take military action against the Turkish insurrectionary forces of Mustafa Kemal, who were resisting the Treaty of Sèvres. Venizelos was the pro-Entente Greek leader who had brought Greece into the war against the Central Powers in 1917. The consequence of Greek action, supported by Britain and France, was that in the spring of 1920, a renewed war became likely in the Near East. In March, both the British General Staff and the British Commander in the Near East, Admiral de Robeck, urged that Allied treatment of Turkey not be too harsh. The Turks would fight to maintain control of Turkish territory and Allied forces in the area were not sufficient to impose a settlement on the Turks. Billington, 69-70; Turner and Dockrill, 54.

Kerr continues to withhold papers from the Prime Minister?" Relations between Kerr and Crowe further declined when, in November 1919, Kerr insisted that the prime minister had the right to review Crowe's handling of British policy at the conference, where Crowe was a British representative on the Supreme Council, without first consulting Lord Curzon. In a private letter to Crowe, Kerr condescendingly explained that, "I am not sure you understand the Prime Minister's attitude on the Adriatic Question."¹¹²

The building acrimony between Kerr and the Foreign Office led to the charge that the prime minister's secretary had constituted himself a "second Foreign Office" to provide policy advice more acceptable to Lloyd George than the inconvenient attitudes adopted by the real Foreign Office. Sir Robert Vansittart noted that Lloyd George disliked advice unless it suited him, and thus often failed to consult Balfour and Lord Hardinge.¹¹³ Consequently, Kerr figured strongly not only in the growing objections to Lloyd George's foreign policy, but in Lloyd George's growing isolation as a coalition prime minister as well. In particular, he found himself in the crossfire between Lloyd George and Lord Curzon, especially when it was made public in March 1921 that Kerr was the prime minister's secret go-between with the Greeks. Unlike Kerr's secret negotiations with the Austrians and Turks in March 1918, in this instance the Foreign Office had been kept completely in the dark. Abandoning the Lloyd George coalition in October 1922, Curzon noted that it was the prime minister's "ill-judged and calamitous interference in Foreign Affairs that brought about his doom."¹¹⁴ While Curzon disagreed with Lloyd George's handling of the French and his strong partisanship for the Greeks, he particularly objected to his habit of conducting policy without informing the Foreign Office. The knowledge that, on several occasions, Curzon was not completely in the prime minister's confidence, simply intensified his bitterness.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Turner and Dockrill, 53-54.

¹¹³ Vansittart, 220-221.

¹¹⁴ In October 1922, the Unionist party withdrew from the coalition, resulting in Lloyd George's downfall as prime minister. The Unionists became known again as the Conservative party and formed a government under Andrew Bonar Law.

¹¹⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 80; Turner and Dockrill, 55-57.

Clearly, Kerr's activities as Lloyd George's private secretary and foreign policy adviser inspired considerable resentment, notably on the part of very powerful men in very high places. Curzon described Kerr as "a most unsafe and insidious intermediary, being full both of ability and guile. He was the chosen agent of most of his master's intrigues." Curzon and Balfour both felt that Kerr's role as a "second Foreign Office" undermined their authority as foreign secretaries.¹¹⁶ Sir Henry Wilson described Kerr's influence as "poisonous."¹¹⁷ Winston Churchill, whose schemes for large-scale Allied intervention against the Bolsheviks had been halted by Kerr, also objected to Kerr's position. In June 1920, he told Lord Riddell, proprietor of the *News of the World*, and a friend of Lloyd George:

At present the P.M. is conducting the business of the Foreign Office with Kerr's assistance. I don't think that any man who does not hold a leading position in the State should be permitted to exercise so much influence on important questions as Kerr does. I told him so the other night. I said to him, "You have no real responsibility. If things go wrong, others have to take the consequences. All you have to do is walk out of Downing Street." They are formulating schemes which affect the lives of millions and the destinies of the world, and all this is done behind the scenes.¹¹⁸

During the years from 1917 to 1921, Kerr's primary role was to make sure that important matters came to Lloyd George's attention. The prime minister praised his service in this capacity: "I could not have kept fully in touch with events abroad without Mr. Kerr's intelligent and informed vigilance."¹¹⁹ Moreover, he said, "the depth and the breadth of his intellectual capacity impressed some of the greatest men" of the day, Clemenceau, Wilson, and Venezelos, who "treated him, not as a Prime Minister's secretary, but as if he were an emissary to the Conference, and a very important one."¹²⁰ At the same time, he helped to manage events and he had a hand in some of the key decisions of war and peace. His distinctive contribution was to encourage a moral emphasis in the prime minister's public statements and policies. His actual influence on policy, however, is more difficult to assess. While there is little doubt

¹¹⁶ DNB, 418; Turner, 7; Turner and Dockrill, 55.

¹¹⁷ Turner and Dockrill, 58.

¹¹⁸ Billington, 71; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 80.

¹¹⁹ Billington, 71; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 111.

¹²⁰ Edward Grigg, "Philip Kerr, Marquess of Lothian," in *Speeches*, xxiii.

that the prime minister gave great consideration to Kerr's suggestions, especially during and immediately after the Paris Peace Conference, Lloyd George brusquely dismissed his secretary's advice whenever it did not serve his needs at the moment.¹²¹ Moreover, Kerr clearly failed in his larger ambitions to recentralize the British Empire and to establish a peacetime partnership with the United States.

Nevertheless, while the aftermath of the Great War effectively spelled the end of the Round Table movement, Kerr became even more convinced that, by working together with the United States, a reformed British Empire could anchor and extend a wider liberal civilization and preserve peace. For the rest of his life, therefore, he would work to improve Anglo-American relations and to encourage United States' involvement in the world.¹²²

Kerr in the 1920s

Kerr served as Lloyd George's private secretary until March 1921, and as the managing editor of the *Daily Chronicle* and a director of United Newspapers Ltd., which Lloyd George controlled, until February 1922, when he resigned in order to withdraw to private life, to devote himself to religious study and practice.¹²³ Over the next three years, Kerr maintained no permanent employment. In October 1922, following the collapse of the Lloyd George coalition, he turned down the offer of the Unionist candidacy for Roxburghshire, stating to his mother Lady Anne Kerr, "I don't think the old associations would approve of my views at all." He supported himself principally by lecture tours at home and in the United States, and by free-lance journalism. He resumed writing articles for *The Round Table* in 1924; he also wrote for the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Observer*, and other papers.¹²⁴

¹²¹ One of the better known anecdotes about Kerr's alleged influence was told by Balfour. Had Lloyd George read a certain memorandum? he once asked Kerr, who replied, "I don't think so, but I have." "Not quite the same thing, is it Philip -- yet?" responded Balfour. Rose, The Cliveden Set, 97.

¹²² Billington, 72-73; Butler, Lord Lothian, 103-104; Turner and Dockrill, 58; Vansittart, 220-221.

¹²³ Butler, Lord Lothian, 81-83, 126; Roberts, 98. By September 1920, Kerr began to decline physically under the strain of settling the peace treaties and seeing the prime minister through nine international conferences in as many months. His physician, Sir Bertrand Dawson, ordered him to take an extended rest. Kerr also became weary in his political outlook as well. He suggested to Lloyd George that Britain "must deliberately draw in its horns in the matter of foreign policy," and concentrate instead on domestic recovery and imperial problems. Billington, 72.

¹²⁴ Billington, 90; Butler, Lord Lothian, 126; DNB, 418; Roberts, 98.

As his interest in international affairs revived, Kerr tended to see the Foreign Office as an obstacle to the diplomacy that he and his former Round Table colleagues had wanted to implement. His war and postwar experience deepened a sense that ordinary diplomacy was not adequate to the needs of the new world order.¹²⁵ As early as July 1920, in a conversation with Lord Riddell, Kerr criticized the methods and the outlook of the Foreign Office, whose professional diplomats had “no conception of policy in its wider sense.” He believed that the narrow professional training of the diplomat did not and could not provide a grasp of the interdependent problems of peace. For that reason, during the 1920s and 1930s, Kerr would at times try to influence events informally on his own, still infused with the confidence of the Kindergarten that he could make things happen by operating behind the scenes.¹²⁶

Over the 1920s, Kerr was particularly interested in and concerned with four fundamental issues. First, he identified France as a primary source of tension in the international arena. His suspicions of French motives, which had emerged at the Paris Peace Conference, remained constantly near the surface. As early as 1920, he condemned the French for “unwisdom” in their treatment of Germany, and again in 1922, for their emphasis on building up “nothing but armaments.” His suspicions of France stirred again in 1924, when the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald considered the Geneva Protocol to empower the League of Nations to enforce the arbitration of international disputes. In part, Kerr saw the Protocol as a means by which to guarantee an unjust French domination over Germany.¹²⁷

Kerr’s second main concern was, therefore, Germany. Kerr increasingly believed that the former Allies must treat Germany with fairness. In the March 1925 *Round Table*, Kerr argued that any new agreement to keep Germany down would be unjust and untenable:

¹²⁵ For further information about British foreign policy in the interwar period, see Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy 1919-39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Alan Farmer, *Britain: Foreign Affairs, 1919-39*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006); W. N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 1919-1939*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1968); and David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1991).

¹²⁶ Billington, 71-72, 73.

¹²⁷ Billington, 90; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 78, 111-114; Roberts, 113.

Germany will never submit to her present position of subordination forever. She would not be the great nation she is if she did. Eventually she will demand the right to the free control of all her own territory, and to deal with her neighbours on equal terms. She will demand the evacuation of the Rhineland and that she be allowed either to bring her own armaments up to the levels of those of France or that France bring her armaments down to the German level. And if these demands are . . . denied her, she will begin to prepare to recover her equality and independence by force of arms, as she did a century ago.

These words marked a striking change from Kerr's assurances to the French at the Paris Peace Conference in March 1919. At that time, he had assured the French of an Anglo-American counterweight behind them; now he spoke of the need for Germany to equal France.¹²⁸ In fact, he never believed that the peace terms, as harsh as they had been, had been designed to keep Germany down indefinitely. Although Kerr had insisted, in his letter covering the Allied reply to the German Observations in June 1919, that Germany accept moral guilt for the war and make restitution, he nevertheless assumed that, at some point, when those terms had been fulfilled, Germany would have the right to return to the community of nations. To Kerr, therefore, the 1923 French action in the Ruhr represented a policy of vengeance that repudiated the idea of reconciliation.¹²⁹

Third, Kerr remained sharply opposed to any binding international agreements, particularly those that involved an obligation to go to war.¹³⁰ Although he became somewhat reconciled to the League of Nations in its weakened form, and saw the League's Assembly as a forum in which Britain might influence world opinion,¹³¹ Kerr nevertheless remained skeptical about its overall effectiveness. Furthermore, he grew increasingly unsympathetic to any British involvement in the affairs of the continent altogether. In 1922, for example, he applauded the British government's refusal to make an Anglo-French alliance that promised British military support in the event of any German infringement of

¹²⁸ Billington, 90-91.

¹²⁹ Billington, 91; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 111.

¹³⁰ For further information about international efforts to establish the postwar order, see Erik Goldstein, *The First World War Peace Settlements, 1919-1925* (London: Longman, 2002); Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West, 1925-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Gaynor Johnson, *Locarno Revisited: European Diplomacy 1920-1929* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Anne Orde, *Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978).

¹³¹ Turner and Dockrill, 52.

the Treaty of Versailles. The League, he believed, should restrict itself to considering such issues as armaments, the use of the high seas, the treatment of backward peoples or minorities, and any other international questions “which must all be looked at from a world point of view.”¹³² Kerr also opposed Britain’s consideration of the Geneva Protocol. In the March 1925 *Round Table*, as the MacDonald cabinet considered the Protocol, he asked whether Britain intended, “automatically and perpetually, to guarantee the existing Polish-Russian frontier?” What would happen if the United States went to war with a League member? Britain certainly could not automatically side with America’s enemy. Kerr thus welcomed the new Baldwin government’s veto of the Protocol in March 1925. Kerr was equally skeptical of the Locarno treaties of October 1925, whereby Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium signed security treaties recognizing and guaranteeing each others’ frontiers, including the western border of Germany. In the December 1925 *Round Table*, he wrote that, “Frankly we are profoundly concerned at the possible consequences of an arrangement under which Great Britain will abandon her freedom of choice and the advantages of her geographical position to the extent now proposed. In 1927, he declared that the League ought to concentrate on developing both public opinion and the machinery behind the idea “that no alteration of the existing status quo in any part of the world, and that no settlement of an international dispute should be attempted by force,” and stressed that the League should not try to resolve special problems: “The attempt, made in the [League] Protocol, to link up the League with special problems, such as the stability of the Versailles settlement or the Franco-German problem, is fundamentally unsound and destructive of the central concept of the League.” Issues such as the Rhineland problem and international security guarantees should, he argued, “be settled by normal diplomatic means, quite apart from the League.”¹³³

Above all else, Kerr was driven by his desire to strengthen Anglo-American relations. He continued to believe that American entry into the League of Nations was critical to its success and he

¹³² Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 107-110; Roberts, 113.

¹³³ Billington, 90-91; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 111-115; Roberts, 113-114; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 128-129.

remained convinced that an Anglo-American understanding was the foundation for any workable international order. In 1920, Kerr told the Reverend J. Morgan Gibbon:

There is no more important work than to establish a good understanding between the American and British democracies. The future largely depends upon the co-operation of all the great Western democracies in the colossal task of rebuilding the world on better lines than those which crashed in ruins during the great war. It is especially on our two countries that the responsibility rests because they have now in especial degree, the wealth, and as I believe, the ideals, necessary to the making of a new and better world.

He maintained that Great Britain and America would be able to cooperate, in spite of “hostile and estranging propaganda,” because “the ideals which lie at the bottom of their social, political and religious life are fundamentally the same.”¹³⁴

Throughout the 1920s, , Kerr continued to encourage the United States to break with its isolationist traditions and, in partnership with Britain, take a more active role in running the world.¹³⁵ “It is not too much to say,” he wrote in 1922, “that if the British Commonwealth is to survive, and if the world is to be guided towards unity and peace, it is essential that the United States and the British Commonwealth should act in friendly co-operation.” In another 1922 essay, he warned Americans that in any international organization, force was needed to back up the rule of law, and that “the most serious blow” to European peace since the war had been “the withdrawal of [America’s] presence and counsel from the consideration of post-war problems.” He also maintained that nations needed “to recognize that they belong to the larger community of nations” and that the United States and Britain should “combin[e] with other nations to give some kind of constitutional system to the world.” There “has been placed in a special way upon the shoulders of the English-speaking nations in this century,” he declared,

the task of helping mankind to draw up and establish that just world constitution without which it can have neither lasting peace, freedom, nor opportunity. No other peoples seem so well situated to take the lead, though they can and will cooperate; and it seems to me that America, with its high ideals, its great traditions, its immense strength, is inevitably marked out to take a leading part in this work.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Roberts, 110.

¹³⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 102-104; 117-118; Roberts, 111.

¹³⁶ Kerr, “A Programme for the British Commonwealth,” *The Round Table* 46 (1922): 247; Kerr and Lionel Curtis, *The Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 7-74. Quotations in Roberts, 111.

In 1925, Kerr became the secretary to the Rhodes Trust,¹³⁷ thus providing him with yet another opportunity to facilitate and cultivate closer Anglo-American cooperation.¹³⁸ Established in 1903 under the will of Cecil Rhodes, the Rhodes Trust was designed to foster closer relations among the English-speaking nations, primarily by providing funds for American and Empire students to attend Oxford University. The principal work of the secretary was to administer the Rhodes Scholarships.¹³⁹ Rhodes's interest in the United States was particularly appealing to Kerr. Rhodes had argued that if the United States and Britain descended into conflict, the world would "break into pieces," whereas if they could combine their resources, "they were invulnerable."¹⁴⁰ Kerr agreed, suggesting that, whereas Woodrow Wilson's ideas of international organization had been too ambitious, there was much to be said for "the Rhodes thesis that the first step towards stable world peace is the re-construction in some form of the wartime association of the English-speaking nations."¹⁴¹

Kerr's tenure as secretary, which lasted until 1939, far lengthier than any previous secretary, enabled him to undertake his most sustained work yet for Anglo-American relations. He used his position to deepen his knowledge of the United States by visiting annually, traveling extensively in almost every

¹³⁷ For further information about the Rhodes Trust, see Frank Aydelotte, The American Rhodes Scholarships: A Review of the First Forty Years (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946); Godfrey Elton, ed., The First Fifty Years of the Rhodes Trust and the Rhodes Scholarships 1903–1953 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955); Anthony Kenny, ed., The History of the Rhodes Trust 1902–1999 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Philip Ziegler, Legacy: Cecil Rhodes, the Rhodes Trust and Rhodes Scholarships (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹³⁸ For Kerr's years at the Rhodes Trust, see Billington, 80-85; Butler, Lord Lothian, 126-143. His appointment was roundly applauded by most observers. The decision to appoint Kerr, however, was not unanimous. Rudyard Kipling objected so strongly that he resigned from the Board. Butler, Lord Lothian, 126.

¹³⁹ In his last will, Rhodes established sixty scholarships to Oxford University for eighteen British colonies and two scholarships for each American state. He also provided fifteen to Germany. One-third of the Scholars were to be chosen each year for three years of study, although the Trustees restricted the Scholarships to graduate students. The German Kaiser nominated his country's scholars, until the outbreak of war in 1914, when Parliament revoked them; committees of university and college presidents in each British colony or American state nominated the rest. Billington, 81.

¹⁴⁰ Butler, Lord Lothian, 128.

¹⁴¹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 135-136; Roberts, 112.

state, and acquiring considerable understanding of the American political system, as well as a vast, near legendary network of friends within the political, academic, journalistic, and Christian Science worlds.¹⁴² His goal specifically was to produce Rhodes Scholars who would someday reach positions of influence, imbued with the ideals of liberal-democratic civilization. So vital did Kerr believe the scholarships to be in the selection and cultivation of exceptional leaders that, in the spring of 1929, he used his political influence to push through Parliament a bill altering the terms of Rhodes's will. According to the Rhodes Trust Act, scholarships would no longer rotate automatically through each American state, but be awarded on merit in larger districts of six states apiece.¹⁴³

During the mid-to-late 1920s, Kerr's efforts to improve and promote Anglo-American cooperation focused particularly upon a handful of generally divisive issues. One of the most contentious involved tensions arising from the ongoing Anglo-American naval rivalry.¹⁴⁴ Kerr devoted much time attempting to persuade educated opinion in both countries that the naval dispute required a deeper political solution. The solution, he wrote Lionel Curtis on 2 September 1927, was to educate American opinion: "Personally I am convinced that the forces for righteousness are so strong in the U.S. that when they awake to the question they will bring the U.S. into line for the world commonwealth. But they are not awake now, and it will take a long period of education and experience to teach them about the realities of the position."¹⁴⁵ Moreover, in 1927, at the height of tension preceding the Geneva conference, Kerr corresponded with British Admiralty officials, suggesting potential strategies to allay Anglo-American

¹⁴² Billington, 81-83; Butler, Lord Lothian, 124-135, 142; Roberts, 111-112.

¹⁴³ Kerr and the Rhodes Trustees feared that smaller states lacked a sufficient number of outstanding candidates with the potential for distinguished elite careers. Kerr reported to his Trustees in 1926: "Half a dozen men of real influence and ability in public life, in education, in journalism, in law or in business can do a thousandfold more than hundreds of average men who never attain to any position of influence outside their own immediate circle of acquaintances." Billington, 82; Butler, Lord Lothian, 130-131; Roberts, 112.

¹⁴⁴ For further information about the Anglo-American naval rivalry, see Erik Goldstein, The Washington Conference, 1921-1922: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor (New York: Routledge, 1994); B. J. C. McKercher, The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924-1929: Attitudes and Diplomacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); John E. Moser, Twisting the Lion's Tail: American Anglophobia between the World Wars (New York: New York University Press, 1999); and Stephen Roskill, Naval Policy Between the Wars, 2 vols. (New York: Walker, 1968, 1976).

¹⁴⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 117-118.

naval suspicions. Following the failure of the conference, moreover, he published several articles on naval policy in *The Round Table*, dispatching numerous copies of each to influential friends in the United States, Britain, and the Dominions, in politics, business, journalism, and law. In the March 1928 *Round Table*, he wrote that the dispute over naval parity presupposed the possibility of an Anglo-American conflict. The only risk of conflict in any future war, he argued, would occur over freedom of the seas if one or the other power was neutral. Therefore, the basic issue was not the rights of a belligerent at sea, “but the question of when belligerents should be allowed to interfere with neutral commerce.” If both sides agreed in advance on the circumstances in which one or the other could rightly close the seas, Kerr suggested, then neither power would come into conflict.¹⁴⁶ The reaction in the United States was generally positive. *The New Republic*, in an editorial of 4 April 1928, praised Kerr’s article. “For a while, [a quest for naval supremacy] seemed to *The New Republic* the most reasonable explanation of British behavior. We are convinced . . . by the explanation in the *Round Table* . . . that the British did not harbor any such intention.”¹⁴⁷

Kerr also used public and private avenues to address the ongoing dilemma regarding the League of Nations. Although skeptical about its overall effectiveness, he remained convinced that the League would remain hopelessly impotent without the United States. Consequently, Kerr continued to look for ways to make League membership more palatable to Washington. In the spring of 1928, for example, with the conclusion of the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact,¹⁴⁸ Kerr promptly offered amendments that might

¹⁴⁶ On 22 March 1928, Kerr delivered the substance of his article in an address before the National Council for the Prevention of War in London. Billington, 92; Roberts, 114.

¹⁴⁷ Billington, 92; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 117-118.

¹⁴⁸ In 1927 and 1928, Kerr endorsed American Secretary of State Frank Kellogg’s proposal for a treaty to outlaw war. In the June 1928 *Round Table*, he wrote that “if there is to be peace, the right to use ‘war as an instrument of national policy’ must be absolutely renounced by nations.” Kerr sent prints of this article to most of the Americans who received his March naval article: Kellogg wrote back, “It is an excellent article and analyzes the negotiations and the proposed treaty with great accuracy;” Senator William Borah, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also commended Kerr; Norman H. Davis, a New York attorney and leading Democrat, wrote to Kerr that he hoped to persuade his party to endorse the pact in their 1928 platform; Allen W. Dulles, a Republican, thanked Kerr for the article and expressed the hope that the peace pact would create “a better psychological atmosphere.” Billington, 92-93.

allow for the United States to commit to consultations in the event of war, and thus tie Washington closer to the League of Nations, and perhaps even accept some form of membership.¹⁴⁹

Kerr also called for more contact among non-professional diplomats. Specifically, in his 22 March speech before the National Council for the Prevention of War, he urged both sides to “go slow on conferences and treaties for the next few years.” Instead, he called for informal talks among bankers, business leaders, and journalists on both sides of the Atlantic. As venues for such contacts, he undoubtedly had in mind two institutions, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, or Chatham House, in London, and its American sister organization, the Council on Foreign Relations, both of which were founded in 1919. Kerr believed that the solution to greater Anglo-American cooperation was contact and education. In April 1928, for example, he wrote to Francis Bourdillon, secretary of Chatham House, that “The greatest obstacle to good Anglo-American relations to-day is the ignorance and therefore the misunderstanding and suspicion between the political classes on both sides of the Atlantic.”¹⁵⁰

Tensions between Washington and London, however, escalated with the breakdown of the Geneva naval talks in 1927, which precipitated talk of war, and with the Anglo-French naval compromise of 1928. Kerr vehemently denounced the Anglo-French accord, on the one hand, because of its adverse impact upon Anglo-American relations. Whatever London had intended, Washington no doubt saw the agreement as a British effort to maintain its naval supremacy. On the other hand, he suspected that the French were again trying to secure a British guarantee against Germany. Kerr told Ramsay MacDonald in December 1928 that British statesmen “ought continuously to press upon the French . . . that they can get the security they want through Anglo-French-German agreement . . . and that they cannot get security by trying to draw Great Britain into an entente which has an anti-German point.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ He launched a protracted and energetic, although ultimately abortive, campaign to persuade the British League of Nations Union to demand modification of the League Covenant, so as to eliminate provisions for automatic mandatory sanctions, thereby making it consonant with the pact, but more important, acceptable to the United States. Roberts, 114; Butler, Lord Lothian, 118-121.

¹⁵⁰ Billington, 93.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 94.

Kerr therefore spearheaded efforts to alleviate the growing tensions between the United States and Britain primarily by establishing coordinated study groups. In 1928–1929, Chatham House established a “Special Group on Anglo-American Relations,” chaired by Kerr, whose findings predictably contended that close cooperation between the two powers was in the best interests of both. Britain and the United States, he maintained, shared common political ideals and economic interests, while no territorial disputes divided them. He argued that if Britain and the United States stood for liberty, democracy, and the rule of law, then these values called out for a common defense: “If the United States and Great Britain really make up their minds not only not to go to war with one another as they have more or less done, but that they will use their whole influence and power to prevent other powers from settling their disputes by war, at any rate on the high seas, the risk of their getting to cross purposes about interference with one another’s trade in time of war becomes immensely less.” The Council on Foreign Relations issued their June 1929 report, which drew substantially upon the recent articles by Kerr in *International Affairs* and *The Round Table*. It argued that war between the United States and Britain should be unthinkable and that, while economic concerns might cause dissension, the only reason such a conflict might arise was potential British interference with United States shipping in a war in which America remained neutral. As a result, it suggested that, since there was no guarantee that the Kellogg-Briand Pact alone would prevent future wars, Britain and the United States should coordinate their policies toward subsequent controversies between other nations. Fearing that the Senate would not ratify such a treaty, the group recommended that, following the precedent of the hallowed Monroe Doctrine, it should be implemented by executive action.¹⁵²

In any event, Anglo-American relations began to improve fundamentally in 1929. Following the American ratification of the Kellogg-Briand Pact on 15 January 1929, and the passage of a new Cruiser Bill by Congress on 13 February,¹⁵³ the new president, Herbert Hoover, directed the American

¹⁵² Billington, 95-96; Roberts, 115-116.

¹⁵³ The bill, which authorized the construction of 15 cruisers and one aircraft carrier, had stalled in Congress but was given great impetus by the animosity to the Anglo-French naval compromise. Moser, 56, 58.

disarmament negotiator in Geneva to take a more flexible position on naval parity and begin seeking reductions. More important, in October 1929, Hoover and Ramsay MacDonald, who returned to office following a general election in May, met in Washington and agreed to convene a naval conference in London, which met from January to April 1930. A five-year treaty renewed the 1922 limits on aircraft carriers and battleships, while both sides obtained the right to build the cruisers each wanted.

Throughout all of this, Kerr's role in facilitating Anglo-American cooperation did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. Christian A. Herter, a future American secretary of state, thanked Kerr for his efforts to relieve tensions between London and Washington: "It is a curious fact that you seem to be doing more toward bringing an intelligent realization of the situation to our people than anyone else." In Britain, figures to the left of center, such as MacDonald, sought his advice, while conservatives and diplomats treated Kerr as someone who might be useful, if not altogether trusted.¹⁵⁴

Lothian the Appeaser

In March 1930, Kerr succeeded his cousin as the eleventh Marquis of Lothian.¹⁵⁵ He also served briefly in the government. In August 1931, the Labour cabinet split over whether to reduce unemployment compensation in order to close a budget deficit. To enforce austerity, MacDonald formed a National Government on 25 August. Conservatives and Liberals joined, but almost all of the Labour MPs refused, and the Labour party expelled MacDonald and the few who did.¹⁵⁶ MacDonald wanted to

¹⁵⁴ Billington, 96.

¹⁵⁵ On 16 March 1930, Kerr succeeded his cousin Robert Schomberg Kerr as the eleventh Marquis of Lothian. He inherited four magnificent houses: Ferniehirst Castle; Monteviot house; Newbattle Abbey; and Blickling Hall, near Edinburgh. The new Lord Lothian chose Blickling as his primary residence. In addition to farmland from whose tenants he received rent, he inherited the Lothian Coal Company, which stayed in business through the Great Depression. To pay death duties, however, he had to sell most of the art and book collections that came with Blickling Hall. The sale preserved the estate, leaving him a wealthy man. At the same time, there were compensations. Now a member of the peerage, he possessed a seat in the House of Lords, which afforded him a platform to express his views and possibly the means of giving them effect. Billington, 100; Butler, Lord Lothian, 144-158.

¹⁵⁶ Billington, 102; Heyck, 181. For further information about the Labour split and the National Government, see R.J.Q. Adams, British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Stuart Ball, Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The Crisis of 1929-1931 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald (London: Cape, 1977); Robert Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931 (London: Macmillan, 1967); Andrew Thorpe,

include a prominent Liberal peer in the Cabinet, but not as the head of a major department. Lord Lothian agreed to accept such a role as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a cabinet-level office that oversaw the estates of the King. In the general election of 27 October 1931, however, the Liberal and Labour parties lost most of their seats. MacDonald reconstituted the National Government, which now depended upon a Conservative majority. Lothian stepped down, but quickly agreed to accept appointment as undersecretary to the Conservative Sir Samuel Hoare, the new secretary of state for India.¹⁵⁷ His service as undersecretary ended abruptly, however, when he resigned in September 1932 to protest the government's decision to implement Imperial Preference.¹⁵⁸

Over the course of the 1930s, therefore, Lothian focused on his continuing responsibilities as the secretary of the Rhodes Trust. As the international situation began to deteriorate, Lothian became increasingly concerned with matters of security and the prospect, however initially remote, of war. His growing concerns about war, particularly in the absence of the United States from any meaningful collective security arrangement, ultimately led Lothian into the most notorious episode of his career, his support for the appeasement of Nazi Germany.¹⁵⁹

The British General Election of 1931 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Philip Williamsom, National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁵⁷ For Lothian's service as undersecretary of state for India, see Billington 102-112; Butler, Lord Lothian, 164-168. In this capacity, he chaired a committee, authorized by the Round Table Conference, which recommended giving Indians a broader franchise. He also played a key role later in persuading moderates in Britain and India to support the 1935 India Act.

¹⁵⁸ In August 1932, under pressure from Conservatives, the MacDonald government negotiated a system of Imperial Preference at the Ottawa Conference. Lothian had supported the Liberal decision to remain in the government following the British adoption of import duties in January 1932, which reversed the historic British policy of free trade; but the Ottawa agreements fixed tariff rates for five years, which in his view risked breaking up the Empire. Therefore, on 28 September 1932, Lothian resigned from the National Government, along with Sir Herbert Samuel and half of the Liberal MPs. Billington 109-110.

¹⁵⁹ For further information on appeasement, see R.J.Q. Adams, British Appeasement and the Origins of World War II (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994); Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966); Frank McDonough, Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); and William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930s (London: Edward Arnold, Inc., 1977).

During the early 1930s, Lothian became sufficiently skeptical of the League of Nations that he advocated a British withdrawal, not merely from the League, but from any further commitments to the continent as well. As early as 1931, for example, he wrote that, should the forthcoming European disarmament conference break down, Britain should withdraw from European affairs altogether and consider as nonbinding any obligation to participate in a war in Europe.¹⁶⁰ League sanctions against nations defined as aggressors would, he feared, prove ineffective. Lothian effectively endorsed the viewpoint of his friend, *The Round Table*'s editor John Dove, that Britain should avoid commitment to any side in Europe, and above all should deliberately "take the line most likely to bring America in in the hour of need, and to enable us even before then to co-operate."¹⁶¹ Speaking in 1934 at Chatham House, Lothian suggested that Britain restrict its European commitments to a guarantee of French and Belgian security, and otherwise withdraw from the European system, a position he reiterated in another address in April 1936,¹⁶² and in a lengthy personal letter of 3 June 1936 to foreign secretary Anthony Eden.¹⁶³ In 1937, he told the House of Lords that Britain should emulate the American policy of "armed neutrality," and that the only way to prevent another world war would be "if both the United States and Great Britain remained outside any alliance system either in Europe or in the Far East."¹⁶⁴

Lothian remained committed, above all else, to closer Anglo-American cooperation and friendship. As the Depression deepened in the 1930s, Lothian tried privately to work for ways to end it, primarily in partnership with the United States. In January 1933, President-elect Franklin Roosevelt agreed to meet with MacDonald in Washington to discuss the issue of British war debts. In order to prepare for the prime minister's visit, Lothian made a three-week trip to the United States in January, during which he tried to persuade influential Americans, including Colonel House, of the need to cancel

¹⁶⁰ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 122; Roberts, 116.

¹⁶¹ Roberts, 116-117.

¹⁶² Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 197-200; 213-217; Roberts, 117.

¹⁶³ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 354-362.

¹⁶⁴ Roberts, 117.

Allied war debts. When MacDonald proved reluctant to visit Washington in the absence of some prior agreement over how to resolve the question of debts, Lothian characteristically urged preliminary meetings at a lower level before bringing the two leaders together. In a memorandum to British officials, Lothian again noted that the key is educating the Americans: "Public opinion in the U.S.A. is still so uneducated that the new Congress cannot be expected to ratify an agreement transferring permanently a burden of some \$250,000,000 a year to the backs of American taxpayers." In an *Observer* article of 19 February 1933, he argued that lower tariffs and the remission of debts were essential to reviving the global trade on which America's own resources depended.¹⁶⁵ Later, in 1937, moreover, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Royal Institute of International Affairs each established subgroups on war debts and trade practices that exchanged highly confidential memoranda and other documents across the Atlantic and commented on their proposals and analyses. Lothian joined the war debts subgroup. This group sought a settlement of British war debts (on which Britain had defaulted in 1933) that the British could afford and Americans would accept. Lothian's principal concern was to make such proposals politically acceptable in both the United States and Britain. He suggested that, in the interests of improving Anglo-American relations, Britain resume at least token payments on its debt.¹⁶⁶

In addition to searching for ways to effect economic cooperation, Lothian also sought to encourage greater Anglo-American cooperation with respect to military security. In the June 1930 *Round Table*, he argued that if Britain were forced to choose between "a Europe drifting back to the balance of power on the one hand, and the United States on the other, she will inevitably choose the latter."¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Lothian continued to call upon the United States, through articles, lectures, and correspondence, to become more active in global affairs -- to join, or at least be regularly represented at, the League of

¹⁶⁵ Billington, 113; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 190-191. Lothian's memorandum obtained the approval of Stanley Baldwin and two leading civil servants, Sir Warren Fisher, permanent secretary of the treasury, and Sir Maurice Hankey, the cabinet secretary. At the same time, however, the chancellor of the exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, preferred to risk a summit meeting in the hope of avoiding a breakdown. Consequently, MacDonald left for Washington in April, and his talks with the president were inconclusive.

¹⁶⁶ Roberts, 119-120.

¹⁶⁷ Billington, 114.

Nations, and to support efforts at collective security. In a letter to Colonel House, of 11 April 1933, he warned that much of Europe was drifting toward reaction and dictatorship. In part, Lothian reminded House, this was due to Washington's decision not to join the League of Nations. The American decision deprived the states of Europe of a "neutral and moderating influence," and forced France, deprived of the security of an Anglo-American promise of protection, to seek cooperation in a system of military alliances with the Little Entente, and thus making virtually impossible the "effective scaling down of reparations" that was originally contemplated. The only solution was that the United States must become active in world affairs:

. . . it reinforces what I am completely convinced of to-day, that unless the United States comes right forward into international affairs now, you will in the next year or two have a further triumph for reaction, a further war, with the Liberal nations of 1919 not triumphant but confronted with a more formidable combination than that which they had to meet in 1914.¹⁶⁸

Most important, Lothian worked to avert an Anglo-Japanese agreement in 1934 that, he feared, would have antagonized the United States government. In the spring and summer of 1934, as British policymakers began to recognize Germany as a significant potential threat, many leading politicians and civil servants -- most notably Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, Sir Warren Fisher, permanent under-secretary at the Treasury, and Sir Robert Vansittart -- supported an Anglo-Japanese naval agreement.¹⁶⁹ The advocates of refashioning the old Anglo-Japanese alliance poured scorn on the United States. Chamberlain said that "we ought to know by this time that USA will give us no undertaking to resist by force any action by Japan, short of an attack on Hawaii and Honolulu." Fisher, who was reported to "hate" the Americans as much as Vansittart "hated" the Germans, remarked that the Americans "are no use to use, ,but make use of us – to our detriment – vis-à-vis Japan." Vansittart added: "I still desire as much as ever, that we shall get on well with this

¹⁶⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 191-192.

¹⁶⁹ Rose, The Cliveden Set, 140-141; Donald C. Watt, Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 91-95.

untrustworthy race . . . [but] we shall never get very far; they will always let us down.” He complained that the American public and Congress were “too stupid, and, above all, too self-righteous. . . . In ageing I have lost my wind for running after the United States Government. It is a futile paper chase.”¹⁷⁰ In response, a political alliance, consisting of *The Times* and *Observer* newspapers, Lothian, and General Jan Christian Smuts, emerged in opposition to any rapprochement with Japan.¹⁷¹ Lothian, as part of his effort to nudge Washington, obtained an interview with Roosevelt during his visit to Washington in October 1934. In response to a Japanese naval buildup,¹⁷² he asserted, Britain could increase its fleet at Singapore, form a common front with the United States, or seek a new agreement with Japan; the first option, however, was too expensive, and the third was undesirable. Roosevelt sidestepped Lothian by arguing that, even if he agreed informally to support London against Tokyo, his successor might not; the United States, therefore, could not guarantee British security in the Pacific. In the end, the president told Lothian to rely on the fact “that our ideals and interests [are] fundamentally the same.” “I doubt whether that is enough,” Lothian responded.¹⁷³

Lothian’s interview with Roosevelt drew some criticism in the Foreign Office, particularly among those civil servants who detested his “amateur meddling” or who did not share Lothian’s enthusiasm for the United States. Sir Robert Vansittart, permanent under-secretary in the Foreign Office, wrote that “Lord Lothian told me recently and repeatedly that we had a ‘tiger in the White House’ who ‘would do our fighting for us in the Far East.’” Vansittart dismissed Lothian’s assurances as nonsense and replied that there was not a tiger in the White House, but a “rabbit in the hutch.”¹⁷⁴ A clerk in the Far Eastern

¹⁷⁰ Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 141; Rose, *Vansittart*, 126-127.

¹⁷¹ Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 140-141; Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, 91-95.

¹⁷² Japan had chafed under the 5-5-3 ratio in capital ships that the 1922 and 1930 naval agreements had imposed respectively on Britain, the United States, and Japan. Tokyo demanded parity with Washington and London when the 1930 agreement expired in 1936.

¹⁷³ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 200-201; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 140-142; Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, 95-96. Lothian noted, perhaps with unintended irony, that the president’s position “was fundamentally not unlike the attitude which Great Britain takes to France.” Billington, 115.

¹⁷⁴ Billington, 116-117; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 142.

Department, R. Allen, wrote that “Lord Lothian, to say the least of it, does not seem to have converted the president to his ‘front line’ views.” C. W. Price, a clerk in the Dominions Office, criticized Lothian because he did not mention a fourth alternative, a joint non-aggression pact between Washington, London, and Tokyo, “which as a matter of fact is that now being explored.”¹⁷⁵ British officials indeed began separate talks with the Japanese in late October 1934. Reports began appearing in the press that Britain and Japan were exploring a three-way pact, by which Japan would obtain naval parity but would not actually build up to this level. On 11 November 1934, Roosevelt warned Wilmot Lewis, the *Times* correspondent in Washington, of his opposition to any such agreement and to any separate Anglo-Japanese deal. The next week, on 18 November, following the lead of General Smuts,¹⁷⁶ Lothian published an article in *The Observer*, in which he opposed any concessions to Japan that might antagonize the United States. William Phillips, the American undersecretary of state, conveyed Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s approval of Lothian’s article. As a result, the effort to achieve an agreement with Japan gradually petered out. As a matter of fact, however, while Lothian, Smuts, and the Round Table took credit for killing the “pro-Japanese movement,” powerful forces in the government had become hesitant about coming to any accommodation with Japan; besides, the Japanese never seriously responded to London’s overtures.¹⁷⁷

British anxieties regarding both Japan and Germany nevertheless continued to escalate. In a letter of 14 December 1934, Smuts wrote Lothian that it was not just the Pacific but Europe that needed to be addressed: “We *must* prevent a Japanese-German combination which will be fatal. And this can only be done by ceasing to treat Germany as a pariah.”¹⁷⁸ It was within this context that Lothian became

¹⁷⁵ Billington, 115-116.

¹⁷⁶ On 13 November 1934, Smuts delivered a powerful address at Chatham House, in which he claimed that any course other than cooperation between Washington and London “would mean building our Commonwealth policy on quicksands, and placing the future of this group at the mercy of incalculable hazards.” Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 143; Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, 96-97.

¹⁷⁷ Billington, 116; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 143; Watt, 98.

¹⁷⁸ Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 143; Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, 99.

associated with the appeasement of Nazi Germany in the mid-to-late 1930s. In contrast to his hard line approach with Japan, Lothian supported a more conciliatory approach to Germany. Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, Lothian was indeed a consistent advocate of the revision of the Treaty of Versailles and accommodation with Germany.

Lothian advocated appeasement for a number of reasons. One of the most fundamental explanations was undoubtedly his passionate conviction that the Allied treatment of Germany, at the Paris Peace Conference and particularly in the Treaty of Versailles, had been excessively vindictive and unjust. In certain respects, this might have been the result of a sense of guilt. In 1919, adhering to the conventional wisdom that Germany was responsible for the war, Lothian approved a severe peace and personally drafted the uncompromising reply to the German delegates. He believed, however, that the more discriminating items would be modified in time. Article XIX of the League Covenant, for example, provided for the reconsideration of treaties that had become inapplicable. As time passed and they were not modified as he thought they should be, Lothian came more and more to feel that the Germans were being denied justice, first in the form of equality of armaments, then in the form of an economic sphere of influence in Central Europe. The principal obstacle to the realization of justice for Germany, he long maintained, was the attitude of the French. Intellectually, Lothian sympathized with the French demand for security, and in fact he blamed the American and British governments for having withdrawn from their guarantee of assistance. Nevertheless, in their respective approaches to collective security, he denounced the French for their uncompromising insistence on harsh sanctions, while the British emphasized “conference and goodwill, pacific procedure and disarmament.” He wrote that the source of the present difficulty is that “the Germans have got a case, but nobody is really willing to make the concessions necessary to meet their claims.”¹⁷⁹

This is not to say that he excused Nazi excesses. Lothian was under no illusions about the character of the Nazi regime. He was quite aware through his Christian Science associates and the

¹⁷⁹ DNB, 419; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 198-199, 235-236; Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, *The Appeasers* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 23, 30; Turner, 13.

Rhodes Trust that the Nazis were belligerent, repressive, and racist.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Lothian advocated treating the Germans with equality, particularly with respect to armaments. The problem was that the Allies still treated Germany as a defeated subservient state, almost fifteen years after the war. For example, after finally conceding the principle of parity in land forces with Germany, the Allies in October 1933 asked Germany to accept an inferior position for the next four years. When Hitler responded by withdrawing from the League of Nations, Lothian defended the German action. In a letter to *The Times* on 15 November, he wrote that France and Germany both had legitimate security needs: “In these circumstances, it is essential that we should understand . . . both sides, however much we may dislike the Nazi regime.”¹⁸¹ In the December 1933 *Round Table*, he argued that the principal German grievance was military inferiority: “Either Germany’s neighbours . . . must bring their armaments down, or Germany’s will come up.” In advocating a position of fairness with Germany, Lothian urged the former Allies to emulate the diplomats at the Congress of Vienna:

It was one of the supreme merits of the diplomacy of Castlereagh and Wellington that they did not make the mistake of trying to ‘repress’ France after the Napoleonic wars. And the best way to help restore a more liberal regime in Germany is to remove the legitimate grievances by the exploitation of which the Nazis have so largely risen to power.¹⁸²

In other words, Germany simply wanted a peace for Germany commensurate with its strength and quality. Consequently, although he was quite aware of the repressive features of the Nazi regime, Lothian chose to blame these upon the treatment defeated Germany had endured since 1919.¹⁸³ Ultimately, he believed

¹⁸⁰ The Rhodes Trustees reestablished two Scholarships for Germany in 1929 and had appointed a committee of distinguished Germans and former German Scholars to make nominations. The Nazis, however, objected to one member, Professor Albrecht Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, who was Jewish. Not surprisingly or coincidentally, in October 1933, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy lost his chair at the University of Hamburg. Similarly, the following January, one of the two German Rhodes Scholars for 1931 found himself unable to find employment at home because his grandmother was Jewish. In July 1934, the Gestapo arrested German Rhodes committee member Adolf Morsbach, director of the German Academic Exchange Service, whose office handled applications for Scholarships. Billington, 117-118; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 137.

¹⁸¹ Billington, 114-115.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 115.

¹⁸³ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 197; 205-207; Gilbert and Gott, 53; Roberts, 117-118.

that if the Germans could be compelled to sit down with the British in conference, “we could influence them, I think, to moderate the brutality of their practice.”¹⁸⁴

There were, however, other considerations that drove Lothian toward appeasement. He favored an accommodation with Germany in part due to his own long standing fear of Bolshevism. He was greatly impressed that Hitler was “profoundly occupied with Russia” as a problem of foreign policy. In May 1935, the American ambassador in Berlin, William E. Dodd, who once noted that Lothian “seemed to be more a Fascist than any other Englishman I have met,” accused Lothian of trying to turn Nazi Germany against Soviet Russia: “That this might lead to a war between Russian and Germany does not seem to disturb him seriously. In fact, he seems to feel this would be a good solution.” In July 1936, Lothian himself wrote to the Duchess of Atholl, “I am not sure that Russia is not more dangerous than Germany,” and in a November 1937 letter to James L. Garvin, he hoped that Germany would get “a free hand for herself in dealing with Russia.”¹⁸⁵

An equally powerful consideration that led Lothian to appeasement was his relentless desire to effect closer relations between Britain and the United States. The fundamental and guiding principle of his commitment to appeasement was his conviction that Britain absolutely had to remain out of a war that it could not win, or that it could win only with substantial external assistance; and it was clear that, in any major conflict, Britain could not hope to prevail unless it had the assistance of the United States. Lothian in fact never made any real effort to address German grievances until Germany became strong enough to pose a challenge to British power. His efforts to avert war by reaching some kind of understanding with Hitler, by offering Germany colonies in Africa, for example, arguably arose not so much from his belief that the postwar settlement had unfairly disadvantaged Germany, but from a clear and sober calculation that, without American support and assistance, Britain was too weak to oppose Germany alone.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Gilbert and Gott, 96.

¹⁸⁵ Billington, 129-130; Gilbert and Gott, 53-54; Roberts, 119.

¹⁸⁶ Roberts, 118-119.

Furthermore, over the course of the 1930s, Lothian grew more committed to the idea that Britain should disengage from the continent in large part because of his continuing hope of drawing the United States out of its isolation. In his Chatham House address of 2 April 1936, following the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, he observed that an alliance between the United States and the British Empire would have a preponderance of naval power in the world and would be “a real nucleus round which a League of democratic nations could exist in security.” Two obstacles, however, stood in the way of such a grouping: commitments to Europe that the United States was unwilling to make, and the fact that the United States “has yet to realise . . . that her own security and peace may be made more certain by partial than by total isolation.” In his 3 June 1936 letter to the new foreign secretary Anthony Eden, Lothian urged a policy of British abstention from the continent in order to make an Anglo-American partnership more attractive to the United States. Although he received no encouragement from Americans, it appears clear that he was willing to risk allowing Germany to grow stronger while he waited for the United States to assume a greater role in the world.¹⁸⁷

Lothian had his first significant meetings with Nazi leaders on a visit to Berlin in late January 1935. Although he went to Berlin to meet with the German Rhodes committee, the German embassy in London urged that Lothian be given full access to Nazi leaders. Consequently, he met with future Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Defense Minister Werner Blomberg, Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess, and Dr. Albrecht Haushofer of the German Foreign Ministry.¹⁸⁸ Most significant, Lothian met with Adolf Hitler at noon on Tuesday, 29 January 1935.¹⁸⁹ The interview was primarily a monologue by the Führer, who obsessed on the Russian menace. Hitler demanded a three-way agreement that treated Germany, France, and Britain as military equals. In response, Lothian asked if Germany would sign a general agreement to stabilize Europe for ten years. Specifically, Lothian raised three questions:

¹⁸⁷ Billington, 123-124; Butler, Lord Lothian, 214-215, 354-362.

¹⁸⁸ Billington, 118, 216; Butler, Lord Lothian, 202.

¹⁸⁹ For the text of Lothian’s interview with Hitler, see Butler, Lord Lothian, 330-337.

Lothian: (1) Germany would never endeavor to settle the Polish question except by peaceful means, as in the Polish Treaty.

Hitler: Certainly, I agree.

Lothian: (2) Frontiers with France settled. No more resort to force here.

Hitler: Certainly. Most absolutely correct.

Lothian: (3) No intention of settling Austrian question by force, although this did not rule out eventually changing the situation by a free plebiscite.

Hitler (passionately): Force absolutely ruled out.

When Hitler expressed the hope that Germany and Britain could together keep the peace, Lothian replied that Cecil Rhodes had envisioned a partnership between Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, but that Germany's intentions were still unclear. He further expressed the hope that meetings such as this one would help to remove misunderstanding. Hitler thanked Lothian for his kindness.¹⁹⁰

Lothian, highly impressed, returned to London on 30 January and reported his meeting to the foreign secretary, Sir John Simon. He pronounced himself convinced that "Germany does not want war and is prepared to renounce it absolutely . . . provided she is given real equality." Consequently, he urged direct talks with Germany on the grounds that Berlin wanted to be an equal party to arms negotiations and not just be dictated terms from Paris and London. Lothian asserted that concessions would eventually moderate the nature of the regime, and that Hitler would behave more decently if his reasonable demands were met, which included the ending of the punitive clauses of the treaty, the assimilation of German-speaking areas into Germany where plebiscites showed themselves in favor, and the creation of "a sort of Ottawa economic mitteleuropa."¹⁹¹ Lothian also wrote two articles for *The Times*, on 31 January and 1 February 1935, in which he argued that a ten-year peace agreement between all European powers was possible if Germany was treated as an equal. Lothian unmistakably was charmed by the Führer: "He seemed to me to have the qualities of a prophet, which in this country is a term of respect . . . He is indeed the prophet of the new Germany." He confidently told Eden that, if appropriate concessions were made to Germany, there was "a good chance of the 25 years peace of which Hitler spoke."¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Billington, 118-119; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 202-204, 336; Gilbert and Gott, 52.

¹⁹¹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 203; DNB, 419; Gilbert and Gott, 52; Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, 127-128.

¹⁹² Billington, 119; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 236, 236, 354-362; Gilbert and Gott, 42; Roberts, 118.

Lothian's initiatives, however, were not altogether welcomed in all quarters. Many in the Foreign Office frankly thought that Lothian had been suckered. For example, Sir Robert Vansittart described Lothian's unshakable faith in the sincerity of the German attitude as "unpardonable."¹⁹³ Ralph Wigram, head of the Central European department in the Foreign Office, noted that the Germans wanted approval of their rearmament in return for guarantees that they had already given in the Locarno treaties and in the German-Polish non-aggression pact of 1934. He wrote: "What a 'marché des dupes,' and how it recalls the similar methods of duplicity which our state papers show that Germany practised towards us before the war."¹⁹⁴ Others, such as Leonard Montefiore, a British Jewish leader, denounced Lothian's defense of the Nazi regime.

Lothian countered his opponents by arguing that Nazi excesses and brutality could be moderated by treating Germany with respect:

In some degree the brutality of National Socialism is the reaction to the treatment given to Germany herself since the war. I believe the best way of restoring reasonable rights to the Jews in Germany is not to counter hate with hate but to undermine the source of the evil aspects of National Socialism by giving Germany her rightful place in Europe.¹⁹⁵

At the same time, however, Lothian clearly understood the precarious nature of Anglo-German relations. During the spring of 1935, for example, in response to the aggravation of international tensions precipitated by German rearmament,¹⁹⁶ Lothian warned Ribbentrop on two separate occasions that British opinion was shifting against Germany. Similarly, in late June 1935, Lothian tried to impress upon Ribbentrop how deeply the brutality of the Nazi regime was precluding closer Anglo-German relations.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Vansittart, 475.

¹⁹⁴ Billington, 119-120.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 120.

¹⁹⁶ On 4 March 1935, the British government cited German rearmament to justify the initiation of its own modest rearmament. The French then extended their period of military conscription from one to two years. In response, Germany announced on 9 March 1935 the existence of its air force, the Luftwaffe, which was prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles. A week later, on 16 March 1935, Hitler instituted conscription and enlarged the standing Germany army from one hundred thousand to half a million men. In response, on 2 May 1935, France and the Soviet Union signed a pact of mutual assistance.

¹⁹⁷ Billington, 121.

As the Nazi regime grew more and more violent and as its armed forces grew stronger, Lothian began privately to air reservations. He attempted to intercede on behalf of victims of Nazi persecution and he accepted the chairmanship of the German Refugees Assistance Fund, an umbrella organization of groups that assisted victims of the regime to emigrate. He came to rely more and more on religious faith to sustain his hope of peace with Germany. For example, during his last meeting with Hitler in 1937, Lothian protested the Nazi harassment of Christian Scientists and the Nazi edict of December 1936 banning Christian Science activity in Germany. When the ban ended after his return home, Lothian credited spiritual effort with the change: "Clearly everybody concerned had done good metaphysical work." In July 1935, however, Lothian declined to sign a public statement denouncing Nazi brutality, "not because I do not sympathise with it but because . . . to sign it would lessen any influence I have for the very purpose you have in view." As such initiatives and entreaties to Berlin typically met with silence, Lothian saw little point in persisting with them: "I do not believe that individual protests . . . will have any effect except to salve our consciences," he wrote to Lord Clifford Allen in October 1935.¹⁹⁸

While privately, he began to betray signs of lassitude, publicly, Lothian persisted in appeasement of Germany in the belief that justice demanded removing the conditions imposed on Germany in 1919. In an address to Chatham House on 2 April 1936, he defended the German remilitarization of the Rhineland as a response to a Franco-Russian pact of mutual assistance, ratified on 28 February 1936.¹⁹⁹ After all, the Germans were, he was widely reported to have said, only occupying "their own back garden."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Billington, 121-122; Butler, Lord Lothian, 206; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 187.

¹⁹⁹ On 7 March 1936, German troops reoccupied the Rhineland, in violation of the 1925 Locarno treaties that prohibited Germany from remilitarizing the area. Hitler cited the French ratification of the Franco-Russian pact on 28 February to justify his move. Ostensibly to soften the blow, however, he proposed a 25-year peace pact. The Rhineland crisis broke as Lothian hosted a number of friends over the weekend of 7-8 March 1936 at Blickling. The guest list included Lord and Lady Astor and Thomas Jones, a confidant of Stanley Baldwin, who had replaced MacDonald as prime minister in June 1935. The group, largely at Jones's instigation, resolved themselves into a "Shadow Cabinet" and urged Baldwin to welcome Hitler's peace proposal "wholeheartedly" and to treat the reoccupation as an "assertion . . . of recovered statues of equality and not as [an] act of aggression." Jones telephoned the group's conclusions to Baldwin the next morning. Billington, 122-123; Thomas Jones, A Diary With Letters, 1931-1950 (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1954), 179-182, entry for 8 March 1936.

²⁰⁰ Butler, Lord Lothian, 212-213; DNB, 420; Gilbert and Gott, 55.

Although Lothian remained focused on trying to moderate German policy while facilitating conciliation, his doubts nevertheless grew. On 14 July 1936, he was the keynote speaker at a London dinner of the Anglo-German Fellowship, an elite social group with members in both countries. Before an audience of Nazi and British dignitaries, he declared:

Germany now has both equality and strength. Reparations have gone. Part V [the military clauses] of the Treaty of Versailles has gone. The demilitarization of the Rhineland has gone, and the sooner that recovery of her natural right of self-defence is accepted without further discussion the better. [But] if Britain makes this contribution to appeasement . . . Germany has also her contribution to make. Let me speak plainly. There are aspects of the internal policy of the National Socialist State which are a serious obstacle to the establishment of cordial relations between the British and the German people. Everyone knows what they are. And the speed and extent of Germany's rearmament has caused a not unnatural anxiety as to the ultimate intentions of German policy.

Lothian called on Britain, therefore, to rearm, declaring that “whether for defense or in negotiation we must play our cards from strength and not from weakness.”²⁰¹

Lothian met with Hitler a second time on 4 May 1937, during which he called attention to a recent speech by Anthony Eden, in which the foreign secretary seemed to imply that eastern Europe was not a British interest.²⁰² Lothian suggested that Germany recognize the independence of its smaller eastern neighbors in return for economic and political ties similar to those Britain had with its Dominions. Hitler, however, was evasive.²⁰³ Upon his return to Britain, Lothian sent a memorandum and transcripts of his interview with Hitler to Chamberlain, Eden, Jan Christian Smuts, Roosevelt, and, to the annoyance

²⁰¹ Billington, 124.

²⁰² Gilbert and Gott, 52. On 20 November 1936, in an address at Leamington, Eden endorsed British rearmament and stated that Britain would go to war to defend the British Empire, the Low Countries, and its treaty allies of Egypt and Iraq. Eden pointedly did not commit Britain to defend eastern Europe, however. Whatever the foreign secretary's intentions, Lothian took his words to suggest that Britain had lesser interest in countries beyond the ones Eden mentioned by name. Billington, 127.

²⁰³ Billington, 127-128. For a transcript of Lothian's 1937 interview with Hitler, as well as interviews with Reich Air Minister Hermann Göring, and Reichsbank Chairman Hjalmar Schacht, see Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 337-345. The two men seemed to have at least one area of genuine rapport. Lothian told the Chancellor that he considered the chief obstacle to a solution over Austria to be, not Britain, but Mussolini and the Pope. “The Pope, certainly,” said Hitler. The two men were amused -- Lothian, the former Catholic and Hitler, whose parents had needed a Catholic dispensation in order to marry. Lothian noted in his report that, “After this diversion the atmosphere became considerably lighter, and there were smiles all round.” Gilbert and Gott, 53.

of the Foreign Office, to the Dominion prime ministers, presently in London for the Coronation of King George VI. He reported that, while the situation was “both more dangerous and more soluble than he supposed,” German demands for union with Austria and a free hand in Eastern Europe were not unreasonable. They amounted to “adjustments” in Eastern Europe, including union with Austria and favorable treatment for German minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as economic and colonial arrangements that would assure to Germany a steadily rising standard of living for its people.²⁰⁴

Over the late 1930s, Lothian became increasingly uneasy with the appeasement policy. In response to the *Anschluss* of 13 March 1938, Lothian again defended German actions as being consistent with the principle of national self-determination. In a 14 March letter to *The Times*, he declared that “at long last it ends the disastrous period when the League of Nations Powers attempted . . . to deny to the Germans, who were certainly not solely responsible for the Great War, their national unity.” At long last, he wrote, “the wrong done to Germany” had been corrected. At the same time, however, while Lothian described the *Anschluss* as a legitimate grievance that needed to be resolved, he expressed concerns that Germany might go beyond what was “legitimate.”²⁰⁵ He therefore argued that the Allies needed to prepare for conflict. He stressed that remaining issues could now be negotiated, but “only if we and the other democracies show not only physical strength but moral discipline and resolution.” Therefore, he told the House of Lords in the spring of 1938, some kind of national service was necessary. Moreover, the government’s new programme for air expansion was quite inadequate. Britain needed parity in the air, or conscription, and should set up a Ministry of Supply. In late May 1938, when the threat of war became real,²⁰⁶ Lord Halifax, who replaced Eden as foreign secretary in early 1938, asked Lothian to write a firm but conciliatory letter to *The Times* that would be read in Berlin. Lothian sent a draft but

²⁰⁴ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 217-219; Gilbert and Gott, 100; Roberts, 118.

²⁰⁵ Billington, 133-134; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 222-223; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 187.

²⁰⁶ On 24 April 1938, leaders of the three million Germans in the Sudetenland demanded autonomy. On 19 May, German troops were rumored to be massing on the Czech frontier in support of this demand. France and Russia affirmed their alliances with Prague, and on 20 May, Lord Halifax warned Ribbentrop that Britain would go to war if Germany invaded.

wrote to the foreign secretary that the time for such a letter had passed: “I confess that I do not think it will have any modifying effect in high quarters in Berlin because what has annoyed them is that we took action, wittingly or unwittingly, which made them realize that we had to be counted in on the other side in the event of resort to violence.”²⁰⁷

The Munich crisis marked the beginning of a turning point for Lothian.²⁰⁸ He was out of the country when the crisis broke in September 1938.²⁰⁹ Although he tended to blame the Czechs themselves, as tools of the French, for the growing tensions, Lothian urged Halifax to warn Hitler that if Germany invades Czechoslovakia, “it means war.” Nevertheless, he ultimately shared the widespread relief that Britain and France had averted war by making concessions to Hitler at Munich.²¹⁰ Over the next several months, however, he began truly to appreciate the Nazi danger. After his return to London in October, he learned of Hitler’s bullying of Chamberlain in Munich. More chilling, however, on the night of 9-10 November 1938, a nationwide pogrom erupted in Germany against the country’s remaining Jews.²¹¹ In the *Observer*, of 20 November 1938, Lothian called for Allied firmness:

Will [Germany, Italy, and Japan] . . . decide to be content with the new situation they have created? Or will they continue, alone or together, to try to alter the status quo by mobilizing overwhelming superiority at particular points or with greater audacity decide to challenge that predominance in the oceanic world which the democratic Powers still unquestioningly possess, and which is the condition on which alone free institutions and democracy can survive? The answer will depend on whether the democratic Powers can oppose to such plans of expansion a sufficient force to make them unattainable.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Billington, 133-134; Butler, Lord Lothian, 223; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 187.

²⁰⁸ For further information on Munich and Britain’s reaction, see Colin Brooks, Can Chamberlain Save Britain? The Lesson Of Munich (Brooks Press, 2007); Edward Lee Henson, Britain, America and the Month of Munich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); Clement Liebovitz, In Our Time: The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998.); Igor Lukes, The Munich Crisis, 1938: Prelude to World War II (Frank Cass and Company, 1999); and Telford Taylor, Munich: The Price of Peace (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979).

²⁰⁹ Lothian had accepted the invitation of his friend Lionel Curtis to attend a Commonwealth foreign policy conference in Sydney, Australia from 3-17 September 1938 to debate.

²¹⁰ Billington, 134; Butler, Lord Lothian, 214, 226; Roberts, 123; Rose, The Cliveden Set 188-191, 194.

²¹¹ Billington, 134; Butler, Lord Lothian, 225-226; Roberts, 118.

²¹² Billington, 134-135, 224. Lothian entitled his article, “Britain Awake!” no doubt sarcastically adopting the Nazi slogan, “Deutschland Erwache!” [Germany Awake].

In December 1938, Lothian declined a renewed invitation to travel to Germany for another Anglo-German discussion, which had been planned for the spring, but interrupted by the *Anschluss*.²¹³

The German invasion of Bohemia and Moravia, and the final German dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, simply confirmed what Lothian began to realize in September 1938; the Nazi regime was determined to wage war. The invasion of non-German territory indeed removed all possible doubts as to German ambitions. In the meantime, he read, for the first time, the unexpurgated edition of *Mein Kampf*.²¹⁴ Judging from his words, he underwent a transforming experience. In a letter to Thomas Lamont, of J.P. Morgan and Company, Lothian wrote that Hitler's attack on the remainder of Czechoslovakia was "very serious":

Up till then it was possible to believe that Germany was only concerned with recovery of what might be called the normal rights of a great power, but it now seems clear that Hitler is in effect a fanatical gangster who will stop at nothing in order to beat down all possibility of resistance anywhere to his will. The rapid consolidation of the democracies so that he cannot dominate the West because its resources are effectively organised to prevent it is the vital need of the hour.²¹⁵

On 12 April 1939, furthermore, he denounced Hitler in the House of Lords:

One of Herr Hitler's great advantages has been that, for very long, what he sought a great many people all over the world felt was not unreasonable, whatever they may have thought of his methods. But that justification has completely and absolutely disappeared in the last three months . . . Everything that has happened since then proves that what we are confronted with is the most ruthless use of the most ruthless power to remake the world according to plans which are set forth in *Mein Kampf*.

Lothian now endorsed the "Grand Alliance" of nations that Winston Churchill had proposed a year earlier and described the Anglo-French alliance with the Soviet Union now "absolutely vital." He added, most

²¹³ Amy Buller, warden of women students at the University of Liverpool, who had served as a secretary of the Student Christian Movement in Britain, asked Lothian to join another Anglo-German discussion. "We may need to arm sufficiently to frighten the Nazi gangsters . . . but if we could also give a lead in showing some real belief in moral and spiritual value . . . we could call into play far more powerful forces in Germany than all of their boasted strength and unity." In declining the invitation, Lothian replied: "I am sure now that Germany has attained her essential desires . . . the next stage is to convince the gangsters that they cannot get more by the methods they have hitherto employed." National Archives of Scotland [hereafter cited as NAS], GD40/17/36974-75, Lothian to Buller, 13 December 1938; Billington, 135.

²¹⁴ Billington, 136; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 216-217, 227-228; Roberts, 118; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 193-194.

²¹⁵ NAS, GD40/17/383/416, Lothian to Lamont, 29 March 1939.

likely with Franklin Roosevelt in mind, that to merit the support of the Dominions and the United States, “it is absolutely essential that we should prove to the world that we are capable of giving an effective resistance to aggression.”²¹⁶ He wrote Aga Khan that it would be necessary to resist Hitler with force: “the organization of resistance to Hitler is the necessary preliminary to a real settlement. I have recently studied the unexpurgated edition of ‘*Mein Kampf*’ and it is quite clear that his mind is fundamentally strategic.”²¹⁷ He also wrote Geoffrey Dawson, and asked him to dispel the “widespread suspicion that *The Times* [is] ready to surrender Danzig.” Lothian’s position indeed represented a remarkable volte-face from the views he had previously held. Very few, after all, had championed the pro-appeasement spirit more fervently and campaigned more strenuously on its behalf. Although he still believed that Germany had been grievously wronged by Versailles, Lothian believed that Hitler’s obliteration of Czech independence meant that there could be no more concessions and no more surrendering to blackmail.²¹⁸

Until the end of his life, Lothian had to answer for his commitment to appeasement and his confidence in Hitler. He faced the criticism, however, openly and frankly. When he paid a brief visit to the United States over the winter 1938-1939, Lothian met with American leaders, including Roosevelt, in order to gauge American opinion in the wake of Munich. Among others, he met with his old friend Felix Frankfurter. “I had a most intimate talk with Lothian,” Frankfurter briefed Roosevelt, and “[he] is now as hot against Hitler as any of us, and said that Chamberlain now knows that his ‘appeasement’ policy is a complete flop as to Hitler.”²¹⁹ Similarly, shortly after assuming control of the British Embassy in the late summer of 1939, he “admitted frankly” to Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, who became his personal assistant in Washington, that “up to Hitler’s occupation of Prague, with its flagrant flouting of the Munich Agreement, he had believed it to be possible that Germany was only concerned with treaty revision and

²¹⁶ Billington, 136; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 195.

²¹⁷ NAS, GD40/17/388/14-16, Lothian to Aga Khan, 16 May 1939.

²¹⁸ Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 195-196.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 192-193.

regaining the status of a great power. It had now become clear to him that Hitler was a political gangster who would stop at nothing, and who was determined to beat down all resistance to his will.”²²⁰

Lothian’s conversion was welcomed by many. The Duchess of Atholl, a Conservative MP, wrote to congratulate him on coming around.²²¹ John W. Dafoe, editor of the Winnipeg Free Press, and a skeptic of the Round Table movement for 25 years, also approved as did the American Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. In asking for a talk with him about general policy with regard to the United States, Lothian wrote Sir Robert Vansittart on 11 May, “You have certainly been proved right in your estimate of the true nature of the National Socialist regime, though if we had tried appeasement more vigorously in the days of the Republic there might never been a Hitler after all.” “Yes, indeed,” replied Vansittart, “how different things would have been if we had all provided the Republican regime in Germany with greater concessions and so with greater authority and credit. We might all have lived happily ever afterwards.”²²²

One obvious result of Lothian’s association with the policy of appeasement was considerable damage to his reputation. In November 1937, the left-wing journalist, Claud Cockburn attacked the social circle of Lady Nancy Astor, which included the Astors, Lothian, Geoffrey Dawson, James L. Garvin, and R. M. Barrington, who wrote many foreign policy stories for *The Times*, dubbing it the “Cliveden Set” after the Astor country estate, Cliveden. Although they all maintained a deep dislike for France, as well as a conviction that Britain should establish friendship with Germany, critics exaggerated the influence of this cabal. For example, Cockburn accused Lothian, Nancy Astor, Dawson, and other members of this circle of trying to negotiate with Germany behind Eden’s back. It turned out, however, that on the weekend of 23-24 October 1937, when a gathering to plot this activity allegedly took place, Eden was

²²⁰ Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships: America in Peace and War (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 67.

²²¹ It had been the Duchess of Atholl who, in 1936, following the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, had called Lothian’s attention to passages in the book revealing Hitler’s real intentions. In response, Lothian simply defended the German action. Butler, Lord Lothian, 217.

²²² Billington, 136; Butler, Lord Lothian, 228.

himself the guest of honor at Cliveden. Similarly, the left-wing press erred a few months later, when it accused the Cliveden Set of having plotted in January 1938 to remove Eden. In fact, at the time, the Astors were visiting the United States and Lothian was in India. Nevertheless, charges of a “Cliveden Set” struck a popular chord and suggested that there indeed existed a convergence of social, political, and intellectual influence, which perpetuated the policy of appeasement. They made no secret of their views, nor did they hide their efforts to promote them, considering themselves a kind of self-appointed think-tank. On the contrary, they drew the widest publicity to themselves. Although it could not accurately be described as a “second Foreign Office,” its critics saw their behavior as an amateur diplomatic, part-time corps, entertaining ambassadors or flying off to Germany to sound out Hitler and his associates about the chances of a European settlement. It was a natural target, a “defeatist, pampered group,” wrote Harold Nicolson, which “prevented us from taking a strong line while it could made for peace.” Lothian, who was seen as a “power broker among the dilettantes,” was an easy target because his access to three powerful newspapers, *The Round Table*, *The Times*, and *The Observer*, at a time when print media were the principal source of news and commentary in Britain, gave elevated prominence to his views. “Not a very safe intermediary,” said Sir Robert Vansittart.²²³ Lothian thus became an object of popular ridicule. David Low, the brilliant cartoonist of the *Evening Standard*, portrayed him, along with Nancy Astor, Geoffrey Dawson, and J. L. Garvin, as the “Shiver Sisters,” dancing to the tune of Hitler's foreign policy, choreographed by a gleeful Joseph Goebbels.²²⁴

Furthermore, much was made later about one notable weekend that seemed to suggest that Lothian's conversion in the spring was less than sincere. He spent the weekend of 3-4 June 1939 with the Astors at Cliveden, where he dined with Halifax and other British political figures. The Astors' son David invited a friend from Oxford, the 1931 German Rhodes Scholar Adam von Trott zu Solz. Trott was now an official in the German Foreign Office and was visiting Britain on a mission to explore British

²²³ Billington, 129; Gilbert and Gott, 25-26; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 7, 174-180, 194.

²²⁴ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 250; Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 179; Turner, 12-13.

intentions.²²⁵ Trott privately despised the Nazis but shared the opposition of other German moderates to the existence of the Polish Corridor that separated Germany from East Prussia after 1919. Trott therefore hoped to learn whether the British would agree to a German withdrawal from Czechoslovakia, although not the Sudetenland, in exchange for adjustments to the Polish frontier in Germany's favor. Trott raised the idea with Lothian, who opposed any trade of Polish territory. According to Trott's memorandum to the German Foreign Ministry, however, Lothian suggested that Germany withdraw from Czechoslovakia unilaterally as a way to restore British trust:

[If it was possible] for the Führer to give Bohemia and Moravia their full national independence back again, on condition of an effective limitation of their armaments and economic co-operation with Germany, such an action would, in his view, have a revolutionary effect on British public opinion, and consequently on the freedom of action of the British Government and on world opinion in general. Hitler would, in one blow, disarm his bitterest enemies abroad, restore confidence in Europe, and thereby lend to the British desire for an understanding, which was still honestly felt, a unanimity it had never before known. On this basis he thought that the gradual elimination of all moral and material differences still existing between Britain and Germany was possible. . . . Any further British distrust of, and obstruction to, German economic expansion in the South-East would then have to stop. If Germany led, but did not dominate, Central and Eastern Europe, the Western European nations could then feel reassured about their political independence. England-America (which Lothian naturally likes to regard as one!) and Germany, as the only real Great Powers, could then jointly shape and guarantee the future of world politics. This picture of the future had occupied his mind after his conversation with the Führer, and he still could not believe that it was finally impossible.²²⁶

Trott's memorandum, which did not become public until after the war, suggested that Lothian's repudiation of appeasement was insincere, and that he remained, as late as the summer of 1939, prepared to make concessions to Hitler behind the back of his own government. When Ribbentrop received Trott's

²²⁵ Trott was a former Rhodes Scholar, the son of a Prussian Minister of Education. He was thus well known to Lothian; he was in fact one of those whom Lothian consulted in Berlin in 1935. As a patriotic and moderate German, to whom Nazi ideology and practices were increasingly abhorrent, Trott was doubtful as to his course of action. After a few years in Germany, he obtained a further grant from the Rhodes Trust for a stay in the Far East, ostensibly for research but, in fact, to think out his position. According to his friends, he apparently decided that in working for the downfall of the Nazi regime, he could be more useful in Germany than abroad. In June 1939, along with others of the secret opposition, he visited Britain in the hope of buying time for his group to organize resistance before war broke out, if war could not be prevented. Butler, Lord Lothian, 228-229.

²²⁶ Billington, 138; Butler, Lord Lothian, 229-230; Gilbert and Gott, 215-216; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 197-198; Sykes, 404-405. Billington maintains that Lothian allowed Trott to report that the suggestion was his, while Butler argues that Lothian asked that he should not be identified as the originator of the idea.

memorandum, however, he tossed it aside.²²⁷ In addition, when asked by the peace activist Corder Catchpool, in May 1939, to visit Ribbentrop one last time, Lothian refused:

The tragedy is that if only Germany could now go liberal, she has permanently within her grasp everything that the most patriotic German could wish for. She would be the inevitable leader of Europe. She would have a kind of British Commonwealth of free independent nations about her, and she could certainly get a sound colonial deal in return for disarmament.

Lothian had become convinced that, as much as he wanted to believe otherwise, a policy of appeasement was a waste of time:

If Hitler's project of partitioning Poland . . . is stopped . . . it may lead to a change of policy or an evolution of regime in either Italy or Germany . . . which will make negotiation for a final settlement possible. At this moment, however, I am convinced that negotiation is useless.²²⁸

Lothian indeed called for Britain to use force. In a 6 June 1939 letter to Smuts, Lothian asserted that if Hitler did try to destroy Poland and Romania, Britain should prepare for war. Similarly, in a 5 July 1939 letter to James L. Garvin, Lothian suggested that if Chamberlain put Churchill into the cabinet and mobilize the fleet as soon as any further sign of action begins, there would be a good chance that Hitler would back away from triggering any major crisis in the fall. He clung to the hope that moderates in the Axis powers still existed, but he was ready now to risk war.²²⁹

Appointment to the United States

The British Ambassador in Washington, since 1930, had been Sir Ronald Lindsay. The Foreign Office valued Lindsay's services and had on several occasions tried to dissuade him from retiring. But by May 1938, Lindsay was adamant that a successor be found. Beyond that, by the summer of 1938, the British Embassy in Washington had fallen under growing Foreign Office scrutiny, amid mounting reports

²²⁷ Lothian's two principal biographers flatly assert that the suggestion was absurd. David Billington maintains that not only were the Nazis clearly not going to withdraw from Czechoslovakia, but on the issue of Poland, the only issue that mattered to Hitler during the summer of 1939, Lothian did not signal any British retreat. J. R. M. Butler noted that Lothian could not have believed that, while restoring even conditional independence to Bohemia and Moravia would have been to Germany's diplomatic benefit, there was any realistic chance that Hitler would take such a backward step. Billington, 138; Butler, Lord Lothian, 231-232.

²²⁸ Billington, 138-139.

²²⁹ Billington, 139; Butler, Lord Lothian, 233-234; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 196.

of Lindsay's personal failure in the field of public relations. Lothian received numerous letters from American friends, who complained about British arrogance and aloofness in its dealings with politicians and journalists, an attitude that had driven Washington to joke about the British Embassy as "the British Compound." For example, in early November 1937, Lothian received a letter from Mr. James M. Witherow, Attorney-at-Large in Moorhead, Minnesota, who complained that:

Instead of being a friendly hospitable mansion, it is built like a citadel, with high stone walls surrounding it, suggesting the maintenances of machine gun nests and legation guards. The result is that it has a forbidding aspect among the newspaper men and the congressional ménage.

Beyond that, however, Witherow warned Lothian that the British were handicapped by the aloofness of their diplomatic representation in Washington. While Lindsay was respected as a competent and courteous gentleman, the most serious grievances were with the embassy attachés, who received visitors with conventional politeness, but without any friendly cooperation. The problem, Witherow suggested, was that they were too formal. British diplomatic procedure was based upon "backstairs" operations instead of straight-forward and open friendly exchange of views. Other embassies in Washington frequently sent their attachés to have friendly interviews and discussions with members of the Senate and Congress. "But such a thing is entirely unheard of among the British. Instead either the ambassador or the proper attaché calls upon the Department of State and occasionally the president, and presents letters and communications and has formal discussions with either the secretary or one of the juniors in the State Department." Furthermore, Witherow noted that in the discussion of these précis reports, "the British communications both oral and written are unfortunate in tone and diplomacy of argument":

There is much egotistic assertion of the view and desires of "his majesty's government" with the inference that it is the duty of the American government to conform to the things which the British desire. In the Foreign Relations Committee there is a humorous characterization of the British précis as the "British commands", which by reason of the unfortunate psychology of the suggestion simply makes the members of the committee assert their independent judgment from a patriotic standpoint [even if the British position were more sensible].²³⁰

²³⁰ According to established procedure, the substance of every interview with an official representative of a foreign nation was embodied in a précis, which was filed in the proper place by the State Department, and was available for reading and copying by the members of the House Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Committee.

Lothian argued that the source of the problem was that the embassy staff generally consisted of old public school boys, “many of whom manifest a constitutional inhibition when dealing with the average politician either in the Senate or the House of Representatives.”²³¹ In August 1938, Lothian brought the complaints to the attention of Halifax, who agreed that a new attitude was needed at the Embassy. Given Lothian’s record of support for both appeasement and strong Anglo-American relations, he seemed to be the logical choice to serve as Chamberlain’s ambassador in Washington.²³²

Although initially, Halifax favored a professional diplomat, in the end, he decided to look outside the diplomatic service. He wanted an ambassador who would appeal beyond official circles to the American people, someone more “of the Bryce type.”²³³ His first choice was his old friend, Lothian. In early August, Neville Chamberlain and the King gave their approval, and Lothian formally, although reluctantly, consented on 12 August, although the appointment was not announced until April 1939.²³⁴

The decision to send Lothian to Washington, however, provoked considerable controversy in Whitehall, particularly within the Foreign Office. Much of the Foreign Office opposition was professional; such an important post belonged to a career diplomat. Moreover, Lothian had never held

²³¹ NAS, GD40/17/358/666-667, Witherow to Lothian, 5 November 1937. See also Witherow to Lothian, 23 February 1938; Lothian to Witherow, 31 March 1938.

²³² Nicholas John Cull, Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American “Neutrality” in World War II (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20; Ritchie Ovendale, ‘Appeasement’ and the English Speaking World: Britain, the United States, the Dominions, and the Policy of ‘Appeasement’, 1937-1939 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), 199-200.

²³³ James Bryce, a distinguished historian and student of American institutions, had served as British ambassador to the United States from 1907-1913. DNB, 420; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 2; David Reynolds, “Lothian, Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Origins of Lend-Lease,” in The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, ed. John Turner (London: The Historians’ Press, 1988), 93.

²³⁴ NAS, GD40/17/369/1-3, Halifax to Lothian, 9 August 1938; NAS, GD40/17/369/7-8, Halifax to Lothian, 11 August 1938; NAS, GD40/17/369/9, Lothian to Halifax, 12 August 1938; Cadogan, 90; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 2. Chamberlain had left the matter in Halifax’s hands. According to Oliver Harvey, Halifax’s personal secretary, the Prime Minister had said “that as the Americans are so rotten and as it therefore does not matter who we send there, he is content to leave the post to the Service.” Harvey, 148; Billington, 136; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 2; Roberts, 97. Lothian himself was hesitant, although he ultimately accepted “with grave misgivings” as to his qualifications and certain conditions: the appointment should be made for two or three years rather than the ordinary five and, subject to diplomatic necessities, he should come home at least once a year, partly for consultation and partly to tend to his estates. Butler, Lord Lothian, 257.

high political office, as had Bryce, whose traditions he was expected to follow. Furthermore, he was not, again as Bryce had been, a man of letters. In a far more significant way, however, the Foreign Office resented Lothian's amateurish interventions in foreign affairs, dating back to the Paris Peace Conference. His two visits to Hitler in 1935 and 1937, and his association with appeasement and the "Cliveden Set," were particularly offensive. Many observers believed that Lothian's position would be compromised because of his highly publicized support for appeasement.²³⁵ Lothian's critics maintained that his attitude to Germany in the 1930s was simply another manifestation of his chronic poor judgment and that he would be even more well-placed to press his foolish views on those who really made decisions.²³⁶

The opposition to Lothian's appointment notwithstanding, many commentators on both sides of the Atlantic considered him well suited to his position. In many ways, to be sure, Lothian was the ideal candidate for the post. "When I read the announcement yesterday," the veteran American journalist Walter Lippmann wrote, "it suddenly seemed as if it could not have been anyone else."²³⁷ John Buchan, 1st Baron Tweedsmuir, the Governor General of Canada, encouraged Lothian "at all costs" to accept the appointment as ambassador: "He knows America well, and above all he likes Americans, and there are no people more susceptible to liking." In the United States, Frank Aydelotte, the American Rhodes secretary and president of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, stated that Lothian's appointment had been received in America with "a chorus of welcome" such as had greeted no ambassador from any

²³⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 258-259; DNB, 420; Reynolds in Turner, 93; Turner, 12-13.

²³⁶ John Turner noted that such criticism has two flaws. On one hand, Lothian's attitudes were the result of real experience. He had been there when the first serious mistakes were made, one or two he had made himself. On the other hand, historical interpretations about the Cliveden Set were highly tainted by partisan political considerations. Turner notes that recent research has emphasized how the historiography of British foreign policy in the 1930s was launched more or less as events themselves were taking place. The story of the Cliveden Set was part of this historiography. Specifically, because the management of news was an essential element in policy-making, the story of the Cliveden Set became a "move in the game" between the Foreign Office and Downing Street. On one side, Sir Robert Vansittart, a senior Foreign Office official and convinced anti-appeaser, used newsletters such as *The Week*, edited by Claud Cockburn, and freelance journalists, such as Vladimir Poliakov, to undermine the news management of Downing Street and thus embarrass Chamberlain. He continued to feed information that emphasized the conspiratorial and unpatriotic nature of appeasement. On the other side, Chamberlain, through his control of the weekly *Truth*, sought to undermine the credibility of anti-appeasers. Turner, 14-15.

²³⁷ DNB, 420; Reynolds in Turner, 93.

nation within his memory. Lothian, he pointed out, had been “well-known and well-liked in America for many years”:

He knows how Americans look at the world and what are their habits of thought in the Middle West and the South and on the Pacific Coast, as well as in New York and Washington. Since Lord Lothian likes people, since he is fond of discussion of contemporary politician and economic problems, since he is as well a charming companion and an excellent golfer, he has had unrivalled opportunities to learn to know a wide circle of men of all political faiths in all walks of life. . . . Few Englishmen have been as much entertained in as many houses throughout the country. Nor has the hospitality been all on one side; in countless weekend parties at Blickling, Americans have been made welcome and have learnt how good a host it is possible for a bachelor to be.²³⁸

Even the hostile Oscar Gass of the American Treasury feared that Lothian “will be a big success in the United States” and “as influential an ambassador as has ever been sent us by Great Britain.” Gass suggested that Lothian would use “equalitarian,” even “Socialist” and “left-wing” rhetoric and “outdo the State Department in the rhetorical force of his sermons,” but that, after uttering a “high-sounding prelude in favor of world federation,” he would pursue nationalistic British goals and seek “to create the background for American support of Great Britain should the latter ultimately be forced into a war in defense of her imperial interests.”²³⁹

Halifax preferred Lothian for a number of reasons. Lothian knew America and Americans probably as well as any living Briton in public life. He stressed the importance of knowledge about the United States and was often at pains to demonstrate his own familiarity with American history and governmental precepts. Traditionally, British diplomats rarely ventured very far outside of official Washington; but in the circumstances of growing tension and ultimately war, Britain needed a representative who could secure popular as well as official American support. For this task, Lothian appeared to be supremely fitted. He had numerous influential friends or close acquaintances, among them Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of *The New York Times*, Norman Davis, Thomas Lamont, managing partner of the J. P. Morgan bank, and Felix Frankfurter. He strengthened these contacts as ambassador,

²³⁸ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 260.

²³⁹ Roberts, 123.

frequently flying to New York City to dine with small groups of key men, generally returning to Washington that night. His cousin, Mark Kerr, was an old friend of President Roosevelt, and Lothian had himself talked with the president on several occasions.²⁴⁰ Although many of these contacts dated from the 1920s, following the Paris Peace Conference, Lothian also knew other circles of Americans through his deep commitment to Christian Science, his work as *The Observer's* American correspondent, and from his work between 1925 and 1939 as General Secretary to the Rhodes Trust. In the latter capacity, he had traveled frequently and extensively around the United States; he told reporters in April 1939 that he had made fourteen visits, covering 44 states. Out of these travels grew a remarkable network of acquaintances, which tended to be strongest among academics and local newspaper editors, although it also included business and civic leaders. All this was in striking contrast with most British policymakers, whose experience of America, where it existed at all, was usually confined to the East Coast or to the artificial atmosphere of the commercial lecture circuit.²⁴¹

Not only did Lothian know America, he genuinely liked the United States and he liked Americans. On his first visit to the United States in 1909, his first impression was almost prophetic: "I like America. It is really extraordinarily like England." In 1912, he told the architect Sir Herbert Baker how exhilarating he found it to walk through or contemplate the skyscrapers of the business quarter of San Francisco, the water front of Chicago, or the lower end of New York, and that, by contrast to American literature, music, and painting, the country's "architecture has caught the modern American spirit of boundless material enterprise, boundless confidence and boundless energy."²⁴² Furthermore, one of his major objections to inheriting his title was, it seems, his fear that this would "quite spoil the pleasure I used to have in travelling to the New World. One cannot fail to be unpleasantly

²⁴⁰ Billington, 142; Butler, Lord Lothian, 264.

²⁴¹ Billington, 142; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, "Lord Lothian: Ambassador 'to a People'" in The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, ed. John Turner (London: The Historians' Press, 1988), 78; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, "The Inestimable Advantage of Not Being English," The Scottish Historical Review LXIII, no. 175 (April 1984), 106-107; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 2-3.

²⁴² Butler, Lord Lothian, 253; Roberts, 105.

conspicuous.”²⁴³ Indeed, while many of the British elite adopted a condescending attitude to what Harold Nicolson once called “the eternal superficiality of the American race,” Lothian was friendly and impetuous, and found the United States open and invigorating. “I always feel fifteen years younger when I land in New York,” he remarked in 1939. In turn, many Americans readily responded to his unaffected enthusiasm. Americans liked his approachable, unpretentious manner, his bespectacled good-looks, his impatience with conventions. Lothian’s liberalism, on such matters as free trade, and constitutional reform in India, was also appealing; to many, Lothian had aristocratic charm, but democratic ideals.²⁴⁴

Lothian was well-qualified to take a more forward policy in public, more so than the one adopted by Lindsay. Moreover, he understood how to deal with press -- and especially the American press. Lothian, himself an experienced journalist and editor, knew many American newspapermen, including Walter Lippmann and William Allen White. He understood, and even enjoyed, the rough-and-tumble of American journalism, which contrasted sharply with the more deferential character of press-government relations in Whitehall. Above all, he appreciated the importance of the media in helping to establish that consensus among opinion-leaders upon which any effective American diplomacy had to be based. Consequently, he made it a condition of his appointment that he be allowed to choose a special attaché to deal with the Washington press and also to cultivate the contacts with non-official circles in which the embassy was deficient.²⁴⁵

Finally, Lothian had long been a passionate and zealous advocate of Anglo-American cooperation. Since before the First World War, he had considered this the essential foundation of world peace. While his objective was world government, with regional federations on the model of a truly federal British Commonwealth, in the mid-1930s his immediate goals were “Atlanticist” -- isolation from European commitments and cooperation with the Empire and the United States to promote world

²⁴³ Butler, Lord Lothian, 144; Roberts, 105.

²⁴⁴ Lothian, “Speech at the Pilgrims’ Farewell Dinner to Lord Lothian, at the Victoria Hotel, London, 13 July 1939,” in Speeches, xlii; Butler, Lord Lothian, 40; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 3; Roberts, 105.

²⁴⁵ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 2-3.

peace.²⁴⁶ He called for a new “Monroe” system, joining the Empire with the United States in a bloc detached from any other continental system, a bloc so strong that no other country would dare consider attacking it, one that was “economically and politically so stable that it could stand outside a European war, in isolating it if it broke out, and in ending it quickly and on reasonably just terms.”²⁴⁷

Lothian’s ultimate realization early in 1939, however, that Nazi Germany could not after all be appeased and truly represented a significant threat to peace, strengthened his conviction that the United States and Britain must cooperate in order to maintain the peace. He remained committed to the idea of compelling the United States to abandon its philosophy of neutrality, in order to build an ideal global order. In his view, he wrote Smuts, “the only foundation for world peace was close co-operation between the British Commonwealth and the United States.” He believed that world war in the nineteenth century had been prevented by the supremacy of the Royal Navy on all the oceans, but that such power and responsibility must henceforward be shared with the United States. This, he felt, would provide a “nucleus” for a League of Nations backed by “overwhelming superiority of power behind the law.” The dominant powers in this organization should “be able both to maintain overwhelming superiority in armaments behind the League system and to limit the armaments of individual nations.” Preparing himself to depart for Washington, Lothian confessed it was his “dream that in the United States I may be able to help promote such an end.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 4.

²⁴⁷ Orde, 115.

²⁴⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 103, 233-235; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 4; Roberts, 124.

CHAPTER FOUR: LOTHIAN DURING THE PHONEY WAR

Sir Ronald Lindsay had been Britain's ambassador in Washington since 1930. He was a career diplomat, having served in the diplomatic service since 1899. Although he saw duty in St. Petersburg, Teheran, Constantinople, and Berlin, his appointment to the United States was the pinnacle of his career. Unfortunately for Lindsay, however, his ten years in Washington coincided with a series of Anglo-American tensions, primarily over economic issues -- war debts and protectionism -- as well as disagreements over international security. To some extent as well, Lindsay's personality was somewhat of a liability to Anglo-American relations. Unlike his successor, Lindsay sought to keep a low public profile. In one respect, this was a matter of preference. Lindsay tended to be stiff and old-fashioned, although he nevertheless believed that he could cultivate American friendship through personal charm. He continued to maintain, however, a patronizing attitude toward the United States. He once said to Anthony Eden that "America is still extraordinarily youthful and sensitive. She resembles a young lady just launched into society and highly susceptible to a little deference from an older man."¹ Although he cultivated good working relations with the president, Lindsay never established particularly close relations with either Secretary of State, Henry Stimson or Cordell Hull.² He also found it enormously difficult to tolerate what he considered to be the provincialism and ineptitude of American congressmen, and frequently belittled the "archaic" constitutional division between the legislative and executive branches of government. At the same time, the State Department wearied of the formal notes from the British Embassy, which they mockingly referred to as the "British commands."

¹ Benjamin D. Rhodes, "Sir Ronald Lindsay and the British View from Washington, 1930-1939," in Essays in Twentieth Century American Diplomatic History dedicated to Professor Daniel M. Smith, ed. Clifford L. Egan and Alexander W. Knott (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 62-63.

² Lindsay regarded Hull as exasperating. During the Anglo-American trade negotiations in 1938, for example, Lindsay described Hull's remarks as long, discursive, and obscure, and complained that the secretary's speeches were difficult to read "without allowing one's mind to wander to other topics." Ibid, 71, 78. At the same time, Hull described Lindsay as "difficult to deal with." He confined his contacts with Americans "to a restricted set of the highest society, most of whom opposed the Roosevelt Administration. It was hard to make him see our point of view. I got along much better with his abler and more agreeable successors," Lothian and Halifax." Hull, 380.

Lindsay tended to remain out of the public eye. He did very little speaking or traveling, and did not give a formal press conference until May 1939. Yet, Lindsay's low profile was a matter of policy as much as preference. He was convinced, for example, that efforts to "educate" American opinion were self-defeating, primarily because they exacerbated American suspicions of British propaganda -- fears that the wily and perfidious British were trying to entangle the United States in another European war. Lindsay believed that only events, as interpreted by the administration and the American media, and not propaganda, would have an effect on American opinion.³

Consequently, the assumption of the British Embassy in the United States by Lord Lothian brought a vast and profound change in style. Unlike Lindsay, Lothian sought to keep a visible public profile. He did much speaking, much traveling, and sought to cultivate strong relations with the American press, convinced, unlike Lindsay, that American opinion could in fact be "educated." Franklin Roosevelt's secretary, Grace Tully, noted that Lothian was "the personification of informality, particularly when contrasted to the dignified old-school diplomat of the Lindsay type." As a result, Lothian brought a "freshness and vitality" to the Anglo-American relationship.⁴

Lothian Assumes the Position

A relatively lengthy delay occurred between Lothian's appointment and his assumption of duties. Halifax appointed Lothian in August 1938 and hoped that he could take up his post in the fall. Lothian's commitments in Australia, however, as well as King George VI's desire to retain the more experienced Lindsay to help oversee the royal visit to the United States the following June necessitated the delay. Throughout the winter of 1938-1939, therefore, the appointment remained unannounced and unknown to all but a handful of senior British policymakers.⁵ In Washington, although the State Department was aware that Lindsay was due to retire, the first direct intimation came on 26 October 1938, when Lindsay

³ Ovendale, 'Appeasement', 199; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 1-2; Rhodes, 62-63.

⁴ Grace Tully, F.D.R.: My Boss (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 298.

⁵ Billington, 136-137; Butler, Lord Lothian, 257; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 5.

himself told Sumner Welles, an Undersecretary of State, that his departure was imminent. In response, the Roosevelt administration hinted a strong desire for London to appoint a new ambassador who would be more politically savvy than a career diplomat. On 14 November 1938, Norman Davis, another Undersecretary of State, wrote to Alexander Cadogan, the permanent undersecretary in the Foreign Office, to say that:

While Lindsay has been a real success here in every respect, it is felt in certain quarters that unless it is possible to get an exceptional Service man, it would be highly beneficial to have someone with practical political experience who is or has been a Cabinet Officer and is thus well known, and who could, on occasion, make a good speech.⁶

While there is little evidence of consultation with American officials, Lord Tweedsmuir, the Governor General of Canada, made this point much more explicitly, when he told Chamberlain in January that Roosevelt considered the choice of Lindsay's successor "enormously important," adding that the president thought "that a career diplomat is not the proper choice at this time."⁷

Nevertheless, Lothian paid a brief visit to the United States over the winter 1938-1939, primarily to begin making arrangements to replace Lindsay and to gauge American opinion in the wake of Munich. Particularly in the aftermath of the recent international tensions, Lothian understood the indispensability of the United States to Britain's ability to confront the challenge of Nazi Germany. On his departure from Britain, he thus declared: "America really holds the key to the whole future." While in the United States, Lothian intended to establish contacts with people concerned about international affairs. Driven by his own growing alarm at not only German aggression, but also American unpreparedness, both military and diplomatic, he intended to initiate a campaign for greater Anglo-American cooperation and for American rearmament, and to bring proposals before certain American leaders, including the president.⁸ Therefore, prior to his departure from Britain, Lothian asked Sir

⁶ Cull, 20; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 5; Rock, 160-161.

⁷ While the British took note of these judgments, there is no evidence that they revealed the identity of Lindsay's successor to the administration before the end of March 1939. Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 6.

⁸ Cull, 20; Ovendale, 'Appeasement', 200.

Maurice Hankey, the cabinet secretary, to prepare a paper on the potential effect of the collapse of the British Empire on the United States. Hankey produced a nine-page memorandum that Lothian considered to be “extremely good and just what I wanted.” It painted an exceptionally gloomy picture of the situation that would confront the United States should Britain collapse. Not only would France and the French Empire surely disintegrate as well, but European democracy itself would fall, a process that would certainly continue eastward into Asia. As a result, in the present state of international anarchy, the balance of power lay with the United States. If adequately armed, America had “only to lift a finger to avert all serious danger of war, as well as the threat to democracy and all ultimate menace to herself.” The fundamental question for Washington, therefore, was “whether one of those rare moments is not at hand when prudence, foresight and self-interest combine in rendering action desirable which may change the history of mankind.”⁹

During his American visit, Lothian found himself constantly reminded of his association with appeasement. “The Cliveden Set yarn is still going strong everywhere here,” he wrote to Nancy Astor from Chicago. “It symbolizes the impression spread by the left and acceptable to the average American that aristocrats and financiers are selling out democracy in Spain and Czechoslovakia because they want to preserve their own property and privileges . . . [and that] Chamberlain is their tool.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, armed with Hankey’s memorandum, Lothian insisted, both in his correspondence and at various private gatherings in Washington, that Britain could not maintain international stability and peace on its own, that the United States must assume more responsibility of policing the oceans, and that the struggle between dictatorship and democracy would become effectively a duel between Hitler and Roosevelt. It was along these general lines that Lothian spoke with President Roosevelt on 2 January 1939. The two men found substantial areas of agreement. Although he had to endure considerable teasing from Roosevelt about his commitment to appeasement and his confidence in Hitler two years earlier, Lothian now accepted that “no one could talk to Hitler, and that the Führer must in fact be tamed, if not outright eliminated altogether,

⁹ NAS, GD40/17/444/314-332, “The Value of the British Empire to the United States”; Rock, 143.

¹⁰ Rose, *The Cliveden Set*, 192-193.

before peace could be secured.” The president, for his part, was anxious to accelerate American air rearmament, to use United States diplomatic influence as pressure upon the dictators, and to act as democracy’s arsenal.

In spite of their agreement over the broader perceptions of the Anglo-American relationship, Roosevelt and Lothian fundamentally disagreed over specifics. Lothian intimated, on the basis of Hankey’s memorandum, that a collapse of the British Empire was a distinct possibility. Without the “very powerful outpost line” of British military and naval defenses, he suggested, the United States would be increasingly hard pressed to maintain its democracy and its commitment to the principles of liberty and justice against the powerful totalitarian forces that would press down upon America. Lothian expressed his great desire to see the United States assume Britain’s role as guardian of world peace, arguing that Britain no longer had the power to do this itself. Roosevelt, by contrast, expected a more robust attitude from Britain. He emphasized that, although the United States would help redress the military imbalance, it would not be pushed into a position of international leadership or dragged into another war. Consequently, the primary responsibility for world peace, the president suggested, still rested with Britain. Roosevelt saw Britain’s problem as a lack of nerve rather than a lack of power, and stated that as long as London kept up the argument now advanced by Lothian, the United States would be less inclined to help.¹¹ Roosevelt later complained to his associates that Lothian’s remarks were typical of the spineless, buck-passing attitude currently taken by the British. Harold Ickes, the American Secretary of the Interior, noted in his diary that, although Roosevelt was willing to help all he could, he would do nothing if Britain “cringed like a coward”:

The President thinks that Great Britain is suffering from an inferiority complex. . . . She is being out-maneuvered at the council table. Her fleet is helpless and she has neglected to build enough airplanes. She has fooled herself with respect to Spain. The wealthy class in England is so afraid of communism . . . that they have thrown themselves into the arms of Nazism and now they don’t know which way to turn.¹²

¹¹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 227-228; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 403; Moser, 115; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 6-7; Rock, 143.

¹² Harold Ickes, *The Secret Diaries of Harold L. Ickes, Vol. II, The Inside Struggle, 1936-1939* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 571, entry for 29 January 1939; MacDonald, 127-128; Rock, 143-144.

It is characteristically difficult to ascertain precisely what Roosevelt's tantrum was intended to accomplish. MacDonald argues that Roosevelt's outburst was the result of resentment. The president believed that he had done all he could and was thus unable to act, constrained by politics, but felt that Britain should do something; Britain, according to the president, seemed unwilling to stand up for itself. Reynolds and Rock maintain that Roosevelt hoped to stiffen British policy; they suspect that the president anticipated that these tough words would eventually pass to the Foreign Office through his principal conduit, the British historian George Macaulay Trevelyan.¹³ When Roosevelt's former Harvard professor, Roger B. Merriman, sent the president part of a dispirited letter from Trevelyan, Roosevelt's reply, of 15 February 1939, was brief but impassioned.¹⁴ He told Merriman about the meeting with Lothian only a few days before:

I wish the British would stop this "We who are about to die, salute thee" attitude. Lord Lothian was here the other day, started the conversation by saying he had completely abandoned his former belief that Hitler could be dealt with as a semi-reasonable human being, and went on to say that the British for a thousand years had been the guardians of Anglo-Saxon civilization -- that the scepter or the sword or something like that had dropped from their palsied fingers -- that the U.S.A. must snatch it up -- that F.D.R. alone could save the world -- etc., etc. I got mad clear through and told him that just so long as he or Britishers like him took that attitude of complete despair, the British would not be worth saving anyway. What the British need today is a good stiff grog, inducing not only the desire to save civilization but the continued belief that they can do it. In such an event they will have a lot more support from their American cousins.¹⁵

This conversation between Lothian and Roosevelt was notable on two levels. First, it strengthened and accelerated Roosevelt's campaign for not only American rearmament, but also American assistance for Anglo-French rearmament programs. In spite all of his bluster, Roosevelt had been impressed by the primary outline of Lothian's argument. The president, since November 1938, had

¹³ Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 43-44; Rock, 143-144.

¹⁴ Billington, 135; Cull, 22-23; Davis, Into the Storm, 403; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 121-122; Ickes, 2: 571, entry for 29 January 1939; Moser, 115; Owendale, 'Appeasement', 215; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 43-44. Merriman himself later suggested that he was to pass on Roosevelt's observations to the British. He sent a copy to Trevelyan for his discreet use, which Trevelyan in turn forwarded to Halifax at the Foreign Office. Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 7.

¹⁵ Davis, Into the Storm, 403; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 7.

made it clear to associates, advisers, and certain congressional leaders that the United States must begin to rearm. He had become convinced, due to reports dispatched by American ambassadors in Europe, notably William C. Bullitt in Paris and Joseph P. Kennedy in London, that the Nazis had achieved a fundamental psychological dominance over Britain and France. He also had become convinced that any meaningful negotiations with Hitler were impossible, and that the Führer was a “nut,” who was driven by “paranoia” and believed himself “to be a reincarnation of Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ.”

Roosevelt’s demands for rearmament rested in part on growing concern about possible German penetration into Latin America. Germany in the 1930s became a far more active trading partner in Latin America, although the United States remained the region’s largest trading partner, and German political influence appeared to be on the increase, particularly in Argentina and Brazil. As a result, Washington worried about a possible insurgency by the 1.5 million Germans in southern Brazil, which might then create a base for further Nazi influence. In response, Roosevelt called in the fall of 1938 for a strengthening of the United States Navy in the Atlantic.¹⁶ In addition, the annual fleet maneuvers, scheduled for February 1939, were to take place for the first time off the American east coast; this practice exercise was designed to prevent a German fleet from assisting a fascist-led revolt in Brazil.

Even more threatening than such a revolt, however, was the possibility of German superiority in air power. Indeed, Roosevelt believed that only German supremacy in the air could sufficiently explain the extent of Hitler’s victory at Munich. Bullitt in particular convinced the president that the fear of massive airborne destruction had overwhelmed Paris and London during the crisis. Therefore, Roosevelt’s major preoccupation over the winter of 1938-1939 was to help Britain and France redress the air balance, but principally in order to serve the interests of American security. The advent of air power, as Roosevelt understood it, held serious consequences for American security because it threatened the traditional concept of a separate Western Hemisphere, protected by the Atlantic Ocean. The

¹⁶ Since 1919, the United States had based its main fleet on the west coast, at San Diego, against a possible Pacific challenge from Japan, while maintaining only an antiquated training force in the Atlantic. As a result of growing concerns over potential German designs on the Western Hemisphere, however, Roosevelt called for an operational Atlantic squadron.

administration believed that Germany had 1500 planes capable of crossing the Atlantic to Brazil in a day, refueling perhaps in the Cape Verde islands. From bases in Brazil or Mexico, they could then threaten New Orleans or Miami in a couple of hours. Roosevelt's conclusion was that the defense of the Western Hemisphere against a possible Nazi threat required bolstering the air power of Britain and France. Therefore, his major preoccupation during the winter of 1938 and 1939 was to help Britain and France redress the air imbalance, in order to serve the interests of American security.¹⁷

Accordingly, in early January 1939, Roosevelt asked Congress for \$500 million in appropriations for rearmament. Furthermore, he urged revision of the neutrality laws because, in their present form, they "may actually give aid to the aggressor and deny it to the victim." The president, however, had to backtrack in the face of opposition within the War Department. The War Department wanted a balanced program in order to build up the army and the navy, as well as the army air corps. In addition, it did not want to sell new prototypes to foreign governments.¹⁸ Roosevelt's conversation with Lothian, however, renewed the president's resolve, and prompted him, in part, to summon the entire Senate Military Affairs Committee to the White House on 31 January 1939. Suggesting that the United States needed to take more responsibility in the world, he set out his assessment of the Nazi threat to the Western Hemisphere, the new challenge of air power, and the need to recognize that "the first line of defense in the United States" was "the continued independent existence" of key nations in Europe, particularly Britain and France. He warned that, if a European war broke out in the present circumstances, there would be a 50-50 chance that Germany and Italy would win. He was frank about his determination to build planes and get them to Britain and France, cash "on the barrelhead," while denying munitions to Germany, Italy, or Japan. He admitted that his policy might be called unneutral but insisted that it was a matter of "self-

¹⁷ Davis, Into the Storm, 405; Joseph P. Lash, Roosevelt and Churchill: 1939-1941: The Partnership That Saved the West (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 74-76; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 37-38; MacDonald, 120-121, 126-127; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 42-44; Rock, 131-133. As of 14 November 1938, the administration claimed that France had fewer than 600 planes, while Britain had 1500 to 2000 such planes. Germany, however, had 5500 to 6500 first-line planes and about 2000 second-line planes; this gave Germany, on the most conservative estimate, air superiority of at least two-to-one. Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 44-45.

¹⁸ Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 47.

protection” and that it would reduce, not increase, the chances of an American entry into another European war.¹⁹ Victor Mallet in the British Embassy reported that Roosevelt told the gathering that the United States needed “to go to all possible lengths short of war to back up European democracies.”²⁰

While the meeting with Lothian thus nudged Roosevelt into taking a decisive early step to implement American rearmament, the immediate effect of the meeting and of the president’s letter in London was a minor storm within the British foreign policy establishment. This controversy was significant enough that it threatened to derail Lothian’s appointment as ambassador. The president’s letter prompted some within the Foreign Office to question the choice of Lothian for the vital position in Washington. Some senior officials in the Foreign Office, led by Alexander Cadogan, seized on Roosevelt’s remarks as an opportunity to overturn, or at least undermine, Lothian’s appointment, which they had consistently found objectionable. Many indeed saw Lothian not as an experienced, professional diplomat, but as an amateur, a “man of affairs.” Many, such as Cadogan and Victor Perowne, disliked his repeated interference in foreign affairs, dating back to his days as Lloyd George’s private secretary during the Paris Peace Conference. Oliver Harvey, also of the Foreign Office, noted in his diary that Lothian’s was a “bad appointment.” Sir Robert Vansittart had long regarded Lothian as a well-meaning innocent do-gooder, but a dilettante toying with diplomacy, all the while undermining British interests. He once scathingly denounced Lothian as an “incurably superficial Johnny-Know-All,” following Lothian’s first visit to Hitler in 1935.²¹ Furthermore, many remained skeptical about Lothian’s fitness for the post. Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, for example, told Vansittart that Lothian’s appointment was a “disaster,” that he could have no possible appeal to the American public and would be suspect in official circles. He was

¹⁹ Allen, 778; Billington, 136; Burns, Lion and the Fox, 389; Davis, Into the Storm, 402-403, 404-406; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 47-48. Many of the senators did not find Roosevelt’s candor particularly reassuring. When leaks appeared in the press that he had said that American frontiers were on the Rhine, the president made matters worse by denouncing the leak as a “deliberate lie” by “some boob” in the Senate. Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 48.

²⁰ National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew [hereafter designated as PRO] FO 414/276, C1320/15/18, Tel. 54, Mallet to Foreign Office, 1 February 1940.

²¹ Cadogan, 130, entry for 15 December 1938; Harvey, 274, entry for 7 April 1939; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 8; Rose, The Cliveden Set, 149.

concerned, like many others, that his well-publicized sympathy for Germany might prove an embarrassment in the United States, where the “Cliveden Set” had become a prevalent source of fascination.²² Consequently, on 20 June 1939, before Lothian had departed for the United States, Vansittart, now the chief diplomatic adviser to the foreign secretary and in charge of a Foreign Office committee that oversaw overseas publicity,²³ quietly arranged for Wheeler-Bennett to become Lothian’s personal assistant in Washington. While Vansittart engineered the appointment in order to monitor Lothian’s activities, Wheeler-Bennett understood that, in accepting the job, he might be able to keep Lothian’s former political inclinations in check.²⁴ In addition, there remained serious reservations about Lothian’s discretion and judgment. Even his own close friends and associates agreed that Lothian could be impulsive, and somewhat of a “weathervane.” One of his long-standing friends, for example, Lord Eustace Perry, noted that Lothian sometimes had a “mind of fine steel,” and at other times, a mind like “a fresh pat of butter, which would take any impress and record it sharply and accurately.”²⁵ Thomas Jones described Lothian as a man of diverse interests, charm, and appeal, but one who tended to “be the victim of his most recent experience”:

I remember him coming back from U.S.A. full of American mass-production; then before going to Russia he was so convinced of property as the root of all evil that he was hardly distinguishable from a communist; then last Sunday I walked with him in the grounds of Newbattle Abbey and he was certain that the world could not get on without capitalists and captains of industry.²⁶

Robert Brand, who knew him the longest, once wrote of Lothian:

²² Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 66.

²³ Vansittart had in fact been “promoted” to chief diplomatic advisor. This so-called “promotion,” however, was widely seen as Neville Chamberlain’s way of neutralizing Vansittart, who agreed with Churchill that rapid British rearmament, and not discussions with dictators, was the only credible way to counter the German threat.

²⁴ Cull, 14-16, 30-31; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 65-67. Wheeler-Bennett was an ideal man to offer Lothian proper guidance on matters of American public opinion. He was an Anglo-American intellectual, an Oxford don and visiting lecturer at the University of Virginia. From Vansittart’s point of view, however, Wheeler-Bennett was also a prominent member of the anti-appeasement set, had a unique knowledge of German politics, and regularly contributed a column to the *Evening Standard*. Cull, 31.

²⁵ Jones, 215, entry for 2 June 1936.

²⁶ Billington, 102; Jones, 44, entry for 3 July 1932.

He took colour at once from his surroundings, because he was so sensitive and sympathetic to the arguments of those he met. I always likened him to a pendulum which swings from one side to the other, but always tending to return to a stable equilibrium in the centre. This characteristic was partly the consequence of being quite exceptionally open-minded.²⁷

Lothian himself understood the skepticism generated by his appointment. “After fifteen years as a political free lance,” he wrote, “the discretion which is necessarily imposed on any public servant will be my most difficult achievement.”²⁸

Many in the Foreign Office regarded the Roosevelt-Merriman letter as a confirmation of Lothian’s defects. As Cadogan pointed out, it made a mockery of Lothian’s brash confidence that, on his recent visit to Washington, he was turning American opinion:

Talked about that booby Lothian who came back from U.S. very satisfied that he had ‘put it across’ America and was ‘swinging’ American opinion. But we have a copy of a letter from Roosevelt, showing he *fairly* put his foot in it.

As a result of this “dangerous delusion,” Cadogan pressed Halifax that “we must really reconsider his appointment,” and immediately drafted a cable to Lindsay in Washington for his assessment.²⁹ Oliver Harvey recorded in his diary his own hope that the appointment of “that conceited ass” was now dead:

One amusing thing. Lothian, whose appointment as Ambassador to Washington when Lindsay goes has been approved but is actually held in abeyance, recently passed through America and went to see Roosevelt. . . . Lothian [took] the completely defeatist line that we could not possibly stand up to Germany and Italy, that our day was done and it was now for America to step forward and take up the torch of civilization from our drooping fingers. Roosevelt was furious with Lothian and went for him. . . . This is, of course, just typical of the line that conceited ass (and the whole Cliveden set) takes. If any man had his hands dripping with guilt for the Versailles settlement it was Lothian, who was then Lloyd George’s Private Secretary. Yet, according to himself, he knows America well and expects to “swing public opinion there!” However, I hope and pray this fortunate letter will kill the appointment. H[alifax] has sent it across to the P.M. who is much concerned at it. Alec Cadogan does not think L[othian] can possibly be sent there now.³⁰

²⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 242.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 257.

²⁹ Cadogan, 154, entry for 2 March 1939; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 8. Cadogan wanted Lindsay to address the following questions: Had Lothian spoken along these lines elsewhere in the United States? If so, had it evoked any other unfavorable response? Was Roosevelt liable to momentary outbursts, or would the interview with Lothian have made a lasting impression on him? Rock, 144-145.

³⁰ Harvey, 258-259, entry for 3 March 1939; Rock, 145; Sykes, 402-403.

Even the prime minister and the king were struck by the nature of Roosevelt's remarks, and both expressed doubt about the wisdom of sending Lothian. Chamberlain concurred that "we had better explore the ground further before we send him out in an official capacity."³¹

The furor over his meeting with Roosevelt surprised even Lothian. In a letter to Sir Ronald Lindsay, after Halifax showed him a couple of telegrams that passed between London, Lothian wrote that "I am at a loss to understand that letter."³² With respect to their meeting, he noted that "I had an hour with the President during the whole of which he could not have been more cordial":

We first discussed the relative aerial strength of Great Britain and Germany, and I gave him my own estimate, which was based on very good information, of the relative rate of production per month during 1939 of Great Britain, German[y] and France. I got the impression that he thought my estimated figures were pretty accurate, and he volunteered the statement that the number of men employed in the aircraft industry of the United States was a good deal less than a quarter the number employed in the German aircraft industry. . . . As regards the future I said that I thought that the centre of gravity of the democratic world was now bound to pass from England to the United States, as Cecil Rhodes had foretold, for the reason that the capital so liable to bombardment as Great Britain could hardly remain an effective centre of the old system based on sea power resting on the invulnerability of Britain. I added that I thought that in the long run the United States would be driven to choose between two alternatives, of retiring in isolation to North America, and underpinning in its own way the command of the seas which hitherto has been maintained by Great Britain alone.

He added that "Our conversation was extremely friendly. As I left he asked me to come and see him again when next I was in the States and in no way indicated the point of view he mentions in his letter to Merriman. I was particularly careful to avoid anything which looked like saying what I thought the United States ought to do because that clearly was not my business, though we discussed quite freely the kind of world which seemed to be developing out of recent events."³³

³¹ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 8; Sykes, 403.

³² The president's letter to Roger Merriman.

³³ NAS, GD40/17/383/445-447, Lothian to Lindsay, 31 March 1940. He wrote to Nancy Astor that "I had an hour with the President, whose views are entirely sound & means to do everything he can to block or defeat the dictators. Indeed it is quite clear that the real struggle is going to be between the U.S.A. & Hitler." Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 7; Rock, 144, note 27; Sykes, 402.

In the end, however, while admitting that the episode of the Roosevelt letter was “troublesome,” Halifax stood behind the appointment.³⁴ Lindsay, too, supported Lothian’s appointment. Back on 13 August 1938, Lindsay wrote Lothian, “On public grounds, I am delighted to think that it is you who are to carry on my work, for you have all the requisite qualifications, especially the most important of all, namely antennae, which the Foreign Office conspicuously lacks.”³⁵ In response to Cadogan’s cable, Lindsay assured the Foreign Office on 20 March 1939 that Roosevelt was remarkably even tempered, although he tended to “exaggerate what is said to him and what he says in reply.” Beyond that, the president did not appear to maintain lasting impressions of foolish things said to him. Since Lindsay had received no unfavorable reactions to Lothian’s private conversations elsewhere, he believed the whole business could be safely dismissed.³⁶ Besides, and more important, he wrote that Lothian possessed broad and flexible qualities that British diplomacy now needed: “Withal he has the knack of moving about a great deal in an unobtrusive . . . manner. This is a valuable quality in a British Ambassador in America, whose power to influence the United States Government will be impaired if he is presented by the press or the public as an influential man. He has antennae and understands this.”³⁷ Even Roosevelt, guarded as ever, gave his endorsement of Lothian, more or less. When Lindsay asked the president for his opinion of Lothian, Roosevelt made it clear on 28 March that he had nothing against him: “Look here, there can be no possible difficulty about his *agrément* or anything of that sort.”³⁸

In the meantime, Lothian’s survey of American public opinion in the spring of 1939 was guardedly optimistic. Although initially many Americans he encountered did not yet seem to understand

³⁴ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 8; Sykes, 403.

³⁵ NAS, GD40/17/369/10-12, Lindsay to Lothian, 13 August 1938; Butler, Lord Lothian, 259. Four months later, however, Lindsay admitted to Cadogan that the Lothian appointment “might be undesirable from the ‘Cliveden Set’ point of view.” Cadogan, 130, entry for 15 December 1938.

³⁶ Davis, Into the Storm, 144-145; Rock, 145.

³⁷ Billington, 136.

³⁸ PRO FO 115/3419, 940/2/39, Lindsay to Hull, 17 April 1939; PRO FO 115/3419, 940/2A/39, Hull to Lindsay, 18 April 1939; Billington, 137; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 8; Rock, 182.

that the situation in Europe would affect the United States itself, Lothian noted that Munich had begun to shake Americans out of their “Baldwinite complacency. . . . [They are] beginning to think out her future in the world for [themselves], instead of waiting, critically for us to give the lead.” He stressed that Roosevelt was taking a stronger line against fascism everywhere, and the public was beginning to listen as it had not done before. Therefore, while the United States remained strongly isolationist, there was nevertheless grounds for optimism in the growing public realization that American security was intertwined with that of Britain and France.³⁹

Public announcement of Lothian’s appointment was made on 24 April 1939. American press reaction was highly and uniformly favorable, generally because he was considered to be a man of intelligence who knew the United States well. The press coverage even gave Lothian a certain amount of credit for having the wisdom to change his mind about Hitler.⁴⁰ After further delays, Lothian finally took up his post and presented his credentials at the White House on 30 August 1939.

Far from being a stuffy and forgettable affair, Lothian’s presentation at the White House set the tone for his ambassadorship in a subtle, but distinctive manner. Lothian achieved a substantial public relations success when, as he came out of the White House, he picked up a small black kitten and allowed it to sit on his shoulders as he answered questions from reporters. In that instant, his spontaneous gesture undermined the British reputation for aloof stuffiness, as the interview and the photograph appeared in newspapers around the country. The subsequent publicity, Lothian proudly reported to London, made him appear “human.” One journalist wrote that Lothian “looks more like an American business man than a British aristocrat.” *Time* magazine wrote, “The chill is off.”⁴¹

Lothian also established a very warm rapport with the president during this presentation. Indeed, Lothian and Roosevelt spoke warmly for almost two hours. “The President could not have been more

³⁹ Jones, 422-423; Rock, 145-146.

⁴⁰ Billington, 142; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 261; Cull, 32; Ovendale, ‘*Appeasement*’, 294; Rock, 182.

⁴¹ Billington, 142; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 261; Cull, 32. The cat was promptly named “Crisis” by the reporters.

friendly,” Lothian wrote. “We had a talk over the whole field for one and a half hours.” Moreover, Lothian found “certainly nothing neutral” about the president’s attitudes. Roosevelt’s most serious concern at that point was that nothing should permit American opinion to form the conclusion that Hitler was maneuvering Britain and France into pressuring Poland to abandon vital interests, as had occurred in Czechoslovakia. They spoke about the ways the United States could assist Britain in the event of hostilities, including getting all of the American republics to help patrol the western half of the Atlantic, thereby relieving strain on Britain’s navy and assuring safe transport of food and war materials to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where they could be conveyed to Europe in Allied ships. The president hoped and expected that, if war broke out, Congress would revoke the Neutrality Act; but if hostilities were represented as a “police action,” or some equivalent interpretation, he might be able to avoid applying the act altogether.⁴²

On 1 September 1939, two days after Lothian presented his credentials at the White House, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Following an ultimatum to Berlin, Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later on 3 September. Over the next two weeks, German panzer and armored divisions crushed Polish resistance throughout western Poland, while, on 17 September, the Soviet Union invaded from the east. As a result, Poland was soon overwhelmed, and the last Polish units surrendered in early October. Immediately, Lothian’s essential mission was to secure active and material assistance from the United States. Over the course of the next seven months, however, the first phase of his tenure as ambassador, Lothian’s influence on Anglo-American relations was minimal and peripheral.

⁴² PRO FO 115/3419, 986/1, No. 992, Lothian to Halifax, 4 September 1939; Ovendale, ‘Appeasement’, 293-294; Rock, 210-212. During the last days of August 1939, following the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, and as war appeared imminent, Roosevelt gave very clear indications that the United States would endeavor to assist Britain in any means short of war. On 26 August 1939, for example, after Roosevelt signed a declaration that all foreign merchant vessels would be searched for arms before being given clearance, he told Lindsay, “with impish glee,” that while the search might delay German ships for two days, British ships would be cleared in thirty minutes. Roosevelt also told Lindsay that if war broke out, he would delay signing the neutrality proclamation for probably five days, during which time “it would be open to the British authorities to crowd on any ship or transport into Canada all possible arms and ammunition on manufacture here that could be expected.” Although Roosevelt did not in fact delay the issuing of neutrality proclamations, a week after the outbreak of war, he sent secret messages, dated 11 September 1939, to both Chamberlain and Churchill, urging both men to write personally and outside of normal diplomatic channels whenever they wished. Roosevelt assured Chamberlain, “I hope and believe that we shall repeal the arms embargo within the next month and this is definitely a part of Administration policy.” Davis, Into the Storm, 491-492; Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill. Volume VI: Finest Hour, 1939-1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 52; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 176; Lash, 21-24.

The Phoney War

The first significant factor that restrained Lothian's effectiveness in Washington was the nature of the "Phoney War," during which there were few notable military operations and relatively little fighting on the ground in Western Europe.⁴³ In spite of French and British treaty obligations and promises to the Polish government, both London and Paris proved unwilling to launch a full-scale invasion of Germany. Although most of the Wehrmacht was fighting in Poland, leaving the defense of western Germany to a much smaller force along a fortified defensive line on the Franco-German border, the so-called Siegfried Line, the French mobilized timidly and proceeded to mount only a minor, probing offensive in mid-September 1939; the French penetrated only a few miles into the Saar before their troops withdrew to the safety of the Maginot Line.⁴⁴ Nor did the British send any significant assistance to Poland. Britain dispatched 13 infantry divisions of the British Expeditionary Force in order to assume, with the French, defensive positions in northern France and along the Franco-Belgian frontier, while the British Royal Air Force launched a half-hearted and tentative attack on the German fleet at Wilhelmshafen in December 1939. This air raid inflicted virtually no damage, suffered heavy loss, and convinced London that it would be wise not to repeat such operations until it was better prepared. As such, the raid exemplified the futility of the Phoney War. In the meantime, Hitler began to shift his forces from Poland to the west, instructing his generals on 23 October 1939 to prepare for an invasion of France, not to secure the triumph of National Socialism, "but to decide the domination of Europe." Hitler's determination to attack the west, however, led to a prolonged dispute with his generals that lasted throughout the winter. The argument between Hitler and his generals, which revolved around the question of the Wehrmacht's

⁴³ For further information on Britain in the Phoney War, see Philip M.H. Bell, A Certain Eventuality: Britain and the Fall of France (Boston: Saxon House, 1974); Robert A. Doughty, The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940 (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1990); Thomas Munch-Petersen, The Strategy of Phoney War: Britain, Sweden, and the Iron Ore Question, 1939-1940 (Stockholm: Militärhistoriska Förlaget, 1981); and Nick Smart, British Strategy and Politics During the Phony War: Before the Balloon Went Up (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

⁴⁴ The French had a crushing numerical superiority in the west. The Germans had 33-35 divisions in the west, composed largely of elderly veterans from the First World War. They had no tanks and approximately 300 guns. The French, by contrast, had 45 divisions along the Maginot Line, and 40 divisions along the Belgian frontier.

readiness, combined with poor weather well into the spring, delayed the launching of the German offensive until May 1940.⁴⁵

The nature of the Phoney War hindered Lothian's influence because the United States was, for the time being at least, not a priority for the British government. In strictly military terms, the conduct of the war by the Allies was in fact confused and chaotic. In one respect, France and Britain failed to align their strategic and military policies. Many of their efforts toward cooperation, ongoing since well before the outbreak of the war, were half-hearted and unenthusiastic. At the same time, a core of suspicion caused by the mistakes and carelessness of the previous two decades remained. More fundamentally, however, Allied strategy stumbled about among an almost infinite number of committees, inter-Allied agencies, and democratic institutions, which made it nearly impossible for the western powers to agree on any coherent decision, policy, or action. The frankest reality, however, was that British and French politicians simply had no stomach for war. The Allied strategy rested on the hope that they could prevail by strangling the German economy without having to commit to actual combat operations.

The Allies sought to impose a blockade of the continent, just as they had done in the First World War. But this policy led to fundamental disagreements between British military and civilian leadership, which also undermined Allied policies. Many civilian policymakers argued that the only possible way to make the blockade effective was to undertake specific and serious military operations forcing Germany to expend scarce resources in marginal theaters. One such theater was the Mediterranean, where, in late August 1939, Mussolini appeared poised to honor his obligations to Nazi Germany and threaten the Suez Canal. Chamberlain thus argued that, in the event of war, Britain and France could attack the Italians at great Allied advantage. The French army of the Levant, under Marshal Maxime Weygand, was stationed in Syria and a smaller British force under Sir Archibald Wavell was in Egypt, while powerful elements of

⁴⁵ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Viking, 1989), 60-62; Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 73-74; Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 53-55; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Second World War* (New York: Paragon Books, 1979), 36-38.

the Royal Navy waited in Alexandria. Allied military leaders, however, argued that Italian neutrality would be preferable to its belligerency, primarily because of the continuing slowness of British rearmament. The British army was deficient in training and equipment, especially in terms of tanks and heavy guns, its only tank formation was still not ready for action, and the Royal Air Force remained distressingly inferior to the Luftwaffe in total numbers of aircraft. Consequently, British military leaders advocated the continuing appeasement of Mussolini. Their view prevailed and the result was that the Italians remained neutral throughout the Phoney War. This successful appeasement of Italy, however, prevented Allied forces in the Mediterranean from achieving potentially easy military successes against the Italians at a time when the Germans were in no position to help.⁴⁶

In the meantime, the only serious Allied military action took place in Scandinavia and, similar to the British attempt to bomb Wilhelmshafen, underscored the ineffectiveness of Allied efforts during the Phoney War. As soon as the war broke out, the French cut off iron ore exports to Germany; as a result, the German war economy quickly needed a steady source of high-grade Swedish iron ore. During the summer, that ore moved through the Baltic port of Lulea; in winter, however, when the Baltic Sea freezes, it had to move through the Norwegian port of Narvik. In mid-September 1939, the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, proposed mining Norwegian territorial waters off Narvik. He ran into opposition, however, from the Foreign Office and the chiefs of staff. The former argued that such an operation would infringe on the neutral rights of a friendly small power, while the latter argued that such an operation might prevent Norway and Sweden from inviting Allied forces to aid Finland, currently under attack by the Soviet Union, and to occupy these ore fields. The result of these Allied deliberations was inaction. British military leaders rejected virtually every proposal for action due to fears of Axis strength and exaggerations of their own weakness.

In late March 1940, however, largely as a result of domestic recriminations over the Allied failure to assist Finland against the Soviet Union during the “Winter War,” the British revived the plan to lay

⁴⁶ Cadogan, 209-210; Keegan, 62; Murray and Millett, 15, 51-52; Taylor, 44; Sir Llewellyn Woodward, British Foreign Policy in the Second World War, vol. 1 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1970), 21-25.

mines in Norwegian waters. After more delays, Allied minelaying finally began on 8 April 1940. The next day, however, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. The invasion caught the Allies almost completely by surprise, and British efforts to drive back the German invasion and seize control of Narvik descended into a fiasco. British leaders could not agree on where to land their forces and initial British troop landings had to be withdrawn. Furthermore, because the German air force rapidly seized most of the Norwegian airfields, British ground and naval forces operated within range of the Luftwaffe. Although the British did manage to seize Narvik on 28 May 1940, their achievement was eclipsed by the far more significant events in France; eventually, Britain evacuated Narvik on 8 June 1940.⁴⁷ In the United States, the swiftness and the thoroughness of German victories in April 1940 came as a serious blow to Britain's military reputation. Roosevelt called the debacle "outrageous," proof of the incompetence of the Chamberlain cabinet.⁴⁸

While it is easy, with the advantage of hindsight, to see the Phoney War as a period of inactivity, the calm before the storm perhaps, the British *were* active: their activities centered on keeping the war out of the Mediterranean. During the winter of 1939-1940, the British were far more concerned with preserving the neutrality of Italy and the Balkan States, in order to limit the scope of a *European* war, than with securing the favor of the United States, to win a *world* war. Some members of the cabinet, including Churchill, maintained that London should seek to establish a full partnership with Italy. Not only would such a partnership protect the Suez Canal, it would also enable Britain and France to bring home several divisions from the Middle East, thereby strengthening Britain's military and naval position at home and in Western Europe. As late as mid-April 1940, the necessity of preserving Italian neutrality was a primary consideration in launching British efforts in Norway. As the Italians grew increasingly impressed with German success in Scandinavia, Sir Orme Sargent of the Foreign Office commented that, "Mussolini's decision may well depend on the result of the race between ourselves and the Germans to

⁴⁷ Murray and Millett, 52-53; Taylor, 46-48; L. Woodward, 43-44, 116-117, 131.

⁴⁸ Moser, 130; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 92.

get to Trondheim. If we don't win the race Mussolini will conclude that Hitler has succeeded in his conquest of Norway."⁴⁹

Moreover, Chamberlain and other policymakers believed that the war might be over quickly. They did not expect Hitler to launch a major offensive and believed that any protracted war of attrition would destroy the German economy. Because British policymakers did not understand that Germany's *Blitzkrieg* strategy required fundamentally short, sharp campaigns, supplied by an only partially mobilized economy, they convinced themselves that the German economy was already overstretched, and thus looked for signs of an early German collapse. The British were unshakably convinced that, following the conquest of Poland, the German economy was gasping for life; they believed that the Nazi regime had devoted so much to the production of armaments, that Germany thus lacked most of the raw materials necessary for war. As a result, London estimated that, if Britain could resist the initial German offensive through bombing, blockade, and reliance upon their superior global economic resources, they might compel the Germans to overthrow Hitler and negotiate an acceptable peace. Chamberlain said "I do not believe that holocausts are required."⁵⁰ Britain, Halifax told Lothian, was fighting for "intangibles and imponderables," to show Hitler's latest adventure to be a failure and a disaster so that the German people would not "allow themselves to be led into such errors again." Similarly, Chamberlain told Lothian that Britain sought to convince the German people that, "whatever happens they cannot in the long run win the war and that they have to face a gradually increasing restriction on their normal life. If that can be done I should hope for a crack in the German home front."⁵¹ Lothian wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare on 15 September 1939 that, because Germany began the war short of money and supplies, the blockade would make it difficult for Berlin to procure large supplies from Russia.⁵²

⁴⁹ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 64, 240; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 9-10.

⁵⁰ Lyons, 74; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 9-10; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 72; Taylor, 42-43.

⁵¹ Rock, 214-215.

⁵² Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1976), 401.

Nevertheless, in significant ways, the Phoney War inflamed American public opinion, and to some degree, Anglophobia. The military inactivity in Europe prompted numerous observers to conclude that the conflict was really a fraud. One of the most vocal advocates of this position was Senator William Borah, who argued on 17 September 1939 that Britain and France had declared war merely as a face-saving gesture and would negotiate peace with Hitler after a few months. “There is something phoney about this war,” the Senator muttered. Lothian warned Halifax in late September that one of the most significant dangers was the emerging view in the United States that Britain was simply biding its time, while preparing another Munich at the expense of Poland.⁵³

More important, however, was the issue of economic warfare. Anglo-American relations grew increasingly strained over this issue, revisited from the First World War. The change in American neutrality legislation actually reduced British demand for American manufactured goods. The Neutrality Acts required that all war purchases be paid for in cash; hence, it was essential that Britain conserve its limited gold and foreign exchange reserves. Consequently, the British Treasury drastically reduced purchases of tobacco, automobiles, and agricultural produce from the United States, and cut deeply into the \$35 million spent every year to import Hollywood films. Halifax instructed Lothian in November to explain that the restrictions were being undertaken “with the greatest regret” and intended no discrimination “other than what is forced upon us by the exigencies of war.”

Americans complained in any event. Agricultural exchanges proved especially divisive. The New York Produce Exchange protested to the State Department that American farmers were “being penalized for the lifting of the arms embargo.” Southern farmers were particularly irritated that the shortfall in British expenditures on tobacco would be counterbalanced by increased British purchases of northern munitions. This situation created potentially serious political problems for the Roosevelt administration, since the support of fruit, cotton, and tobacco producers in the American South was essential to the Democratic coalition and to Roosevelt’s effective leadership in Congress; it particularly

⁵³ Cull, 34; Thomas E. Hachey, ed., Confidential Dispatches: Analyses of America By The British Ambassador, 1939-1945 (Evanston, Illinois: New University Press, 1974), 5-6; Moser, 124; Rock, 220.

angered their chief advocate within the Roosevelt administration, Secretary of State Cordell Hull of Tennessee.⁵⁴ Secretary Hull, a life-long proponent of free trade, denounced the new British restrictions of having “distinctly adverse repercussions” on the American economy and warned of growing pressure by business and farm interests to terminate the recently concluded trade agreement of 1938.⁵⁵ On 22 January 1940, following an announcement that Britain would shift their purchases of tobacco from the United States to Turkey and Greece, Hull called in Lothian and expressed his great concern about the growing number of British restrictions:

Increasing tension and a feeling of resentment are steadily rising in this country due to a multiplicity of what are considered here as excesses by the British Government in prescribing and carrying out war restrictions on trade and finance. There’s a feeling that your Government is ceasing to show any consideration to my Government and the people of this country. . . . There’s a steadily increasing feeling in this country that American commercial and other interests are being severely injured by discriminations and unnecessary restrictions, the effect of which will extend into peacetime, perhaps permanently, to the detriment of American interests.⁵⁶

Lothian defended his government’s position by urging Hull to remember that Britain was waging a life-and-death struggle. Besides, he reminded Hull, owing to limitations imposed by American “cash-and-carry” legislation, the British were forced to restrict the use of its dollar resources and to avoid buying, in the United States, foodstuffs and raw materials they could buy more cheaply elsewhere. He also noted that Britain made Turkey a large loan and now purchased tobacco there because it had become a “vital bastion in the Allied system of defence.”⁵⁷ Hull protested that that was “not the question,” but whether the British government was doing itself more harm than good, “a fact in which I strongly believe.”

Characteristically enough, while Lothian did his best to conciliate Hull and the State Department, fundamentally he accepted that American grievances were justified: “It is due partly to the feeling that

⁵⁴ Cull, 36-37; Hachey, 18; H. Duncan Hall, North American Supply (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), 82-83; Moser, 124-125; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 359-360; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 71-72; Rock, 230-232; L. Woodward, 161.

⁵⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 269-270; Hull, 748-749; Moser, 125.

⁵⁶ Hall, 83-84; Hull, 748-749; Rock, 250-251; L. Woodward, 162.

⁵⁷ Hall, 84; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 359-360; Rock, 249; L. Woodward, 162.

we have been needlessly inconsiderate of American interests, both private and public; that we have been trading upon her good will and, more important perhaps in the long run, the U.S.A. is beginning to feel the old irritation against the way we use our 'command of the seas.' Which has been the constant source of often unreasonable protest to us for the last hundred years."⁵⁸ He explained to London that they were part of a subtle shift in American opinion about the war. Americans were anxious to see Hitler defeated, but deeply wished to keep the United States itself out of the war. He wrote Robert Brand that the root of the problem "lies in the fact that about 95% of the American population is vehemently anti-Hitler, but 99% is determined if it possibly can, to stay out of the war." Furthermore, the initial nervousness in the United States about being dragged into another European war had been assuaged by the inactivity in western Europe. Now, therefore, Americans were determined to assert their rights and interests more vigorously. The remedy, Lothian advised, was a proper explanation of British policy, in order to convince the American government and public that British action was "really necessary" to win the war. Beyond simply explaining British policy, however, Lothian also called for a real change in the content of British policy. He advised Britain to resume agricultural purchases in the United States, if only on a token basis, to demonstrate its goodwill. London should also give firm assurances that the wartime restrictions were only temporary and did not mean the creation of an embryonic autarkic trading bloc. Moreover, he proposed giving Roosevelt a full statement of the future course of British policy with respect to purchases from the United States.

Lothian's suggestions had limited success. Supported increasingly by the Foreign Office, he compelled Chamberlain to restate publicly Britain's commitment to post-war multilateral trade. The cabinet, however, remained reluctant to spend scarce dollars in the United States. There was general agreement that Britain must conserve her foreign exchange, and that if exceptions had to be made, the Mediterranean neutrals were of greater importance, at least for the time being. Even Halifax, although anxious about American opinion, took this view. Behind it lay not only the policy of financial caution

⁵⁸ Lash, 69-70.

for a potentially long war, but the persistent hope, entertained particularly by Chamberlain and his immediate advisers, that the war could be won without major diminution of Britain's wealth and power.⁵⁹

Britain's naval blockade proved an even more serious irritant to Americans during the Phoney War. As in the First World War, the British considered the blockade to be their vital and decisive weapon. On 7 October 1939, the Foreign Office announced that neutral ships carrying mail bound for Europe would be searched for contraband of war and for "obnoxious documents." As a result, the British began to divert American ships into the combat zone for examination of American mails and implemented an embargo on German exports. For example, British authorities in Bermuda began to inspect American planes refueling at that island for mail bound for any nation except Britain and France. In doing so, the British government resuscitated the old issue of the maritime rights of a neutral nation under international law, the cause of the War of 1812 and the source of much tension during the early years of the First World War. The Anglophobic *Chicago Tribune* published an eight-column banner headline announcing, "BRITISH RAID ON MAIL: LETTERS SEIZED AT POINT OF GUN ON U.S. CLIPPER." Isolationists in the Senate loudly denounced the British: Senator James Mead charged that the Royal Navy had been forcing American ships from neutral sea lanes into belligerent waters in the hope that they would be sunk by German submarines; Senator Bennett Champ Clark introduced legislation prohibiting planes carrying the mail from landing at Bermuda; Senator Ernest Lundeen even suggested seizing the island outright. After the sinking of a Danish vessel off a contraband control port in the Orkney Islands in January 1940, heightening international tensions over the blockade, Lothian begged the War Cabinet to examine American shipping in the safety of the port of St John's Newfoundland.⁶⁰ For many Americans, however, it was not simply the blockade that caused offense, but the inequities in its operation, as Britain gave preferential treatment to the Italians. Still anxious to keep the Mediterranean

⁵⁹ Billington, 142-143; Hull, 748-749; Lash, 70, 125; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 13-14; Templewood, 416.

⁶⁰ Butler, Lord Lothian, 269; Cull, 37; Hull, 733; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 280-288, 354-355, 357-358; Moser, 126.

quiet, London granted preferential treatment for Italian shipping and agreed to buy Italian and Balkan agricultural produce at a time when it was reducing such purchases from the United States.⁶¹

Efforts had actually been made relatively early in war to prevent such a buildup of American irritation. On 4 September 1939, Cordell Hull summoned Lothian to his office, initiating a series of meetings between the two men from which evolved an arrangement for taking up specific problems as they arose, through quiet, informal discussions, rather than by means of strong diplomatic protests, which might stir up public opinion and mutual tensions.⁶² At this specific meeting, Hull proposed to Lothian a resumption of the Navicert program, which had been used during the First World War, in which British officials examined cargoes before they left American ports and issued certificates that would prevent the ships from being stopped on the high seas or taken into British ports for examination. Hull suggested that this time, unlike the First World War, American officials participate in the inspections in order to resolve any disagreements that might arise. In this way, Britain could prevent contraband from reaching the enemy through these countries without triggering resentment within the United States.

On 25 November 1939, Lothian announced the resumption of the Navicert program, to take effect on 1 December. Nevertheless, incidents occurred. British authorities, for example, sometimes refused to certify some cargoes bound for neutral countries in Western Europe and did not explain the denials of certification. To prevent Britain from giving preference to its own exporters or blacklisting American firms whose foreign customers did business with Germany, American negotiators insisted that the British explain denials of certification. The British sometimes detained American ships for as long as three weeks, conducting extensive searches of their cargoes and censorship of mails. Although in Washington, Lothian defended the program to the point of denying to American officials that Britain maintained a blacklist, privately he urged his government to be more considerate of the United States. As a result, in January 1940, Britain halted the diversion of uncertified American cargoes to British ports, which the

⁶¹ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 13; Templewood, 416.

⁶² Butler, Lord Lothian, 270; Hull, 680-681; Rock, 242.

United States regarded as a combat zone. While this left the British free to divert these cargoes to Canada, in fact, the Royal Navy did not do so. Furthermore, beginning in March 1940, London agreed to explain each denial of certification. In the end, however, this question of British economic warfare became largely moot later in the late spring and summer of 1940, when German western offensives eliminated Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries, and France as neutrals. Thereafter, the United States no longer objected to British restrictions on trade with the remaining neutrals.⁶³

Continuing British Skepticism about the United States

Lothian's lack of effectiveness during the Phoney War rested principally on a continuing lack of confidence in the United States, and a decided lack of enthusiasm for Anglo-American cooperation, at the top of British government. While certainly not indifferent to the United States, and well aware that, in the event of total war, Britain would need large-scale American assistance, Chamberlain and his immediate advisers had little confidence that they could rely upon the United States. From bitter experience, they had learned that the promises of American presidents could easily be repudiated by Congress or neutralized by public opinion.

British irritation and resentment intensified because of growing disgust with the attitude of the American ambassador to Britain, Joseph P. Kennedy. Kennedy was remarkably indiscreet. He once astonished Lord Halifax by telling him that he did not care for the post of ambassador; he felt better in America, where he was "as independent as a hog on ice."⁶⁴ More to the point, however, he was a defeatist. Throughout 1938 and 1939, Kennedy had persistently predicted that war would break out and that Britain would be crushed. The totalitarian states, he forecast, would get not only the British Navy, but British bases everywhere and colonial areas in Africa. He predicted that the likelihood of Germany sagging under the pressure of any British blockade was a viewpoint of an earlier era and than end to the war by the spring of 1940 was wishful thinking. Kennedy warned of Britain's inevitable defeat, not only

⁶³ Billington, 143-144; Davis, Into the Storm, 514-515; Hull, 735-736; Rock, 242-244, 248-250.

⁶⁴ Cadogan, 151; Rock, 160.

within the confines of the American Embassy and in his dispatches to Washington, but also in public settings, in cocktail gossip and dinner party conversation, without thought of consequence.⁶⁵ Reports of the ambassador's loud assertions of Britain's imminent defeat poured into the Foreign Office. Their impropriety was such as to warrant the beginning of an extensive secret file.⁶⁶ Kennedy pressed Halifax to seek peace by diplomatic means. He even expressed defeatist views to George VI. The King was not only disturbed that the American ambassador held such views, but worried that such an attitude might color his dispatches to Washington.⁶⁷ Cadogan described a meeting with the King, who seemed a bit depressed, and "a little *défaitiste*," a result of a talk with Joe Kennedy, "who sees everything from the angle of his own investments." In late November, John Colville, the assistant private secretary to Neville Chamberlain [and later, to Winston Churchill], spoke with the Duke of Beaufort, who had been told, presumably by the King, that Kennedy "is talking about our inability to win the war." Colville noted mockingly, "To the P.M. and the F.O. he poses as the greatest champion of our cause in the U.S."⁶⁸ Even the French Embassy in London complained to the Foreign Office about "alarmist rumors" and asked whether something could be done to restrain the American ambassador.⁶⁹

In June 1938, amidst the growing tension over German threats against Czechoslovakia, Kennedy informed American journalist Walter Lippmann that war was inevitable and the British would "be

⁶⁵ Michael R. Beschloss, Kennedy and Roosevelt: The Uneasy Alliance (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 195-196; Ralph F. De Bedts, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, 1938-1940: An Anatomy of Appeasement (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), 120, 160.

⁶⁶ British Intelligence tapped all the telephones in the American embassy and kept Kennedy under surveillance. Those closest to him also were occasionally checked, including having their cars or apartments searched when deemed necessary. Ted Schwarz, Joseph P. Kennedy: The Mogul, The Mob, the Statesman, and the Making of an American Myth (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 246-247, 264.

⁶⁷ De Bedts, 169; Nicolson, 60, entry for 29 February 1940; Rock, 236.

⁶⁸ Cadogan, 215, entry for 9 September 1939; John Colville, The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939 - 1955 (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1985), 54, entry for 29 November 1939; Harvey, 326, entry for 1 November 1939.

⁶⁹ The head of the Foreign Office's American Department, John Balfour, minuted that, "The line we should take . . . should be whilst we do not regard Kennedy as anti-British, we consider that he is undoubtedly a coward, and whilst we ourselves do not feel that we could very properly complain, we would certainly welcome a somewhat stiffly worded remonstrance by the French Government, on the basis of what the French Embassy reported to them, addressed to Bullitt, who would no doubt thereupon convey it to the President." De Bedts, 212-213.

licked.” Lippmann’s recounting of the Kennedy conversation generated much comment at a dinner party in London, on 14 June 1939, attended by MPs Harold Nicolson and Winston Churchill. Churchill in particular regarded Kennedy’s forecast of British defeat as offensive; the ambassador’s comments indeed undermined his relationship with Churchill, whose influence was on the rise in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement.⁷⁰ Even Lord Frances-Williams, editor of the anti-Chamberlain *Daily Herald*, and later to become the head of the BBC, denounced “the smell of peace in the air,” some of which, he said, emanated from the American Embassy, where:

Joseph Kennedy . . . had set flowing a constant stream of denigration of Britain backed by the assertion that we would have no chance against the superior power and discipline of Germany when it came to real war and had better come to terms while we could. . . . all his personal circle seemed to take the same view. Since most of them were, like Kennedy himself, arrogant and gauche, to meet them at dinner parties and diplomatic receptions had become a painful matter. I remember one occasion when one of his staff sneeringly remarked in a loud voice that Britain deserved the fate that was coming to her for being too cowardly to resist Hitler earlier and I rose at the table and said, “While the brave, resolute Americans were resisting Nazism at every turn, I suppose”!, and walked out of the room my meal uneaten. I never again went to the American Embassy so long as Kennedy was there.⁷¹

Kennedy’s gloom and doom predictions became increasingly shrill following the outbreak of the war. He predicted that if the war continued, the result would be bankruptcy and, more important, communism. He expressed little confidence in the British leadership. He continued to trash Britain’s military prospects, describing the Royal Navy as “valueless.” Whenever he heard any words of defiance or confidence, Kennedy tended to discount them.⁷²

⁷⁰ Upon hearing Kennedy’s remarks, Churchill uttered: “It may be true, it may well be true, that this country will at the outset of this coming and to my mind inevitable war be exposed to dire peril and fierce ordeals. It may be true that steel and fire will rain down upon us day and night scattering death and destruction far and wide. . . . Yet these trials and disasters . . . will but serve to steel the resolution of the British people and to enhance our will for victory. No, the Ambassador should not have spoken so, Mr. Lippmann; he should not have said that dreadful word. Yet supposing, as I do not for one moment suppose, that Mr. Kennedy were correct in that tragic utterance, then I for one would willingly lay down my life in combat, rather than, in fear of defeat, surrender to the menaces of these most sinister men.” De Bedts, 141-142; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 172; Will Swift, *The Kennedys Amidst the Gathering Storm: A Thousand Days in London, 1938-1940* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2008), 171.

⁷¹ De Bedts, 141.

⁷² Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Kennedys: An American Drama* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 102-104; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 487; De Bedts, 161-163, 165; Lash, 75-76; Rock, 236-237; Schwarz, 286. Kennedy’s defeatism was not appreciated in Washington any more than in London. On 11 September 1939, he sent a message

By mid-September 1939, as a result of this almost endless defeatism, Lothian thought it essential, based on evidence he was given in Washington, that Chamberlain should summon Kennedy and “state emphatically” Britain’s determination to see the war through.⁷³ British officials increasingly regarded Kennedy as “a cross we must bear.” Sir Robert Vansittart noted in late February 1940: “Mr. Kennedy is a very foul specimen of double-crosser, a defeatist. He thinks of nothing but his own pocket. I hope that this war will at least see the elimination of his type.”⁷⁴

There was more to Whitehall's policy, with respect to the United States, than this disgust with the senior American representative in London. The British perceived that they were fighting not only for their security against Hitler but also for their continued position as a global power. Many in London argued that to triumph over Hitler by becoming dependent upon the United States would represent a pyrrhic victory. British leaders recalled memories of the First World War, when the United States had profited from its neutrality to capture Britain’s trade and had tried to force Wilson’s conception of world order on the victors as well as the vanquished. Lord Chatfield, minister for the coordination of defense, remarked that Americans would “fight the battle for freedom to the last Briton, but save their own skins.”

to Roosevelt, in which he predicted again that the British government could not survive the war: “They realize that a continuation of a war or the maintenance of Government on a war basis means complete economic, financial, and social collapse and nothing will be saved after the war is over.” He suggested that because the British government could never accept any agreement with Hitler, “there may be a point when the President may work out plans for world peace.” The president was outraged by Kennedy’s spinelessness and directed Cordell Hull to respond:

The President desires me to inform you, for your strictly confidential information and so that you may be guided there without divulging this message to anyone, that this Government, so long as present European conditions continue, sees no opportunity nor occasion for any peace move to be initiated by the President of the United States. The people of the United States would not support any move for peace initiated by this Government that would consolidate or make possible a survival of a regime of force and aggression.

⁷³ Rock, 217-218; Swift, 196.

⁷⁴ Collier and Horowitz, 104; De Bedts, 196; Swift, 219. Ultimately, Kennedy simply became a object of ridicule. Even before the declaration of war, Kennedy secured the use of a magnificent estate, St. Leonard’s, which was some 25 miles west of London for personal use and for accommodation of Embassy personnel if needed. With the outbreak of the war, therefore, and with the expectation that the Germans would attack London by air, he began sleeping in locations outside of the city. As a result, Kennedy was ridiculed for his cowardice, especially during the summer of 1940, in contrast to Queen Elizabeth, who refused to leave Buckingham Palace during the harshest of the German air raids. She insisted upon being with the citizens, experiencing whatever fate might befall London, rather than fleeing to preserve her life if the danger became too great. De Bedts, 212-213; Schwarz, 285.

Edward R. Murrow noted that in the opening months of the war, pointedly anti-American comments made the rounds in London: “God protect us from a German victory and an American peace. Britain and her Allies propose to win this one alone.”⁷⁵

Chamberlain thus sought American diplomatic assistance and limited material support, but he clearly did not want the United States to enter the war. “Heaven knows,” he wrote to his sister in January 1940, “I don’t want the Americans to fight for us; we should have to pay too dearly for that if they had a right to be in on the peace terms.”⁷⁶ The prime minister was not prepared to subordinate British policy to the hope of American aid and was in fact prepared to act against the best interests of Anglo-American relations. For example, in early February 1940, in spite of a warning from Roosevelt, Chamberlain and the cabinet refused to commute the death sentences of two members of the Irish Republican Army. In doing so, they also ignored the warnings of Lothian, who warned that the execution might sway opinion in the United States against Britain. To the horror of Irish Americans, the two hanged.⁷⁷

Even the one significant source of potential assistance by the United States did not notably weaken Anglo-American tensions -- the repeal of the American arms embargo. The arms embargo was a product of the Neutrality Acts, passed by Congress between 1935 and 1937, principally to prohibit the sale of arms, ammunition, and munitions to belligerents, and hence, to prevent the United States from being dragged into any future European war. Repeal of the embargo required a revision of the Neutrality Acts -- which required the consent of the Congress. The driving force behind this endeavor was President Roosevelt. During 1937 and 1938, however, domestic considerations preoccupied most of Roosevelt’s attention and energies. Furthermore, the president faced an increasingly hostile Congress. The midterm elections of 1938 saw the return of a significant bloc of Republicans to the House of Representatives for the first time since 1932. The Seventy-sixth Congress, which convened in January 1939, had 164

⁷⁵ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 9; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 73; A. M. Sperber, Murrow: His Life and Times, with a preface by Neil Hickey (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 151-152.

⁷⁶ Cull, 36; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 9; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 78-83.

⁷⁷ Colville, 81, entry for 5 February 1940; Cull, 36.

Republicans and 261 Democrats, a substantial number of whom were disaffected with the New Deal. The result was a strengthening of the forces opposed to Roosevelt's handling of foreign affairs.⁷⁸ The president, therefore, was profoundly determined to avoid international entanglements of any kind.

The Czechoslovakian crisis of 1938, however, proved to be a significant turning point in the president's thinking. Insider reports from the European conferences convinced Roosevelt that there could be no negotiations with Hitler. More important, Hitler's bloodless victory, handed to him by Britain and France at Munich, shook Roosevelt's assumption that the established powers of Western Europe would stabilize the Old World. If Britain and France were subdued, he further believed, Hitler would likely turn on the United States. Roosevelt concluded that Germany posed a real if not immediate threat to the security of the United States. Although he shared the national aversion to another war, he began to envisage a larger American role in Europe, albeit well short of war. Specifically, Roosevelt began to press for the United States to begin rearmament, particularly in terms of air power.⁷⁹

The need for American military preparedness became even more urgent in the spring of 1939, following the German occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Consequently, Roosevelt sought to repeal the arms embargo by revising the Neutrality Act. He wanted a blanket "cash-and-carry" law, by which belligerents could purchase without restriction in the United States, provided that they paid immediately for the goods in cash and carried them away in their own ships. Not only would this enable the United States to avoid the economic entanglements and naval incidents that, supposedly, had led it into the Great War, it would directly enable the Allies, with their superior navies and greater foreign

⁷⁸ Moser, 117-118, 121; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 49-50.

⁷⁹ Davis, Into the Storm, 372-375; MacDonald, 105, 108; Moser, 121; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 171-173; Rock, 131-133. On 14 November 1938, in a secret conference with military and senior administration officials in the White House, Roosevelt called for an accelerated program of rearmament -- the construction of up to 20,000 aircraft per year. In doing so, the president stressed two points. First, in 1917, it had taken the United States a total of 13 months following its declaration of war to put the first planes and the first troops on the western front in France; this time, such a delay would be disastrous. Second, the United States needed to rearm for diplomatic purposes: "When I write to foreign countries I must have something to back up my words. Had we had this summer 5,000 planes, with the capacity immediately to produce 10,000 per year, even though I might have had to ask Congress for authority to sell or lend them to the countries in Europe, Hitler would not have dared to take the stand he did." MacDonald, 120-122; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 45-46.

exchange, to enjoy preferential access to the American market. Because of deep congressional opposition, however, as well as poor leadership on the part of the White House, this effort failed; the bill was withdrawn and any action on repeal of the embargo had to be postponed.⁸⁰

American public opinion remained volatile and ambivalent. With the international situation in the late spring of 1939 relatively calm, there seemed no clear or immediate danger to the United States. Gallup Polls on 8 July 1939 showed that 60 percent favored the sale of arms to Britain and France in a European war. A month later, however, 51 percent of those questioned said that Congress was right to retain the arms embargo, while 37 disagreed and 12 percent expressed no opinion. This ambivalence about a European war remained a consistent feature of American public opinion until well into 1941: most Americans opposed belligerency by the United States, although their sympathies were overwhelmingly on the side of Britain and France.⁸¹

As a result of this ambivalent domestic situation, Roosevelt began to take steps to educate and shape American opinion. Following *Kristallnacht*, the wave of Nazi-inspired violence against Jews and Jewish property that swept across Germany on 9 November 1938, Roosevelt sought to emphasize the moral divide between totalitarian and American values.⁸² In his State of the Union Address on 4 January 1939, Roosevelt stressed that “Storms from abroad directly challenge three institutions indispensable to Americans. The first is religion. It is the source of the other two -- democracy and international good faith . . . Where freedom of religion has been attacked, the attack has come from sources opposed to democracy. . . . We have learned that God-fearing democracies of the world which observe the sanctity of

⁸⁰ The president’s rhetoric was too alarmist and a strong bipartisan coalition mobilized in Congress, inspired by general suspicion of the president and his efforts to expand executive control over foreign policy. In mid-1939, therefore, confronted by deep congressional and public skepticism, Roosevelt chose not to engage in a head-on confrontation. Burns, *Lion and the Fox*, 392-393; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 449-458; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 79-83; 136-147; MacDonald, 155-156, 161; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 41-42, 49-50, 173; Rock, 171-172, 184-185; L. Woodward, 157.

⁸¹ Moser, 122; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 50, 173.

⁸² In response to *Kristallnacht*, Roosevelt summoned home the American ambassador to Berlin for consultation. He tried to amend the 1924 Immigration Act to permit the entry of German refugee children into the United States, but failed due to nativist pressure groups. Burns, *Lion and the Fox*, 388; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 364-372; Hull, 599; MacDonald, 113-114; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 51; Rock, 136-137.

treaties and good faith in their dealings with other nations cannot safely be indifferent to international lawlessness anywhere. They cannot forever let pass, without effective protest, acts of aggression against sister nations -- acts which automatically undermine all of us.”⁸³ On 14 April 1939, after the Germans took over Czechoslovakia and the Italians invaded Albania, he asked why nations could “find no better methods of realizing their destinies than those which were used by the Huns and the Vandals fifteen hundred years ago?” The next day, 15 April, he invited Hitler and Mussolini to guarantee the integrity of 31 specified states in Europe and the Middle East for at least ten years. These messages, broadcast worldwide, were ridiculed in Italy and Germany; Mussolini declared the proposal “a result of infantile paralysis.” Roosevelt, who had in fact rated the chances of a positive response at no more than one in five, told the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King that, “If we are turned down the issue becomes clearer and public opinion in your country and mine will be helped.”⁸⁴

One of Roosevelt’s most notable opportunities to shape American perceptions was the visit, in the first week of June 1939, by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, to the United States, the first visit ever by a reigning British monarch. Roosevelt conceived of the visit as a safe but effective way to dramatize Anglo-American friendship, and as a chance to show off the British monarchy, the past symbol of trans-Atlantic differences, in a favorable light.⁸⁵ To this end, Roosevelt effectively orchestrated the royal visit for maximum public relations effect. For example, when the King suggested that he bring a British minister with him, Roosevelt noted that the presence of a political minister would “excite a lot of talk about an alliance,” which he frankly wished to avoid. News of the royal couple’s triumphant tour of Canada, which preceded their trip to the United States, strengthened the impact of Roosevelt’s arrangements. Anecdotes of their ignoring protocol and meeting with common people face to face had

⁸³ Burns, Lion and the Fox, 389; Davis, Into the Storm, 387-390; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 46-48; MacDonald, 122; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 51-52; Rock, 146-147.

⁸⁴ Burns, Lion and the Fox, 390-392; Davis, Into the Storm, 432-435; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 54; Rock, 177-180.

⁸⁵ In the late summer of 1938, having learned about a projected royal visit to Canada from Mackenzie King, Roosevelt wrote George VI, inviting him to include the United States. He noted: “Frankly, I think it would be an excellent thing for Anglo-American relations if you could visit [here].” Cull, 23; Rock, 139-140.

the American press buzzing with talk of a “people’s king.” After a brief visit to Washington D.C., the royal couple traveled to New York City on 10 June 1939. They toured the World’s Fair and were treated to spontaneous choruses of “Land of Hope and Glory” and “Rule Britannia.” They spent the weekend with the Roosevelts at Hyde Park. Crowds massed by the roadside as the couple drove up the Hudson Valley, and everywhere they were greeted by a cacophony of cheers, horns, and church bells. Stories of the King and Queen relaxing over hot dogs and beer pleased everyone, except for the Roosevelt’s British-born butler, who refused to countenance such indignity and took the weekend off. London was absolutely delighted by the American response to the royal visit.⁸⁶ Sir Ronald Lindsay described the visit as a “complete success” and asserted that the king had become “a real political asset.” “There can be no doubt that the visit has made [a] profound impression on the whole country and has deepened and fixed already existing feelings of friendliness.” He assured Halifax that all Americans “today feel closer to the Empire than they did a fortnight ago, and this cannot fail to be of immense importance.” At the same time, Lindsay was equally anxious to remind London not to expect an immediate political dividend, as it was not yet apparent how the visit might affect legislation.⁸⁷ After all, at the very moment that Americans were cheering the royal couple, the administration’s efforts to revise the Neutrality Acts were dying in Congress. As a result, a senior diplomat in London mourned that Britain “could no more count on America than on Brazil.”⁸⁸

More than any of the president’s efforts, however, the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939 most clearly illustrated the moral divide between democratic and totalitarian civilization. The Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin -- the country of atheistic communism, brutal purges, the leadership cult, and the one-party state -- had revealed itself as the true ideological partner of Adolf Hitler’s Germany, persecutor of the Jews and conqueror of Czechoslovakia. To western commentators,

⁸⁶ Cull, 28-29; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 446-449; Hull, 623-624; Moser, 119-120; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 54; Rock, 188-192.

⁸⁷ PRO FO 414/276, A4139/27/45, Tel. 255, 12 June 1939, Lindsay to Halifax.

⁸⁸ Cull, 29.

the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany seemed indistinguishable in methods and character, and references to Hitler's "Brown Bolshevism" and Stalin's "Red Fascism" became commonplace in the American press.⁸⁹

It is clear, therefore, that by the late summer of 1939, President Roosevelt believed Nazi Germany to represent a significant threat to the United States. It is also clear that he believed it necessary to prepare the American people for the possibility of war, and to convince them that there existed a significant ideological divide between the belligerents. On the evening of 3 September 1939, in his first fireside chat following the outbreak of the war, Roosevelt, in contrast to Woodrow Wilson in August 1914, did not call for neutrality in thought and deed:

This nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well . . . Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience. . . . I have said not once, but many times, that I have seen war and that I hate war. I say that again and again. I hope the United States will keep out of this war. I believe that it will. And I give you assurance and reassurance that every effort of your Government will be directed toward that end. As long as it remains within my power to prevent, there will be no black-out of peace in the United States.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the president did issue neutrality proclamations, as required by international law and the Neutrality Act of 1937. Norman Davis told Lothian that Roosevelt "felt very badly" about having to do this, particularly as every instinct and every "fiber of his being" sympathized with Britain and France. Roosevelt could not, however, give the isolationists grounds for saying he was disregarding the law. The best way for getting the Neutrality Acts revised or repealed, the president believed, was to demonstrate to public opinion how its enforcement denied needed supplies to the Allies.⁹¹

The outbreak of the war gave Roosevelt justification to call back Congress, which had not been due to reconvene until January 1940, in a special session to review the Neutrality Acts. In mid-September 1939, Lothian wrote Lady Astor that the president was "very confident" about getting the embargo removed, adding, "There is no doubt that he is not neutral about Hitler and Hitlerism." Roosevelt had

⁸⁹ Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 55-57.

⁹⁰ Burns, Lion and the Fox, 395; Butler, Lord Lothian, 269; Davis, Into the Storm, 489-490; Dimpleby and Reynolds, 122; Orde, 128; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 63-64; Rock, 210.

⁹¹ Cull, 32; Rock, 210.

learned from the mistakes made on Capitol Hill during the summer and now had a clear strategy for revision, substituting cash-and-carry for the mandatory arms embargo. Although he continued to work through Democratic leaders on the Hill, he also enlisted Alf Landon and Frank Knox, the Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates in 1936, to rebut isolationists such as Senators William Borah and Arthur Vandenberg. In late September, following the presentation of a draft bill to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, hearings and debates began in both houses of Congress, which attracted intense press and radio interest. They also became the focus of intensive propaganda campaigns. In the final two weeks of September, members of Congress received a deluge of letters, postcards, and telegrams, opposing repeal of the arms embargo. Some senators received four thousand each day.⁹²

The opponents of neutrality revision did not give up easily. During the debate, isolationists and other critics of the bill insisted that this measure patently and overtly sought to assist Britain and France. Many argued that repeal would constitute an “unneutral” attempt to assist the Allies and would represent a definite step toward war. Senator Arthur Vandenberg declared that, “In the long run, I do not believe we can become an arsenal for one belligerent without becoming a target for another.” The *Chicago Tribune* declared that, “This is not our war. We should not make it ours. We should keep out of it . . . The frontiers of American democracy are not in Europe, Asia, or Africa.” Anti-interventionists in the United States rallied around Senators Vandenberg, Borah, Bennett Champ Clark, and Gerald Nye, who, along with the support of radio preacher Father Coughlin and celebrated aviator Charles Lindbergh, led a spirited opposition to any repeal of the arms embargo. Borah asked rhetorically, “Was the cruel and brutal and revolting creed of Nazism any different at Munich than it was at Warsaw?” Senator D. Worth Clark attacked what he called Britain’s “holier than thou” attitude, describing the British Empire as “the outstanding example of aggression that the world has ever seen.” Senator Sheridan Downey, in the meantime, reminded his colleagues that Britain has “denied our sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere

⁹² Burns, *Lion and the Fox*, 396; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 493, 497-502; Hull, 693-697; Moser, 122-123; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 64-66; Rock, 225-227.

more than any other country.” Father Coughlin spearheaded a national campaign that brought over a million telegrams, letters, and postcards to congressional offices over the course of days.⁹³

In October 1939, the administration mobilized a counterattack. Building on top of opinion polls that indicated an emerging majority for repeal and overwhelming support for cash-and-carry, William Allen White, a highly respected Republican newspaper editor from Kansas, organized a “Non-Partisan Committee for Peace through Revision of the Neutrality Act.” Its publicity drive centered on endorsements from opinion makers in religion, education, journalism, and business. In the end, the administration’s firm leadership, together with its insistence that this was a “peace” measure, carried the day. On 27 October 1939, the bill won a two-thirds majority in the Senate. A few days later, the bill passed the House by 243 votes to 181. After a Senate-House conference committee resolved minor differences, Roosevelt signed the 1939 Neutrality Act into law on 4 November 1939. Thereafter, all trade with belligerent countries was on a cash-and-carry basis. The British government, which had watched the proceedings with caution, was quite pleased. Lothian, in his reports to the Foreign Office, had described Roosevelt’s confidence of success and noted that the president had told him, “We shall come right in [*sic*] before long.” It was recognized in London, however, that “this was rather typical of the President’s way of speaking loosely and optimistically in private conversation.”⁹⁴ Nevertheless, London was greatly relieved. Chamberlain wrote to Roosevelt on 8 November that the repeal of the arms embargo provided “profound moral encouragement to us in the struggle upon which we are engaged.”⁹⁵

Although the 1939 Neutrality Act minimized the dangers of the United States becoming entangled unwillingly in another European war, Roosevelt intended it as an unneutral act. He clearly intended cash-and-carry to benefit Britain and France -- countries with substantial foreign exchange reserves and large merchant fleets. Within that framework, it opened up the vast material and industrial

⁹³ Cull, 34; Davis, Into the Storm, 494-497; Moser, 123-124; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 66; Rock, 228.

⁹⁴ PRO FO 414/276, A7605/98/45, Tel. 712, Lothian to Foreign Office, 4 November 1939; Rock, 227.

⁹⁵ Burns, Lion and the Fox, 396-397; Davis, Into the Storm, 502-504, 508-509; Moser, 122-124; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 64-67; Rock, 228.

resources of the United States to Britain and France. This did not mean, however, complete and unfettered access. There remained a significant ban on loans, while the “carry” clauses frequently drove the two countries to subterfuge.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the debate over the neutrality legislation appeared to circumscribe Roosevelt’s public position and the actions he could take to help Britain and France. Vandenberg noted that “it is going to be much more difficult for F.D.R. to lead the country into war. We have forced him and his Senate group to become vehement in their peace devotions -- and we have aroused the country to a peace vigilance which is powerful.”⁹⁷

Most significant, the mass of the American population remained deeply opposed to active United States involvement in the war. Only days after the outbreak of the conflict, Lothian wrote to Halifax about the “tremendous debate” that was going on in the public mind about what American policy should be. Many Americans recognized and understood that a peaceful and stable world could not be organized without American cooperation. At the same time, however, they also believed that the United States had been tricked into the First World War by Wall Street financial interests and British propaganda, and tended to attribute the outbreak of the current war to the follies and machinations of the rest of the world. Lothian recognized this opinion as a “huge problem.” It was “obviously going to take a long time to reeducate 130 million people into a truer perspective.” This would only happen, however, once Americans realized “that their own vital interests were in danger.”⁹⁸ Over the course of the Congressional debate, Lothian pointed out that one of the fundamental problems for Britain was the question of whether this was America’s fight. On 15 September 1939, he wrote Sir Samuel Hoare, later Viscount Templeton:

⁹⁶According to the Neutrality Act of 1939, airplanes could not be flown directly from factories in the United States to Canada, and on to Britain. Some were dismantled and shipped in crates by sea. Lockheed, a small company in California that was expanding with orders from Britain, found an original solution that kept strictly within the bounds of the Neutrality Act. The company bought a stretch of flat land in the far north of North Dakota, on the Canadian border. Lockheed pilots flew the planes to the grass airstrip. The engines were turned off and the pilots disembarked. A local farmer hitched a team of horses to the front undercarriage and drew the machines a few yards across the border into Canada, thereby ensuring that the planes had not left American territory under their own power. British or Canadian pilots then went aboard, restarted the engines, and took off for Britain. Dimpleby and Reynolds, 124; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 66-68; Rock, 232.

⁹⁷ Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 68.

⁹⁸ Rock, 212-213.

The consequence of the serious position in which the Russo-German pact and the forthcoming defeat of Poland are going to place England and France is beginning to come home to thinking Americans and instinctively the mass of Americans feel that Hitler is a mortal enemy of all they stand for. But at the moment they are obsessed with the desire to keep out of war -- a desire which naturally grows stronger as they feel the abyss drawing nearer. Their moral preparedness is about that of England during the Baldwin period. If the only issue in the Neutrality Act were whether they would allow England and France to buy implements of war, the embargo would be lifted at once.

But the key struggle, Lothian maintained, was “more and more going to take the form of a debate whether this war is also America’s war or not.”⁹⁹

In early November 1939, in a round of letters to Halifax, Churchill, Lord Chatfield, and Hoare, Lothian reported that the American reaction to the repeal of the arms embargo was mixed. In what would become a consistent theme in his analyses of American public opinion, Lothian wrote that Americans wanted the Allies to win, “partly for ideological reasons, partly because the success of the Allies will remove the Hitlerian menace to American security, especially in South America, while their defeat would leave the United States face to face with a totalitarian Europe.” While the United States would make available resources of every kind on a cash-and-carry basis, however, Americans at the same time had decided “with practical unanimity that [they are] utterly against being drawn into the war in Europe,” until they were exposed to a direct threat to their own vital interests. Lothian stressed that one of the biggest political problems for Britain was the perception throughout the United States that the war was strictly an internal European conflict that did not directly affect American interests: “Public opinion, therefore, is far more confident that it can and ought to keep out of the war than it was.”¹⁰⁰

The skepticism about the possibility of American assistance tended to provoke growing bitterness in Britain. John Colville wrote on 31 December 1939 that, “The U.S. is aloof, and critical of what everybody in Europe is doing and thinking, without showing the least inclination to step in to redress the balance of the Old World.” Halifax wondered how far the United States would go to help guarantee British security; if American support stopped short of war, “where is our security?” Chatfield complained

⁹⁹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 265; Rock, 213-214; Templewood, 401.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 272-273; Templewood, 410.

that it was odd how Washington saw the war as an internal European affair and yet feared the consequences of a British defeat. If the United States ever came in, it would not be out of moral sympathy but in its own self interest.¹⁰¹ Captain Victor Cazalet, MP, wrote Lothian on 10 February that, among other things, public opinion in Britain was growing disgusted with the lack of response by the United States:

It is extremely difficult to find anyone who has any sympathy for the Americans at all. I try and maintain silence when "America" is mentioned, but the general reaction, here and in France, to America's attitude today is [very] disappointing. There is a sort of general feeling that America would like a little more blood-letting before taking a real interest in the war.¹⁰²

British leaders were particularly offended by remarks made by Roosevelt in a private conversation with Lothian in mid-December 1939. One of his great difficulties, he told the ambassador, was to get the American people to understand the tremendous risks to the United States should Britain lose the war. It would be helpful, the president suggested, if the British could emphasize their commitment to self-government; specifically, if Halifax could state publicly that Britain had abandoned its empire-building of earlier centuries and admit that it had "long ago learnt the lesson that the only foundation for a stable international system was national autonomy." Roosevelt's point, that the British admit the errors of the past while pointing to a change of heart in the present, was not appreciated in London. Chamberlain rejected the admitting of past errors, and Vansittart at the Foreign Office mocked the president's suggestion as "simply lunacy."¹⁰³

Lothian Confronts American Public Opinion

Lothian believed that one of his principal, even vital, missions was to amend this American lunacy. Furthermore, he believed that one of the principal, and even vital, sources of this lunacy was the uncertain state of American public opinion. Lothian understood, as many British leaders understood, that

¹⁰¹ Colville, 62, entry for 31 December 1939; Rock, 234-235.

¹⁰² NAS, GD40/17/399/503-504, Cazalet to Lothian, 10 February 1940.

¹⁰³ Rock, 2237-238.

well before the outbreak of the war, Americans generally mistrusted any war propaganda, primarily because of their experiences during the First World War. He also understood the potentially immense power that public opinion could exert over American politicians, especially the current president. Consequently, from the moment he assumed control over the British Embassy, and over the course of his entire ambassadorship, Lothian devoted much energy, and in fact achieved considerable success, in his efforts to sway American public opinion increasingly in favor of Britain.

Because so many Americans confidently believed that British propaganda had lured the United States into the war, the Foreign Office was reluctant to revive such methods in the United States, and formally adopted a policy of “No Propaganda.” British policy was, in theory, to tell the truth, eschew secrecy, let the facts speak for themselves, and allow American opinion to more or less evolve on its own.¹⁰⁴ In reality, however, the British government established the foundations for a propaganda and public relations apparatus in the United States. This network, which evolved over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, consisted of the following principal operations: (1) the British Library of Information, New York [hereafter known as BLINY];¹⁰⁵ (2) the Foreign Office News Department; (3) the BBC “Empire Service”;¹⁰⁶ and (4) the Ministry of Information.¹⁰⁷

Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden raised the first significant consideration of propaganda in the United States in March 1937, when he asked Sir Ronald Lindsay to compile a detailed report on how Britain might “retain . . . the goodwill of the United States Government and public opinion” in the

¹⁰⁴ Cull, 10; Rock, 187-188.

¹⁰⁵ The BLINY was a small, experimental branch of the Foreign Office News Department. Originally, it served as a press liaison, but ultimately became the American agent for all British government publications and sources of reference information on all things British, from royalty to tax law. It also made use of a press survey to monitor American newspapers, which became London’s primary barometer of American public opinion. Library staff developed their own network of contacts, in all fields, from the Special Libraries Association of America, the Catholic Church, as well as literary and film circles.

¹⁰⁶ Although this service, consisting of news and discussion, was beamed largely at Canada, it could also be heard in the United States. In December 1935, the BBC opened its New York office in Rockefeller Center’s British Empire Building on Fifth Avenue, a prestigious site soon to be shared with the BLINY. This afforded the BBC a bridgehead for British broadcasting into the United States.

¹⁰⁷ Cull, 10-13.

mounting international crisis. In a long report, dated 22 March 1937, Lindsay made numerous suggestions for improving American opinion of Britain. Among other things, he urged the Foreign Office to consider American public opinion when formulating British economic policy and to woo the United States with a liberal trade in military secrets. He cautioned, however, that such a campaign could go only so far. He acknowledged the importance of the BLINY's work, but emphasized the danger inherent in expanding publicity beyond a few visiting lecturers and feature films. Therefore, he endorsed the "No Propaganda" policy and asserted that London could do much within the confines of this policy to win American sympathy. To this end, for example, he called for a large British contribution to the New York World's Fair of 1939, in the form of an exhibit focusing on Britain's cultural achievements.¹⁰⁸

Almost immediately, Lindsay's suggestions began to pay dividends. Over the summer of 1939, the British pavilion at the World's Fair attracted over 14 million visitors and became one of the most popular of all the exhibits. It included the finest in British ceramics and textiles, the latest streamlined locomotive, works of art, concerts, and a technicolor film of the coronation, which packed audiences into the pavilion's cinema. The centerpiece of the British pavilion, however, was the "Hall of Democracy." Here, the British displayed an original copy of the Magna Carta, while on an adjacent panel, visitors could find the pedigree of George Washington, showing his descent from King John and several of the signing barons. The British maximized the propaganda potential of the Magna Carta by mailing every school in the United States a translation and brief history of the document. Thanks to a sympathetic Congressman, Sol Bloom, the British government did not have to pay the postage. In addition, the BLINY persuaded *The New York Times* to produce a magazine feature on the document.¹⁰⁹

Lothian contributed to the success of the British pavilion as well, largely by ensuring that it portrayed the British Empire in the best possible light. In November 1938, Lothian had demanded an "exhibition of the humanitarian and social services aspect of our Colonial Empire" that could effectively

¹⁰⁸ Cull, 13; Rock, 188.

¹⁰⁹ Cull, 26-27; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 443-446; Hachey, 5-6; Moser, 119.

challenge the “constant prejudice in the American mind against British Imperialism.” The Colonial Empire Marketing Board produced a magnificent exhibit that included a “talking” display stand and dramatic photographs of soccer in a Fijian leper colony. The Colonial Office sent a British Empire expert, Sir William McLean, on a national lecture tour of the United States, in which he thanked the Carnegie and Rockefeller trusts for underwriting welfare schemes, thereby demonstrating America’s own involvement in the British Empire. American newspapers responded with headlines such as “U.S. CASH SAVING NATIVE MASSES IN BRITISH COLONIES.”¹¹⁰

The need to improve American opinion of Britain became even more imperative following the Munich crisis in late 1938. Although the BLINY reported an initial surge of public sympathy, by January 1939, returning lecturers and visitors reported that “anti-Chamberlain feeling” in the United States was intense. In addition, individual enthusiasts pressed the Foreign Office News Department, as well as Lord Lothian, to begin active propaganda in the United States. For example, in October 1938, in a speech broadcast over NBC, Winston Churchill urged the United States to rearm and stand shoulder to shoulder with the English-speaking world: “We need the swift gathering of forces to confront not only military but moral aggression; the resolute and sober acceptance of their duty by the English-speaking peoples and by all the nations, great and small, who wish to walk with them.”¹¹¹ In December 1938, Anthony Eden accepted an invitation to visit the United States. In a long speech, broadcast nationally over CBS on 9 December, he emphasized that Britain was “neither decadent nor faint hearted” in the face of the Nazi threat, and certainly did not seek to “lure others to pull our chestnuts from the fire.” Eden’s visit was a tremendous success. Victor Mallet, counselor of the British Embassy in Washington, called it a “major sensation.” Not for many years, he reported to Halifax, had a foreign visitor excited such interest and enthusiasm.¹¹² Lothian, still in the United States, wrote to Thomas Jones on 28 December that Eden did

¹¹⁰ Cull, 27-28.

¹¹¹ Winston S. Churchill, ed., Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill’s Speeches (New York: Hyperion, 2003), 185.

¹¹² Cull, 21-22; Harvey, 229-230, entry for 25 December 1939; Rock, 140-142.

very well: “He uttered the right non-committal platitudes, was straightforward and manifestly friendly, got on very well with the press, said that England was in no sense degenerate or defeated, did not criticize Chamberlain, made no whines or requests, didn’t put a foot wrong anywhere so far as I have heard -- a first rate diplomatic performance”; he even “had a success with the girls.”¹¹³

While Eden worked to convince Americans that not all the British were appeasers, more specific efforts were undertaken in London to expedite propaganda operation. These efforts included personnel and structural changes in the Ministry of Information and in the Foreign Office News Department. More significantly, in the short term at least, British officials increasingly cultivated strong relations with the American press corps in London, particularly radio correspondents. Many recognized a great opportunity for Britain to reach out to the United States, since radio provided a common language and technical convenience, while the glamour of such stories as the abdication crisis guaranteed London’s emergence as the hub for such coverage. Furthermore, a large proportion of American radio correspondents, several of whom had spent the past decade in Europe, were already hostile to Hitler and well-disposed to Britain. While the prime minister’s office remained skeptical, the Foreign Office News Department, as well as the circle of dissenters around Anthony Eden, strove to ensure that the journalists were well supplied with material, especially after the Munich crisis. During that crisis, Edward R. Murrow and other American correspondents became household names across the United States as, night after night, they interrupted regular programming with the latest news flash from Europe. Their dramatic and incisive reporting heightened Americans’ appetite for radio news. That lesson was not lost on British officials in the BLINY and the Ministry of Information, who recognized that, if London could trust the burden of its war news to American broadcasters, not only would they secure an invaluable channel of publicity, but the British government could also avoid the charge of propaganda.¹¹⁴ This was the position of Ambassador Lindsay as well. In March 1939, he wrote that:

¹¹³ Anthony Eden, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: The Reckoning* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 46-49; Jones, 422-423; Rock, 141-142.

¹¹⁴ Cull, 14-16, 24-26; Sperber, 125-132.

It would be a great mistake not to have as much broadcast from London as may be physically possible . . . If America ever comes into a European war it will be some violent emotional impulse which will provide the last decisive thrust. Nothing could be so effective as the bombing of London translated by air into the homes of America.¹¹⁵

British officials considered such efforts to be vital and increasingly urgent because, following the Royal Visit in the summer of 1939, American isolationists stepped up their efforts by once again raising the alarm against British propaganda. They alleged that London was already hard at work to lure the United States into the next war. British commentator Alistair Cooke wrote that Americans possessed an “almost psychotic dread” of propaganda; Lothian wrote that the United States is “terrified” of it. In more specific political terms, however, Senators William E. Borah and Gerald P. Nye seized upon a 1938 book entitled, *Propaganda in the Next War*, by British public relations expert Sidney Rogerson, as evidence of a “basic plan to involve us in the next war.” Rogerson claimed that Americans were “more susceptible than most peoples to mass suggestion.” He further described the methods that Britain would employ in the next war, including the exportation of “our leading literary lights . . . to put our point of view over the dinner table” and an emphasis on film coverage. Camera crews would be permitted “to shoot pictures of air raids, in order that a proper volume of pictorial ‘horror’ will be available in one of the few great countries where ‘atrocities propaganda’ will still be operative.”¹¹⁶ *Propaganda in the Next War* was a godsend for Anglophobes and isolationists; it provided, according to Lothian, “an opportune munitions dump” for Britain’s enemies in the United States. In the House of Representatives, a committee led by Congressman Martin Dies, Jr. of Texas, the House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities,¹¹⁷ claimed that the United States was now in the grip of a war propaganda campaign comparable only to those of 1914-1917.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Cull, 25.

¹¹⁶ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 265-266; Cull, 29; Moser, 128-129; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 73.

¹¹⁷ Also known as the Dies Committee, it was established in 1938 to investigate subversive activities within the United States.

¹¹⁸ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 265-266; Cull, 29-30; Moser, 128-129; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 73.

To counter American fears of British propaganda and American isolationist efforts, London continued to expedite the implementation of its public relations operations throughout the summer of 1939. It was careful, however, to adhere overtly to its “No Propaganda” policy. Sir Frederick Whyte, in July 1939, argued that “the less the British Government attempt by direct propaganda to justify themselves, the better. America will judge the European powers, not by what they say about themselves in foreign propaganda, but by what they do. It is almost certain that American reaction in our favour will arise more from the mistakes of enemy powers, both in policy and in propaganda, than from anything we may say in justification of British action.” Yet, Whyte wanted to expand the role of the BLINY and appoint a British Embassy press attaché. Lothian enthusiastically agreed, but Lindsay objected. Due to the delicate and uncertain state of American public opinion, Lindsay advised Lothian to maintain a relatively low profile, for the time being at any rate:

I really would urge you to say and write as little as you can on foreign affairs just now, and when you come out here, to limit yourself, at any rate at first, to the merely necessary speeches in reply to welcomes. In two or three months you will realize the atmosphere here as it blows into an Embassy, and will be able to judge for yourself how far you can go and what you can say.

Lindsay added that, in all of the well-wishes he received, as he prepared to depart, American friends and officials consistently praised him because “I have been wise never to speak in public at all. . . . I may be wrong. I only urge you now not to commit yourself to any course as to publicity here until you can make up your own mind on the spot.”¹¹⁹

When the war broke out in September 1939, the burden of developing the British case in the United States initially fell to the Ministry of Information. In general, the Ministry understood that its most fundamental undertaking was to establish the justice of the British cause, convince Americans that the war was genuine and not “phoney,” counter German propaganda, and to do all this without inflaming American propaganda phobia. With the outbreak of the war, moreover, officials in the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information counted on a steady supply of news that could win American sympathy;

¹¹⁹ NAS, GD40/17/392/402-403, Lindsay to Lothian, 16 May 1939.

they assumed, in other words, that the war would be worth reporting. Instead of high drama in France, however, there was only the “Bore War.” The early months of the war, furthermore, exposed numerous defects in the propaganda operation, the most significant of which involved bureaucratic infighting and the subsequent intrusion of the Chamberlain government. Chamberlain awarded many of the key positions in the Ministry of Information to political allies; the weakest appointment was the Information Minister himself -- Lord Macmillan, a lawyer with no experience in publicity and public relations. He was totally out of touch with his staff, did not work very hard, and had no seat in the War Cabinet or the House of Commons, so that his department carried little political weight. As a result, the Ministry of Information lost its monopoly on the news, as individual ministries established their own press offices and publicity policies.¹²⁰

During the first year of the war, therefore, with the official propaganda apparatus in London still essentially under development, the burden of making Britain’s case in the United States itself fell principally upon the ambassador. More than any other previous British ambassador, Lothian, as a former journalist, understood the power of public opinion in the United States and its role in American politics. He repeatedly warned that Britain’s fate in war and peace hinged on the “omnipotent mass” of American public opinion. What was now necessary, Lothian argued, was mutual understanding: “What is needed is that people on this side, especially among the so-called ruling classes, should be made to understand how Americans think and why they think as they do, and that there is generally as good a reason for Americans taking their view of international affairs as there is for our taking ours.”¹²¹ He had long believed that the American people could be “educated” to a greater understanding of the international situation and their responsibilities within it. On 13 July 1939, just before his departure for the United States, Lothian noted in his speech to the Pilgrims of Great Britain that Britain should not assume American sympathy and/or assistance simply or automatically on the basis of perceived Anglo-American

¹²⁰ Cull, 33, 37-39; Sperber, 138-142.

¹²¹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 258.

unity.¹²² While Britain and the United States shared a common language, as well as a common political and cultural heritage, that unity was quite deceptive. The British in particular tended to overestimate that unity, while Americans tended to overestimate differences between the two countries. His task, he stated, was, “not merely to represent the policy of the British Government to the Administration in Washington and *vice versa*, but to increase the mutual comprehension between the two peoples, which is much better than it used to be, but which is still by no means achieved.” To achieve such mutual comprehension, it was necessary to understand the fundamental differences between the two states. Lothian noted that a major cause of misunderstanding involved the differences in the working of their democratic institutions. Whereas in Britain, “political life centres in the House of Commons,” in the United States, conflicts between the president and the Congress are “resolved, if they are resolved at all, by an appeal to public opinion, by a technique with which we are quite unfamiliar.” This difference was accentuated, moreover, by the more prominent and influential role played by the American press in the United States. The result was that the American people tended to look at the international situation from a point of view very different from that of the British. Lothian argued that the current American perspective was comparable to the British attitude during the period of splendid isolation: “So long as the Channel protected us as the Atlantic protects the United States, the first instinct of our people, as it is to-day of the American people, was to keep out of the maelstrom of the wars between the contending nations of Europe.”¹²³

Lothian reiterated these points in a dispatch to Halifax on 28 September 1939. “Both winning the war and the prospects for a stable free world afterwards,” he wrote, “depend ultimately on whether we win and keep the sympathy of the 130,000,000 Americans.” He explained that public opinion had a direct and immediate effect upon the action of the administration, to a degree unknown in Britain:

This publicity is all the more important because the American constitution with its division of coordinate powers between executive and legislature makes public opinion

¹²² The Pilgrims Society is an Anglo-American dinner fellowship with branches in London and New York that welcomes American and British ambassadors on their posting to each country. Billington, 231, note 65.

¹²³ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 258-259, 261; Lothian, “Speech at the Pilgrims’ Farewell Dinner to Lord Lothian, at the Victoria Hotel, London, 13 July 1939,” in *Speeches*, xli-xlvi.

the decisive factor in all the more controversial matters of public policy. To an extent unknown under the parliamentary system it is public opinion as revealed in the press, the Gallup polls, the tornado of telegrams addressed to Congress and the ordinary reports of party and political whips and not the responsible view of the executive which decides.

Lothian concluded that it would be “a profound mistake to believe that we can be indifferent to the way in which others play upon this sensitive but omnipotent mass.”¹²⁴

Lothian, therefore, saw his delicate but essential mission as working to disperse the “fog of complacency.” He endeavored to aid and encourage Americans, in every way possible, to understand not only the dangers and the realities of the situation, but also the extent to which American interests were intimately bound to those of Britain, and, more to the point, the extent to which their peace and security depended upon the victory of the Allies. He was encouraged in this view by the British military authority Liddell Hart, who urged him in September 1939 to emphasize in Washington the strategic dangers to the United States of a Nazi conquest of Europe, the subsequent extension of German air and submarine bases into the Atlantic islands, perhaps even Central and South America, and a combined German-Japanese menace in the Pacific. Furthermore, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the First Sea Lord, wrote Lothian that America’s early entry into the war would provide greater security to American trade than neutrality because it would expedite the rounding up of enemy vessels that sought to attack Atlantic shipping.¹²⁵

The correct course, Lothian maintained in numerous dispatches to London, was to provide Americans with the facts, while never presuming to teach them their duty. He distinguished sharply between propaganda and what he described as “prompt and intelligent publicity.” He defined propaganda as an attempt to instruct or persuade Americans as to the opinions and actions that would be proper for them to entertain; such an impertinence, he argued, would make Americans “see red.” London should not be surprised, therefore, that Americans would resist British propaganda.¹²⁶ At the same time, it was clear

¹²⁴ PRO FO 115/3419, folio 585, No. 1110, Lothian to Halifax, 28 September 1939; Rock, 220; L. Woodward, 160.

¹²⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 265-266.

¹²⁶ PRO FO 371/24227, A2687/26/45, Foreign Office minutes: T. North Whitehead [12 April 1940]; John Balfour [13 April 1940]; Lash, 86.

that Americans were also eager for genuine news about British affairs and were spending large sums of money to secure this news.” Thus, Lothian relentlessly asserted that one of his primary functions was to hasten Americans’ recognition of the truth, while avoiding any suggestion of propaganda:

It is essential that we should realize that the United States is going to think out these ultimate problems for itself, and by itself, and that it is going to reach somewhat different conclusions from ourselves. We should concede to the United States just the same freedom and independence as we claim for ourselves.

After all, he wrote, just as “We in this country are not much influenced by foreign opinion and propaganda,” neither are the people of the United States.¹²⁷ He pointed out to Halifax that Americans were “so used to the pernicious system of political lobbying that they are particularly ready to suspect all and sundry of attempting to use undue influence.”¹²⁸

Many British officials flatly agreed with Lothian. T. North Whitehead, a newcomer in the Foreign Office’s American Department, minuted on one of Lothian’s dispatches that the ambassador’s “brilliant survey” makes clear that the “close dependence of the Administration upon public opinion accounts for the baffling phenomenon of an Administration clearly sympathetic and yet liable to object to our particular actions whenever we have failed to retain the sympathy of the nation at large.”¹²⁹ John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor General of Canada, wrote to Lothian that due to “the delicacy” of public opinion in the United States, “there should be no propaganda of any kind in America until the situation changes, though it is most important that our Government should be kept in the closet touch with every nuance of American popular feeling. Thank goodness they have in you someone who really understands the country.”¹³⁰ At the same time, however, the absence of any overt British propaganda effort did not dispel the widespread conviction among many Americans that such a campaign must be

¹²⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 266; Lothian, “Speech at the Pilgrims’ Farewell Dinner to Lord Lothian, at the Victoria Hotel, London, 13 July 1939,” in Speeches, xlv.

¹²⁸ Cull, 34-35; Moser, 124; Rock, 220.

¹²⁹ PRO FO 371/24227, A2687/26/45, Foreign Office minutes: T. North Whitehead [12 April 1940]; John Balfour [13 April 1940]; Lash, 86.

¹³⁰ NAS, GD40/17/405/448-449, Tweedsmuir to Lothian, 12 September 1939.

under way. Moreover, many American liberals objected to the lack of clear British war aims.¹³¹ As one Midwesterner put it, “Let God save the King.”¹³²

Lothian’s object, therefore, was to create an American appetite for knowledge of Britain -- its capacity to wage war, the determination of its people to see it through, and its desire that a better world should emerge from the struggle.¹³³ In order to better provide the American people with information, Lothian urged London to expand the operations of the BLINY. What was *not* needed, however, as some in the Foreign Office seemed to believe, was to send British lecturers to the United States. Lothian consistently argued that lecturers were almost invariably a liability, “not so much because of what they say but because any British lecturer is regarded from one end of the United States to another, as coming over here for one purpose and one purpose only, to ‘propaganda’ America” into the war.¹³⁴ Indeed, he wrote David Scott on 15 January 1940 that lecturers generally do more harm than good primarily because the newspapers routinely characterized them as “foreign propagandists and therefore inflame the still widespread fear in America that they are going to be propaganded into the war.” He added that Americans ignore German propagandists “because none of them thinks there is the slightest chance of their going to war on Germany’s side.” But they take British propaganda quite seriously “because that is the side on which they will enter the war if they enter it at all.”¹³⁵

As early as September 1939, lecture tours by numerous British speakers, including the former cabinet minister, Duff Cooper, became the focus of an isolationist propaganda “panic.” By the time Cooper’s tour reached San Francisco, he was met by angry protesters, waving giant lollipops emblazoned

¹³¹ Cull, 34-35; Moser, 124; Rock, 220.

¹³² Hessel Tiltman, the author of a contemporary book on American opinion, asserted that the phrase, “Let God Save the King,” was a slogan invented by German propagandists. PRO FO 371/24227, A540/26/45, “Report on General Position in the United States,” 7 December 1939.

¹³³ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 93.

¹³⁴ PRO FO 115/3420, No. 1433, Lothian to Halifax, 20 December 1939.

¹³⁵ PRO FO 371/24227, A760/26/45, Lothian to Scott, 15 January 1940. See also PRO FO 371/24227, A760/26/45, Lothian to Scott, 20 February 1940.

with the slogan, “DON’T BE A SUCKER FOR WAR PROPAGANDA.” Similar protests occurred in Chicago, Boston, and New York City.”¹³⁶ Lothian wrote Scott, Duff Cooper’s “visit I am convinced has done much more harm than good.” Once again, it was not due to anything he said specifically, but to the fact that very few Americans can believe that an ex-Sea Lord of the British Admiralty “could possibly hand out anything short of propaganda.” In addition, Cooper made comments about Jews that, Lothian complained, were “indiscreet and stupid.”¹³⁷ In part, Lothian understood the venomous reaction toward British speakers and lecturers, due to the voluminous amount of correspondence he received from Americans from across the nation, of all political persuasions, about any variety of topics. One representative sample was a letter from Miss Gertrude Heyman, who complained, among other things about British propaganda:

I seriously object to . . . your method of propagandizing the United States now, by sending many of your best speakers over here to travel our country and get our sympathy. You may think you are subtle, but we bit once, and altho [*sic*] that is some twenty years ago, we haven’t forgotten. So get your Duff Coopers and his kind back home and put them in the trenches, if you need their help. We’re not going to let them stand behind in a safe place and urge our boys on to victory -- again. Only the stupidist [*sic*] kind of people make the same mistake twice, so because you’re doing it don’t expect us to follow suit. That sounds like plain language, but . . . this is no time to mince matters, and I’m not in the government service and don’t have to use diplomatic language.¹³⁸

On the basis of this hostility stirred up by British lecturers, Representative Martin Sweeney in the late spring of 1940 pressed the Dies committee to look into the activities of “paid agents of Britain and France in this country, led by the Marquis of Lothian,”¹³⁹ while one Midwestern newspaper, the *Kansas City Times*, warned on 5 September against the cunning and deviousness of Lothian:

¹³⁶ PRO FO 371/22840, A7983/7052/45, British Embassy Chancery to Foreign Office News Department, 3 November 1939.

¹³⁷ PRO FO 1371/24227, A760/26/45, Lothian to Scott, 15 January 1940. See also NAS, GD40/17/399/495-496, Lothian to Captain Victor Cazalet, 2 October 1939.

¹³⁸ NAS, GD40/17/401/333-335, Gertrude Heyman to Lothian, 31 December 1939. See also GD40/17/406/363, James M. Witherow to Lothian, 18 December 1939; NAS, GD40/17/402/475-476, J.M. Macdonnell to Lothian, 4 May 1940.

¹³⁹ Moser, 128-129.

In a manner, Lord Lothian combines the charm of a cultivated Briton with a degree of democracy not usually associated with his fellow countrymen. We suspect he will make no public speeches and issue a minimum of public statements. Above all, he will be careful never to hint that England expects every American to do his duty. The subtlety of his propaganda will consist of the fact that there will be no propaganda. In short, a very dangerous man.¹⁴⁰

British efforts were also hampered by the German propaganda campaign. Unlike the British, the Germans had very little to lose by engaging in overt propaganda; after all, few Americans seriously favored the Germans. All the Germans had to do was to confirm Americans in their own instinctive reactions against the war and thus reinforce that isolationism. The leading figure in Nazi propaganda in the United States was George Sylvester Viereck, a naturalized American citizen and writer, who had promoted the German cause during the First World War. Among other things, he wrote *Lord Lothian vs. Lord Lothian*, a pamphlet that quoted some of Lothian's pro-appeasement statements in the 1930s, alongside his more recent statements critical of Nazi Germany. Viereck also persuaded some isolationist members of Congress to circulate copies of anti-British writings under the franking privilege that allowed federal legislators free use of the mails. The German Library of Information in New York City also produced a steady stream of publications, including a volume of captured Polish documents. To the embarrassment of the Roosevelt administration, these documents included an account of a conversation between the American and Polish ambassadors to Paris on the eve of the war, in which William Bullitt indicated Washington's readiness to support the Allies in the event of hostilities. In addition, the Germans produced an illustrated booklet that traced the term "concentration camp" back to the British action during the Boer War.

The German government proved highly efficient, initially more so than London, at supplying hard news. Germans were consistently first with news of Allied shipping losses; as a result, their figures gained acceptance almost by default and quickly became a serious deterrent to American approval of assistance to Britain. The Germans were also quicker at providing the photographic images of war craved by Americans; after all, the *Blitzkrieg* on Poland was infinitely more photogenic than scenes of

¹⁴⁰ NAS, GD40/17/400/1; Lothian, "To the Pilgrims of the United States, 25 October 1939," in *Speeches*, 4.

Frenchmen filing into bunkers along the Maginot Line. German photographs outnumbered Allied photos by a ratio of four-to-one.¹⁴¹

The antidote for all this, Lothian repeatedly stressed, was full publicity from London about everything Britain was thinking and doing: “If Britain and France cannot evolve a clear idea for themselves of their purpose in the war and how it is to be won and what is to follow it, no propaganda will do so.”¹⁴² In order to more effectively counter German claims in a timely manner, he urged London to provide American correspondents in London with unprecedented and open access. Like many others, including Sir Ronald Lindsay, Lothian agreed that the most effective form of propaganda at the moment were radio broadcasts by American reporters from London. In a letter to Sir Samuel Hoare on 2 October 1939, he noted:

The really effective things . . . are broadcasts from England by really competent American broadcasters about what is going on in England, about what we think, and our war aims, and speeches by Ministers to British audiences, like the speech Winston recently made to the House of Commons about the navy’s action in meeting the submarine menace. Americans who are extremely sensitive about propaganda feel that speeches addressed by politicians to the House of Commons are probably quite honest, whereas speeches addressed to themselves inevitably have an ulterior purpose in view.¹⁴³

On 6 October, he urged London to provide greater access to American reporters because the Germans *were* providing that access to American reporters in Berlin, to the detriment of Britain’s image and reputation. He argued that American reporters in Germany do not have to endure censorship; they were simply told not to offend government policy “and then allowed to send what they like.” The result was “very frank, vivid, picturesque accounts from Germany which are admittedly friendly to [the] German Government and not always uncritical.” By contrast, he complained, American cables from Britain were held up for hours, and mailed reports were held up for days, by British censors. As a result, two-thirds of

¹⁴¹ Billington, 144-145; Mark Lincoln Chadwin, The HAWKS of World War II (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 213; Cull, 34-36; Moser, 139-140; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 76.

¹⁴² PRO FO 115/3419, folio 585, No. 1412, Lothian to Halifax, 14 December 1939; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 73.

¹⁴³ NAS, GD40/17/404/332-333, Lothian to Hoare, 2 October 1939; Butler, 266.

the cable news was useless by the time it reached the United States because it was out of date. Photographs, furthermore, were “still quite inadequate and seldom interesting,” whereas the Germans were providing photos in great quantity and of high quality. That week’s edition of *Life* magazine, for example, included 36 photographs of the German air force, of no military value, “but indicative of keenness and vigor.” To counter this disparity, Lothian suggested that London publicize the blockade, “which is provoking hardly any criticism and is looked upon favorably by many as our strongest weapon.” London should provide American correspondents and photographers with access to facilities, to study British operations at first hand. London should also provide more and higher quality photographs of the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy, to excite more interest and confidence in Britain’s military effort. More to the point, he urged Whitehall to act because “most [American] newspapers do not want to have to publish German photographs but find themselves forced to do so for lack of competition.”¹⁴⁴

Lothian reemphasized on 29 November 1939 that, as the continued sinking of British shipping by German mines was “having a depressing effect on opinion” in the United States, as were reports that British and French air production remained behind that of Germany, “the best counter propaganda would be as full information as possible given to the United States correspondents in London.”¹⁴⁵ On 14 December, he wrote to Halifax:

American opinion is still . . . almost unanimously anti-Nazi. In addition it is now almost more strongly anti-Soviet. It is to a much less degree pro-French or pro-British. There are formidable elements which are definitely anti-British which take every opportunity to misrepresent our motives and attack our methods.

The solution, he argued, was to provide “the fullest possible publicity” from Britain and France “through the important and high class American correspondents” about what the Allies are thinking and doing.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ PRO FO 371/22839, A7052/7052/45, Tel. 582, Lothian to Foreign Office, 6 October 1939. Lothian’s comments generated much support within the Foreign Office. See minutes by Frank Cowell [9 October 1939], Victor Perowne [17 October 1939], and John Balfour [2 November 1939].

¹⁴⁵ PRO FO 371/22840, A8359/7052/45, Tel. 827, Lothian to Foreign Office, 29 November 1939.

¹⁴⁶ PRO FO 115/3419, folio 585, No. 1412, Lothian to Halifax, 14 December 1939.

By late 1939, Lothian's exhortations from Washington contributed to one significant change within the Ministry of Information. The American Division under Sir Frederick Whyte, which had escaped the chaos that bogged down the rest of the Ministry, facilitated the provision of British war photographs. Confronted by German domination of war photography, the American Division persuaded the MOI's photographic section to issue all official British war photos directly to American photographic agencies and to improve the quality of transmission procedures. By December 1939, as a result, the German advantage was all but nullified. Whyte also turned his attention to the military service departments, which were rarely forthcoming with newsworthy material. One of the most serious offenders was the British Admiralty, particularly when it was under the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. As the bulk of the war news was being made at sea, and as most of it was bad, Churchill actively suppressed news reports. Lothian was particularly incensed. In the end, the Admiralty bowed to pressure from the Ministry of Information and began to release the statistics, although Churchill's periodic reluctance to own up to shipping losses continued to irritate Lothian. For example, Churchill's refusal to admit the loss of *HMS Nelson* and *HMS Barham* in February 1940 drove Lothian to write: "I think Winston has made a fool of himself. He is always doing these things. That is why he never becomes Prime Minister."¹⁴⁷

During the early months of the war, following his assumption of the Embassy, Lothian generally followed Lindsay's advice to maintain a relatively low profile, avoid public statements, and defer all plans to improve publicity in the United States -- at least for the short term. Circumspection on Lothian's part was particularly imperative as Congress began taking up the sensitive effort to repeal the arms embargo. He agreed that this was not an opportune moment for a vocal British ambassador to start "educating" Americans about Anglo-American cooperation against Hitler. He wrote the Foreign Office less than a fortnight after his arrival in Washington: "We have clearly got to go very slowly in this country for the next few weeks." Lothian declined speaking engagements and postponed arrangements,

¹⁴⁷ NAS, GD40/17/405/269, Lothian to Herbert Bayard Swope, 29 February 1940; Billington, 144; Cull, 39-41.

which he had already begun, to find a suitable press attaché. He confined himself to establishing warm working relations with the president and the State Department, particularly with the Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who shared Lothian's devotion to free trade and abhorrence of economic nationalism, and the Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles.¹⁴⁸

Yet, Lothian did not entirely abandon his efforts to promote Anglo-American cooperation. First, he delivered a series of speeches over the fall and winter 1939-1940, in which he emphasized the necessity of Britain's survival to America's own vital interests. Second, Lothian helped to advance the scope of British public relations efforts, although he attempted to do so quietly and behind the scenes.

During the Phoney War, Lothian gave eleven speeches, all of which referred in some way to the international situation, and all of which repeated key themes. He denounced German treachery. As the Soviet invasion of Finland in late November 1939 triggered a wave of anti-Communism in the United States, he peppered his speeches with attacks on Marxism. Lothian repeatedly sought to counter any accusation that he was surreptitiously spreading British propaganda by reminding his audiences of the American commitment to freedom of speech and information. He explained that he was only presenting the facts, although a British interpretation of them, from which Americans could make up their own minds. In doing so, however, Lothian deliberately defined the British position in terms calculated to appeal to American interests and ideals. He persistently portrayed the United States as the inheritor of a precious flame born in Greece, nurtured in Rome, and carried to the New World by the British. He emphasized the common foundations of democracy in Britain and the United States, and thus presented the British cause as synonymous with the American way of life. He also stressed that Britain was fighting for the fundamental values of liberalism and democracy, and that Britain was the center, not of an old-fashioned and oppressive empire but of an evolving, self-governing commonwealth of freely associated powers. He frequently speculated about the post-war order for which the Allies were fighting and suggested the need for world federation on the model of the British Commonwealth.

¹⁴⁸ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 261; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 11.

In making the case for Britain, one of Lothian's most invaluable talents and one of his most distinctive characteristics was his ability to argue on the basis of American needs and considerations; to approach and appreciate an issue, or to propose a solution, from the American point of view. Therefore, Lothian argued the case for Anglo-American cooperation not from sentiment or from Britain's needs, as many of his countrymen tended to do, but from the standpoint of America's own security. After all, as he reported to London, "Americans . . . like being talked to straight and made to think, always provided you don't tread on one or more of [their] numberless irrational prejudices."¹⁴⁹

Lothian's most persistent position, which became one of the most persistent themes of his ambassadorship, was the importance of the Anglo-American division of global sea power and the interdependence of American security in the Atlantic with the survival of the British fleet. Since 1815, the Royal Navy had been the ultimate guarantor of the Monroe Doctrine, preventing hostile powers from moving out of European waters into the Atlantic. By the late 1920s and 1930s, however, it had become clear that the era of the *Pax Britannica* was over. The growth of German air power threatened Britain's insular security, and a potential coalition of three hostile powers, Germany, Italy, and Japan, challenged its global position. The United States, he maintained, ought therefore to share the burden of controlling the oceans -- the American fleet in the Pacific and the Royal Navy in the Atlantic -- so that by deterrence, or if necessary by war, the totalitarian states could be tamed and a new peace system secured.¹⁵⁰ These ideas owed much to Alfred T. Mahan and other American naval writers, and were popularized in the United States in the columns of Walter Lippmann. One of Lothian's talents, however, lay in synthesizing specialist wisdom and using his charm and eloquence to convey it to a wider audience in a coherent and plausible form. As one old friend, Thomas Jones, recalled, Lothian "conveyed a fallacious lucidity of one who had done the thinking and solved the difficulties for you."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Butler, 267-268; Cull, 58; Rock, 279.

¹⁵⁰ Cull, 58; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 4-5, 11; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 93-94.

¹⁵¹ Jones, 515; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 4-5; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 94.

While he generally approved of Lindsay's advice to keep a low profile and to speak in public as little as possible until he had gotten the feel of the American mood, Lothian could not avoid replying to the traditional welcome given the new British ambassador by the Pilgrims of the United States, at a dinner in New York City on 25 October 1939, at the very time when neutrality revision was pending in Congress. After referring to his own longstanding interest in America, to his predecessors from Bryce onward, and to the recent visit by the King and Queen, Lothian spoke of the concern in many quarters of American society that his remarks would be regarded as propaganda. He thus thought it instructive to publicly draw a distinction between publicity and propaganda. Publicity, he argued, was different from propaganda and was essential for the working of democracy, which depended for its success on the capacity of the informed citizen to take responsible decisions. Therefore, Lothian pointed out, "we want to tell you the facts as we know them and our point of view about the facts. But, having done so, by our own democratic principles, we are bound to leave you perfectly free to formulate your own judgments about them." He also emphasized that the century of peace following the end of the Napoleonic wars had been made possible primarily by the Monroe Doctrine and British sea power, supported by a stable gold currency, low tariffs, and free immigration from the Old World to the New, during which the system of individual initiative based on private profit had raised fourfold the western standard of living. Therefore, the real issue of the war, he argued in late October 1939, was not a contest between rival imperialisms, but "whether there is going to be power behind the kind of world" in which the democracies on both sides of the Atlantic believed, or the "far more relentless power behind the kind of world in which National Socialism and Communism believe."¹⁵²

Lothian stressed similar themes two weeks later, when Frank Aydelotte, the American Rhodes secretary and president of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, invited Lothian to address a gathering at the college on 11 November 1939. Lothian emphasized that the war was becoming more and more a struggle between the totalitarian and the democratic way of life: "We of the liberal West are quite

¹⁵² Lothian, "To the Pilgrims of the United States, 25 October 1939," in Speeches, 1-19.

convinced . . . that the ultimate foundations of our civilization are sound. . . . These foundations are the right to individual freedom and individual responsibility, both.” He further stressed the common foundations shared by both states: “Our right to freedom includes those securities for immunity from arrest except for breach of law, freedom for thought and speech and writing and so forth which are embodied in Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus, and the Bill of Rights.” At the same time, however, Lothian reiterated his long-standing belief that the root of political and economic rivalries, and therefore “the reappearance of world war,” was national sovereignty:

It is, indeed, obvious that the division of Europe into twenty-six sovereignties, each with an army and air force, a foreign policy, sky-high tariffs, and insurmountable restrictions on migration of its own, is incompatible either with peace or liberty or prosperity, and that this anarchy has been the main cause of the constant wars and revolutions which have been the bane of Europe in the past.

The solution, Lothian maintained, to the relentless questions of war and peace was world federation. Lest Americans believe that federation was a foreign concept, he argued that federalism was after all “first discovered and successfully applied in the United States,” and was ultimately copied in Canada and Australia. Furthermore, it could only work among democratic states. It was clearly impossible, he argued, to include Communist, Fascist, and democratic states in the same federation: “A true federation is necessarily the result of voluntary agreement and not compulsion. It can only be based on free institutions in some form. One necessary preliminary is the defeat of totalitarian imperialism.” Lothian’s address was in one sense extraordinary, in that very few diplomats would have proposed the abolition of national sovereignty in a public address. The fundamental message, nevertheless, remained consistent -- that America’s interests and ideals were indeed in the line of fire.¹⁵³

Lothian reiterated these themes in his remarks on 28 November 1939, at a ceremony commemorating the depositing of the Lincoln copy of the Magna Carta, one of the four existing copies, in the Library of Congress. The document had been the centerpiece of the British pavilion at the 1939 New

¹⁵³ NAS, GD40/17/403/504-571; Lothian, “Speech at Founders Day Celebration at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, 11 November 1939,” in *Speeches*, 23-35. For favorable American press commentary, see PRO FO 115/3420, 1786/1, No. 1208, Lothian to Halifax, 27 October 1939.

York World's Fair. In order to avoid a dangerous return voyage home, the Library of Congress agreed to keep it for the duration of the war.¹⁵⁴ In his remarks during the ceremony, Lothian noted the common descent of American and British liberty from the great document: "In these immortal words, and in others, inscribed on the musty parchment before us, we see the nucleus of most of our liberties, of trial by Jury, of Habeas Corpus, of the principle of no taxation without representation, of the Bill of Rights, and of the whole edifice of modern democracy." More to the point, Lothian argued that "the principles which underlay Magna Carta are the ultimate foundations of your liberties no less than of ours":

Samuel Adams appealed to the "rights of Magna Carta to which the colonists, as free subjects, have an undoubted claim." It was in their name that your ancestors threw the tea into Boston Harbour and rejected the claim of King George III to tax the colonies for defence. It was in their name that, after bitter sacrifices and frustration, they drew up that constitution which Mr. Gladstone, one of the greatest champions of human freedom, described as "the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man". And it was in their name that Abraham Lincoln fought a four years' war to loosen the fetters from the slaves and to preserve the Union which alone could ensure that the anarchy of national sovereignties, the insatiable breeder of war in Europe, should not appear on this continent.

Although "we still have our liberties," he warned that, "at the moment they are being challenged by totalitarian imperialism, from both the right and from the left." Consequently, with the Justices of the Supreme Court looking on, Lothian committed the document to a place of safety "alongside its own descendants, the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution."¹⁵⁵ In a report to the Foreign Office, Aubrey Morgan described the widespread news coverage of the presentation. He stressed that the significance of the newspaper reaction was not the manner in which the story was told, "but the fact that this story was told as a news story, in pictures, and commented on by columnists and editorials in all types of papers and in all parts of the United States of America." He noted in particular that the Associated Press devoted much commentary on Lothian's emphasis on a common heritage, which thus became the basis of numerous editorials in its 1165 member newspapers. Morgan noted that those

¹⁵⁴ This copy had been the property of the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral of Lincoln, and, according to Lothian, "their most treasured possession."

¹⁵⁵ Billington, 146; Butler, Lord Lothian, 268; Cull, 58; Lothian, "Speech on the Occasion of the Deposit of the Magna Carta in the Library of Congress, 28 November 1939," in Speeches, 44-46.

editorials “showed by their comment how sympathetic a note Lord Lothian had struck in his reference to the Charter as a foundation upon which the democratic development of both countries was built.”¹⁵⁶

During his address to the Chicago branch of the Council on Foreign Relations on 4 January 1940, Lothian once again addressed the ongoing assumption that he was spreading British propaganda. He therefore began by stressing that he would present the audience with facts about the war, not “a few meaningless diplomatic commonplaces”:

To do this is not, I think, propaganda. The free peoples, I believe, are entitled to speak to one another, provided they tell the truth, as I shall endeavor to do. . . . Propaganda, as I see it, is quite a different thing. Propaganda is the deliberate attempt to influence your own countrymen, or other nations, to a particular course of action, by lies or half truths or tendentious innuendos. The truth is never propaganda. . . . The mark of a good citizen in a democracy is his or her capacity to distinguish between truth and error.

He again described the war as one between two conflicting ways of life, democratic and totalitarian, and he again traced the history of liberty from the ancient Israelites and Greeks, through the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, and the American Revolution and Constitution. As he did at Swarthmore College, Lothian suggested that the prescription for most of the world’s problems was democratic federation. The resolution of economic inequality, unemployment, and war required domestic social reform and radical change in international relations: “The kind of world of which the democracies dreamed twenty years ago was not a false dream. . . . But it is now clear that in 1919 none of us understood what was necessary to do if our hopes were to be fulfilled. The ideals which lay behind the League of Nations can only succeed,” he declared, “if all its members are democracies.” Even then, peace could not endure as long as nations remained separate and sovereign: “The idea of federation, applied no doubt in some new way, is, in the end, the only way out of that dilemma.” Until that time, Lothian contended, one of the most significant and urgent requirements for preventing another world war was Anglo-American control of the

¹⁵⁶ PRO FO 371/24245, A270/270/45, “Presentation of Magna Carta to Library of Congress, 28 November 1939,” by Aubrey Morgan. Morgan includes extracts from national newspapers, including *The New York Times* [29 November 1939], *Philadelphia Inquirer* [30 November 1939], the *Flint [Michigan] Journal* [30 November 1939], *Detroit Free Press* [3 December 1939], *Washington Evening Star* [3 December 1939], *Chicago Daily News* [1 December 1939], and the *Portland Oregonian* [5 December 1939]. Lothian wanted to ensure that, at the end of the war, the Magna Carta was presented to the Library of Congress for good. After all, he wrote Leo Amery, “Magna Carta means far more to Americans than to us; perhaps because a written constitution makes them value more highly historic documents of this kind.” NAS, GD40/17/398/165, Lothian to Amery, 9 January 1940.

seas, which had ensured global peace between 1815 and 1914. It was imperative for the United States to assume its share of international responsibility:

Britain neither can nor ought to play by herself the dominant role she played in the last century. The rise of new naval stations and the advent of air power makes that impossible. And sea power, if it is to be used as police power, should be in the hands of democracies collectively and not of one power. Even at this moment, if we face the facts honestly, our present safety to-day rests upon the fact that we control the Atlantic and you control the Pacific. Neither we nor you nor the overseas republics and dominions would be anything like as secure if either of us had to shoulder the task of sea defence alone.

Lothian noted that all indications were pointing to a massive German military effort against France and Britain in the spring of 1940, as soon as the weather improved. Nevertheless, he assured his audience, the British government was not trying to drag the United States into the war: “It knows that no democracy will accept the hideous consequences of war unless it is convinced that its own vital interests, which include its ideals, are at stake.” If ever the United States was driven into the war, he asserted, it would be due to the “relentless march of events,” not because of propaganda.¹⁵⁷

Following his Chicago speech, Lothian’s friend, Thomas Lamont, sent him a copy of “Analysis of Newspaper Opinion” for the week ending 6 January 1940, which noted that, as a result of Lothian’s speech, “newspaper opinion concludes that the United States must very properly ask itself what part it is to play in any coming peace.” The article also scrutinized the speech for evidence of propaganda that might tend to entangle the United States in the war, “and the overwhelming majority clears the British Ambassador of any such intent. It is worthy of note that a very large proportion of comment which the British Ambassador has stimulated in recent months revolves, as in the present case, about the part the U.S. is to play in peace, not upon the part the U.S. is to play in war.”¹⁵⁸

In addition to his various speeches, Lothian also sought to advance the scope of Britain’s public relations apparatus in the United States. Relatively early on, Lothian grew increasingly determined to stretch the boundaries of the “No Propaganda” policy. Although Lindsay had urged him to adopt a low

¹⁵⁷ PRO FO 115/3421, 100/1, 10 January 1940; Billington, 146; Cull, 58; Lothian, “Speech to the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations, 4 January 1940,” in *Speeches*, 47-63; Rock, 279-280.

¹⁵⁸ NAS, GD40/17/402/204, Lamont to Lothian, 6 January 1940.

profile, he did not want the British case to be lost by default. On 27 February 1940, he wrote to Sir Frederick Whyte that while “No Propaganda is still our watch word so far as the United States is concerned, this does not mean that we are not doing our best to make accurate information on our aims and actions available to those who are misinformed.”¹⁵⁹

During the Phoney War, Lothian’s principal effort was to provide open access to, and cultivate the favor of, the American media. For that reason, one of the primary objectives of his speeches was not so much to convert his audiences as to simply get his ideas disseminated by the media. While he urged London to give American correspondents in Britain as much freedom as possible to report events to the American people, he began to cultivate close relations with newspapermen in the United States. He gave them free access to the British Embassy and made himself readily accessible to ordinary journalists, both individually and through informal press conferences. According to the *Jedburgh Gazette*, the day before the war broke out, an American reporter telephoned the British Embassy in Washington. Familiar with all the red tape and traditional stuffiness of the Embassy, he asked for a statement on the situation “with an air of deference and hopelessness”:

“Just a moment, please,” said the operator. In a few minutes a friendly voice could be heard by the reporter. “What can I do for you?” asked the voice. The reporter was startled. “Who is this?” he asked. Said the voice: “It’s Lothian.”

The article pointed out that “It was mainly because Lord Lothian the aristocrat behaved more like a democrat than any British Ambassador had ever done that . . . American newshawks like him; and American newshawks in Washington put Lord Lothian second on the list after President Roosevelt.”¹⁶⁰

He spoke to them with disarming frankness. In January 1940, he won accolades by speaking informally and without notes to the Press Club in Washington and offering himself as a target for questions, which was something not typically expected from a British ambassador. In doing so, Lothian generally charmed the press corps. Lothian was “especially adept” at handling the press, according to his

¹⁵⁹ PRO FO 371/24227, A1852/26/45, Lothian to Whyte, 27 February 1940; Cull, 57.

¹⁶⁰ NAS, GD40/17/400. Clipping from the *Jedburgh Gazette*, 25 October 1940.

assistant John Wheeler-Bennett. “Whereas many of his predecessors had been ‘buttoned up’ and even hostile to the media, Lothian was expansive and assured, knowing if by instinct exactly what to say at any given occasion.”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, he made sure that copies of his speeches were printed and widely distributed, especially in the case of the major addresses. In particular, he made sure they reached public figures, such as his friend Walter Lippmann, but especially the leading sympathetic newspaper owners, such as Arthur Hays Sulzberger of *The New York Times*, Ogden Reids of the *New York Herald Tribune*, and Eugene Meyer of the *Washington Post*, with whom he was on good terms. All but traditionally anti-British papers responded favorably to his speeches. They quoted from them extensively and went on, as Lothian had hoped, to debate his comments in editorials and syndicated columns for days afterwards. His optimism appealed to the media, which became disenchanted with the cynicism of British diplomacy in the 1930s and were presently suspicious of the Phoney War. Lothian’s speech in Chicago on 4 January 1940 attracted particular attention and praise. The columnist Dorothy Thompson, for example, called it “the clearest statement of British war and peace aims which has yet been made anywhere.”¹⁶²

In order to further fine-tune his approach to American opinion, Lothian asked Wheeler-Bennett, who had been serving as a caretaker press attaché,¹⁶³ to be his eyes and ears in the country at large. To initiate a reform of the British consular service and its personnel in the United States, Lothian sent Wheeler-Bennett to visit Britain’s network of consulates throughout the country, which he found to be hopelessly inadequate.¹⁶⁴ He also kept discreetly in touch with anti-Nazi Germans in the country,

¹⁶¹ Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 73.

¹⁶² Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 261; Cull, 57-58; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 12.

¹⁶³ While Vansittart engineered Wheeler-Bennett’s appointment in order to monitor the activities of Lothian, whose appointment as ambassador he described as “disastrous,” it temporarily represented a compromise on the issue of an embassy press attaché, since Wheeler-Bennett was able to perform many of the duties of the attaché. Moreover, as a “man of private means,” he had no need to appear formally on the Embassy’s diplomatic list. Cull, 14-16, 30-31; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 65-67. In February 1940, however, the Foreign Office and the British Embassy agreed to appoint Michael Huxley in February 1940 as a First Secretary “in special charge of press contacts and of the affairs of the British Library of Information.” Lothian finally had his press attaché. Cull, 65.

¹⁶⁴ Cull, 58; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 77-79. Wheeler-Bennett noted that although Lothian did not live to see consular reform implemented, he knew that it had been accepted in principle. It was subsequently put into effect shortly after the arrival of his successor, Lord Halifax. Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 79.

including the former Rhodes scholar and Astor family friend Adam von Trott.¹⁶⁵ Wheeler-Bennett worked out of an office in the BLINY, but visited the British Embassy in Washington once a week for consultation. In the early months of 1940, furthermore, he also accepted numerous invitations to lecture. He spoke at a bewildering succession of meetings, across the country, with university groups, Women's Clubs, Knights of Columbus, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Kiwanis, Elks, Shriners, and even a Pittsburg cathedral. In all of these venues, he delivered, as did Lothian, the same message of British determination and the justice of the Allied cause. At his busiest, Wheeler-Bennett spoke eight times in ten days. After all, Lothian noted, Americans were "an ear hungry people."¹⁶⁶

Lothian also initiated an effort to streamline the BLINY, which, in the fall of 1939, was characterized by what Wheeler-Bennett described as "spirit of lethargy" and "a total inability to grasp the idea of what to do and how to do it." For one thing, confusion emanated from the top. While its director, Angus Fletcher, seemed unaware that journalists lived by deadlines, its parent institution, the Foreign Office News Department, had moved from Whitehall to the Ministry of Information building in Bloomsbury so that no one knew who specifically was giving the orders. The major problem, however, was that the fear of transgressing the Foreign Office directive to avoid any semblance of propaganda had resulted in paralysis; the staff was afraid to answer even the most harmless and general inquiries lest they be accused of propagandizing. Therefore, Lothian instructed Wheeler-Bennett to implement a program designed to expand the scope of its activities. Driven by their efforts, the BLINY began a modest expansion, enlarged its staff, provided for faster and more efficient replies to inquiries from newspapers, and built a mailing list of customers that, by February 1940, stood at 2500 names. It approached customers through pamphlets and low-budget advertising drives in certain technical journals.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Trott was in the German Foreign Office, attached to the Institute of Pacific Relations. He surreptitiously tried to obtain support for moderates in Germany and ultimately became a member of the idealist Kreisau Circle, which sought an alternative to Nazism. In 1944, he was hanged by the Nazis for complicity in the plot of 20 July to assassinate Hitler. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 232-233; Cull, 58; Sykes, 405.

¹⁶⁶ Cull, 58-59; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 79-84.

¹⁶⁷ Cull, 59-60; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 73-74, 91.

Lothian also actively sought out other fresh avenues of publicity. In early 1940, he attempted to initiate propaganda efforts through Britain's allies, such as the Canadians, Czechs, Poles, or the French, all of whom had more room to act without offending American sensibilities. Lothian had long suggested that Canada might serve as an invaluable propaganda proxy. Canada, however, was too wary of the American propaganda phobia, while the Czechs and the Poles lacked the financial resources to make any meaningful contribution. One possibility, however, was the French Information Center in New York. Both its director, Robert Valeur, and his colleague, Raoul de Roussy de Sales, had excellent instincts for propaganda. De Sales had many established contacts in the New York press and soon became a central source of information on European affairs for many radio commentators and magazine writers. He also served as the point of contact between the British and French propaganda operations, meeting Wheeler-Bennett for lunch every Saturday. Encouraged by such contact, Lothian initiated an effort to establish a joint Anglo-French Allied Information Agency under de Sales designed to spearhead a large-scale propaganda drive in the United States. The fall of France, in the summer of 1940 destroyed this scheme, but Lothian's idea for an allied propaganda office remained alive and resurfaced later that year.¹⁶⁸

Lothian's superiors in London, however, advised him to tone down his rhetoric for the time being and to be more discreet in public. In the House of Commons, his references to federalism and Anglo-American control of the seas annoyed some senior backbenchers with long, bitter memories of clashes with Woodrow Wilson at Paris and of the naval rivalry of the 1920s.¹⁶⁹ Even sympathetic friends advised Lothian to "go slow" on such questions as world federation. For example, Sir Herbert Williams, a member of Parliament, took exception to certain passages in Lothian's speech in Chicago, including a favorable reference to the concept of federal union, "whatever that may mean," Williams protested: "I think myself it is a form of vague nonsense which is now attracting the sloppy minds which previously thought collective security meant something." He concluded that "ambassadors ought not to make speeches except of a very ceremonial nature." He added a week later, that as a general principle:

¹⁶⁸ Cull, 60-61.

¹⁶⁹ Lash, 72.

I always object to ambassadors, admirals and generals making speeches. As a rule they are not very good at it, and it is always difficult to know whether they are merely expressing their own view or are making an official speech on behalf of His Majesty's Government.

Within the Foreign Office, Victor Perowne conceded that “the dangers of making speeches of this kind are considerable.”¹⁷⁰ On 19 January 1940, Perowne also drew attention to the fact that the ambassador's speeches were being taken in the United States as official British policy. He wrote that the Foreign Office was at present reviewing all of Lothian's speeches out of a concern that the ambassador might one day make some comment that will generate great applause in the United States, but result in “effects undesirable or even impossible for His Majesty's Government.”¹⁷¹ Others questioned whether he clearly understood the ambassador's role. After trying to elucidate the meaning of one “rather contradictory” and “rather impalpable” letter in late November 1939, Alexander Cadogan dismissed Lothian as “a phrase-monger.”¹⁷² David Scott, an assistant undersecretary in the Foreign Office, believed that the ambassador's task was principally to “jolly along” the State Department “by emitting a pleasant odour” and not to resort to overt pressure or public lecturing.

Although not particularly concerned, Halifax did feel sufficiently compelled to administer a gentle rebuke, “that it would be well for you to go slow over them and especially over any suggestion that federalism is likely to be a remedy for our present-day discontents.”¹⁷³ In response, Lothian admitted that he was merely trying to educate -- not just Americans but British audiences as well. He asserted that his “guarded references to federalism” have not done any harm. In spite of cynicism, bred “to justify their own abandonment of international cooperation in 1920, the American people, in fact, were “hungering”

¹⁷⁰ PRO FO 371/24227, A289/26/45, Williams to Butler, 16 January 1940; minute by Perowne, 11 January 1940; minute by Cadogan, who agreed, 24 January 1940. In his letter to R.A. Butler of the Foreign Office, Williams took particular exception to Lothian's implication that the British government would pool its naval resources “with those of at present neutral states,” and considered asking a question in the House. He decided against doing so because it would put the government in a bad position, either to repudiate Lothian, which would be a difficult thing to do, or to approve of what he said, “which would be even worse.”

¹⁷¹ PRO FO 371/24227, A289/26/45, minute by Perowne, 19 January 1940.

¹⁷² Cadogan, 234, entry for 27 November 1939; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 10.

¹⁷³ PRO FO 800/398, US/40/1, Halifax to Lothian, 30 January 1940.

for idealism and “sacrifice for a constructive cause.” It was necessary to remember, at the same time, that the postwar world would require changes in British as well as American attitudes; Americans would only participate in a world organization when they saw that Europe was trying to regulate its own affairs through some kind of continental federation. In a similar way, an effective system of collective naval security required not only United States involvement but a readiness on the part of the British, including Halifax’s friends in Parliament, to share naval power with the United States.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Lothian pointedly noted that one reason why many Americans did not accept the argument that its first and best line of defense was the Royal Navy was due to their conviction that “we will never share sea power with them -- the very case that your die-hard friends put forward.”¹⁷⁵

By December 1939, even normally pro-British elements in the United States thought that London should tone down its efforts. For example, the Oxford University Union debate team, led by the future Conservative prime minister Edward Heath, earned the praise of the British Embassy for its work on American campuses, but one of Lothian’s contacts suggested that the British team should “trade off a few gas masks for a few muzzles.” Even the Anglophile *Chicago Daily News* concluded an editorial by suggesting that London back off:

Britain needs no propaganda in this country. Hitler has been the pluperfect British propagandist in America, and his unpopularity shown by every poll and test represents a finished job. Only Britain herself can spoil it, by the stupidities of her censorship and by boring us to death with more war books and British lectures. Call off your lecturers, John Bull, or we will begin to think your last name means what it says.¹⁷⁶

Neither Lothian nor the Ministry of Information, however, was troubled by such editorials, as the bulk of British propaganda efforts had largely escaped the isolationists’ notice.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ PRO FO 800/398, US/40/7, Lothian to Halifax, 11 March 1940; PRO FO 800/398, US/40/11, Halifax to Lothian, 30 April 1940. In his letter to Halifax, Lothian commented: “I can imagine what my speeches would have been like if they had first been minuted by all veterans of the Foreign Office at home!”

¹⁷⁵ Lash, 72-73.

¹⁷⁶ PRO FO 371/22840, A7983/7052/45, newspaper excerpt in letter from British Embassy Chancery to Foreign Office News Department, 3 November 1939.

¹⁷⁷ Cull, 61.

Before the Storm

By the late spring of 1940, Lothian believed that one of the most significant dangers for Britain was the sustained mood of complacency within the United States, which was punctuated periodically by irritation over British maritime policy. The root of this complacency lay principally in the American perception of the strategic situation in Europe. Although most Americans hoped for an Allied victory, very few believed that their assistance was necessary to achieve it. Consequently, throughout the winter of 1939, and into the spring of 1940, Lothian's analysis of American public opinion stressed one basic and fundamentally unchanging theme -- the overwhelming majority of the American people were about 90 percent anti-Hitler, but equally determined to keep out of the war.

Yet, Lothian repeatedly emphasized that the American people appeared to be waking up to the real danger posed by Nazi Germany. On 15 September 1939, for example, he wrote Sir Samuel Hoare that "the consequence of the serious position in which the Russo-German pact and the forthcoming defeat of Poland are going to place England and France is beginning to come home to thinking Americans and instinctively the mass of Americans feel that Hitler is a mortal enemy of all they stand for."¹⁷⁸ Similarly, on 2 December 1939, he wrote J. A. Spender that, although American public opinion had become complacent in the absence of a major German offensive in the West, the United States appeared to be waking up: "the invasion of Finland by Russia on 30 November and the prospect of acute tension between the United States and Japan at the beginning of next year is making it begin to think seriously again."¹⁷⁹

At the same time, however, he persistently and relentlessly reemphasized, frequently in the same breath or sentence, that hatred of Germany in the United States did not imply an equal and opposite reaction in favor of Britain. Whether driven by historical antagonisms, lingering disgust at British appeasement, the traditional fear of entanglement in the affairs of the Old World, or above all, by the

¹⁷⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 265; Lash, 124; Rock, 213-214. See similar letters in PRO FO 800/398, US/40/3, Lothian to Alan Lascelles, 20 February 1940; PRO FO 800/398, US/40/10, Lothian to Alan Lascelles, 22 April 1940; NAS, GD40/17/398/462, Lothian to Abe Bailey, 17 January 1940; NAS, GD40/17/405/166-167, Lothian to John Stevenson, 14 March 1940.

¹⁷⁹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 275.

almost hysterical suspicion of being dragged into another European war by British cunning, Americans remained apprehensive of Britain.

Lothian emphasized that the majority of Americans saw the war as a strictly European affair that did not directly impact vital American interests. Lothian pointed out in letters to Churchill, Halifax, Chatfield, and Hoare in early November 1939 that there was not a sufficient amount of danger that would compel the United States to enter the conflict:

But there seems, from here, to be much less probability of an attempted *blitzkrieg* against the Allies than there was a month ago. The weather seems likely to prevent an attempt at a decision this winter, though there will probably be continued attacks by air and submarine on the fleet, and in the spring, with the improved allied defences and a steady stream of armaments beginning to cross the Atlantic from the United States, and with Japan, Italy and Spain determined neutrals, Hitler may well have to decide that the *blitzkrieg* then also is too dangerous to attempt, with Russia waiting in the East to profit from the exhaustion in the West.¹⁸⁰

On 18 December 1939, he wrote an old friend in South Africa, B. K. Long, that while American opposition to any intervention in the war was due in large part to an overwhelming wave of pacifism, the war had unfolded along lines different from those Americans had expected: "For instance, Japan, Italy, and Spain are not in it, and the United States now feels that not only is the war a purely European concern, but that its own security is assured because the Russian agreement is evidently going to ruin Hitler."¹⁸¹ In addition, in a letter to Halifax on 27 January 1940, Lothian noted that, while Americans were growing more and more confident that the United States would not be dragged into the war, they were becoming increasingly irritated by British maritime policies and the feeling that Britain had been needlessly inconsiderate of American interests.¹⁸²

On top of all this, the hope for a negotiated peace between the Allies and Germany, a hope that swelled with Sumner Welles's mission to Europe in March 1940, further compounded American

¹⁸⁰ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 273; Templewood, 410-411; L. Woodward, 161. See also NAS, GD40/17/398/216-217, Lothian to William Astor, 19 December 1949; NAS, GD40/17/399/138-139, Lothian to Robert Boothby, 3 November 1939.

¹⁸¹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 275. See also NAS, GD40/17/398/166, Lothian to Leo Amery, 9 January 1940.

¹⁸² Cull, 61, 67-68; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 14.

complacency.¹⁸³ Unlike his superiors in London, Lothian considered the Welles mission to be part of the president's effort to exert American influence on European events within the limits imposed upon him by the Neutrality Act and isolationist public opinion. The ambassador after all had been preaching to his American audiences that an early peace "really depends upon the neutrals." If the neutrals stood aloof, he argued, a fight to the finish could not be avoided; but if they associated themselves in some way with the war aims of the Allies, Germany might be compelled to consider a negotiated peace.¹⁸⁴

In any event, whether or not anything substantive resulted from the Welles Mission, Lothian nevertheless continued to maintain that the United States was fundamentally hell-bent on staying out of the war, and that the only occasion that would compel the United States to enter the conflict was a direct attack on its vital interests.

Taking all of this into consideration, Lothian argued, it was difficult to foresee what action the United States would take. The present boredom with the "Phoney War," which amounted in some places "almost to resentment that the expected 'drama' of world war would not be played out," would likely focus popular attention back to domestic affairs, namely the presidential election campaign of 1940 and the question of whether Roosevelt would seek a third term. He noted, moreover, that no politician, especially in an election year, would dare "to incur the consequences of being assailed as pro-British, which is much the same as being pro-war, by raising some of the fundamental questions which are

¹⁸³ In the middle of March 1940, Roosevelt dispatched Sumner Welles to four European capitals, in what appeared to be a major peace initiative on the part of the United States. The president hoped, on one hand, that the trip might delay or even prevent the German spring offensive, thereby giving France and Britain more time to rearm and prepare. On the other hand, he hoped to ascertain the intentions of Hitler and Mussolini. Yet, there were clear signs that Roosevelt may have been genuinely interested in peace. In mid-December 1939, after a long private discussion, Lothian wrote his superiors in London that the president evidently hoped he might "intervene as a kind of umpire" at some point in 1940. Roosevelt also ruminated about the need for disarmament and outlined to Lothian the Four Freedoms that he would ultimately announce publicly in January 1941. The effort, however, was not welcomed by Chamberlain, who wrote: "Heaven knows I don't want the Americans to fight for us -- we should have to pay too dearly for that if they had a right to be in on the peace terms -- but if they are so sympathetic they might at least refrain from hampering our efforts and comforting our foes." The result was otherwise confusion and consternation. Isolationists denounced the Welles trip as another attempt by Roosevelt to involve the United States in the war, while pro-Allied interventionists denounced it as an attempt to encourage the embattled democracies to accept a negotiated peace from Hitler. Davis, *Into the Storm*, 523-527; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 124; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 74-75; Rock, 262-276.

¹⁸⁴ Lash, 86-87.

constantly propounded in private.” Yet he also noted the possibility that, as the fear of war lessened, the United States might move toward a more forward and assertive foreign policy.¹⁸⁵

It had become clear to Lothian, as he noted in a dispatch of 10 April 1940, that the evolution of American opinion vindicated the “No Propaganda” policy. Britain had built an effective working relationship with American reporters. British war photographs now outnumbered German photographs by a ratio of twelve-to-one. The Gallup opinion polls from the previous week showed that 84 percent of the American people were in favor of the Allies, approximately the same percentage as in the previous October. It appeared that the worst of American propaganda phobia had passed. Yet, the Phoney War had also demonstrated the limitations of the policy. Britain needed a steady supply of war news to satisfy the American press; without such news, British publicity efforts atrophied. It grew increasingly clear in the late spring of 1940 that, until American attitudes changed, Lothian’s influence on British policy would remain inevitably peripheral. In May 1940, however, Hitler’s invasion of France and the Low Countries furnished the raw news materials and strategic urgency necessary to sweep away the complacent foundations of American isolationist sentiment.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 273-275; Templewood, 411-412.

¹⁸⁶ PRO FO 371/24227, A2687/26/45, Tel. 493, Lothian to Foreign Office, 10 April 1940; Cull, 61, 67-68; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 14.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DESTROYERS DEAL

In May 1940, Lord Lothian began to assume a far more prominent and central role in the conduct of Anglo-American diplomacy. In part, this new importance was due to his own relentless efforts during the Phoney War to win the confidence of the Foreign Office and the Roosevelt Administration. By the spring of 1940, many of Lothian's earlier critics had begun to conclude that their initial reservations about Lothian had been wrong. Sir Ronald Lindsay, for example, wrote Alexander Cadogan in May 1940 that, according to William Bullitt, Roosevelt's friend and ambassador in Paris, "Lothian is doing magnificently in Washington. The President likes him and was always pleased to see him, which was rare as he found most people bores."¹ Many British officials, moreover, increasingly considered Lothian's dispatches about American opinion to be models of analysis. The Foreign Office, for example, described a dispatch from Lothian on 1 February 1940 as "an excellent survey," while the King's private secretary, who had read a great many such missives, described it as "the best I have ever seen from an ambassadorial pen."² With some continuing exceptions, most Foreign Office officials were impressed with the ambassador's speeches. In May 1940, a senior Foreign Office official, Sir Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, who had recently spent several weeks in Washington, reported that while Britons should generally avoid speechmaking in the United States, "in the case of Lord Lothian's speeches, both big and small, I have heard nothing but praise. It is not every British speaker who knows how to address American audiences."³ American observers as well began to note and praise Lothian's unique abilities to grasp, even embrace, the American character. In February 1940, Dr. Herbert Bayard Swope, editor of the *New York World*, wrote to Lord Camrose, of the *Daily Telegraph*, that Lothian "is doing a very good job over here. He has approached his problems intelligently and worked them out effectively. He has succeeded in

¹ Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 15; Rose, 201.

² PRO FO 800/398, Mis/40/3, Sir Alan Lascelles to Lothian, 12 March 1940; PRO FO 800/398, US/40/10, Lothian to Lascelles, 22 April 1940; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 15.

³ Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 15.

understanding the American viewpoint. I should say he were doing a far better job over here than some of our Ambassadors abroad.”⁴

Primarily, however, it was the dramatic events of May and June 1940 that fundamentally elevated Lothian to a more central and vital position. On 10 May 1940, the Germans launched with shattering force their long-anticipated offensive in the West. Over the next several weeks, they surrounded and cut off the Allied forces in the Low Countries, easily overran the feeble armies of France and compelled the surrender of its government on 22 June 1940. In the United States, the speed and dispatch with which the armed forces of Nazi Germany overwhelmed the Western Allies suddenly aroused many Americans to the now very real possibility of German domination of Europe and its consequences to America. The fall of France, in particular, forced the United States and Britain closer together. Until June 1940, British and American policy rested on the assumption that the French army was their first line of defense. After the rapid collapse of France, therefore, Britain, almost defenseless, recognized immediately that its survival would depend upon United States assistance, while many American leaders began to recognize that their first line of defense was now Britain.⁵

Just as important as the military developments were the changes in the British leadership. On 10 May 1940, the same day the Germans launched their attack in the West, Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as the British prime minister. Although not immune from American doubts and suspicions, Churchill was and had long been far more enthusiastic than most of the British leadership, certainly more than his predecessor, about an Anglo-American alliance. To this end, he brought into his coalition Cabinet several prewar advocates of closer Anglo-American relationship.⁶ Moreover, he was much more inclined than Chamberlain to interfere in the detailed handling of foreign policy, particularly

⁴ NAS, GD40/17/405/262-263, Herbert Bayard Swope to Lord Camrose, 21 February 1940.

⁵ Chadwin, 4.

⁶ Anthony Eden as Minister of War, Duff Cooper as Minister of Information, with Harold Nicolson as his Parliamentary Under-Secretary and Ronald Tree as his Parliamentary Private Secretary. Cull, 68; Eden, 93-95, 110-113; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 321-333; Harold Nicolson, *The War Years, 1939-1945. Volume II of Diaries and Letters*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 84-85.

with respect to relations with the United States. Gradually Churchill, the Foreign Office, particularly the American Department, and Lothian established an effective working relationship, which brought Anglo-American issues to the center of British policymaking. Indeed, as Europe fell under German control and the United States remained the crucial neutral power, the American Department assumed a greater importance within the Foreign Office.⁷ Furthermore, Churchill was and remained supremely confident that he would compel the United States to enter the war. In his letter to Benito Mussolini of 16 May 1940, in which he implored the Italian dictator to remain at peace, Churchill asserted that Britain would have the whole-hearted support of the United States: “It is idle to predict the course of the great battles now raging in Europe, but I am sure that whatever may happen on the Continent, England will go on to the end, even quite alone, as we have done before, and I believe with some assurance that we shall be aided in increasing measure by the United States, and, indeed, by all the Americas.”⁸ Two days later, on 18 May, as France continued to face overwhelming German attacks on land and air, he boldly told his son Randolph that he would drag the United States into the war.⁹ In the meantime, Churchill endeavored to impress on President Roosevelt the urgency of British needs, largely through the informal method of correspondence he had initiated in September 1939. Over the course of the war, between May 1940 and April 1945, Churchill sent Roosevelt a message, on average, once every thirty-six hours. “No lover,” he wrote after the war, “ever studied the whims of his mistress as I did those of President Roosevelt.”¹⁰

Consequently, given the disquieting and dramatic escalation of the war, the growing threat to Britain, and Churchill’s own commitment to strong Anglo-American relations, the change in the Cabinet

⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 280; Cull, 68; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 15.

⁸ Churchill, 107; Martin Gilbert, ed. The Churchill War Papers. Volume Two: Never Surrender, May 1940 – December 1940 (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995), 50.

⁹ Randolph Churchill, on leave from military training in the north of England, went to see his father at the Admiralty House at about 8:30 in the morning of 18 May 1940. He sat with his father, who was shaving, standing in front of a mirror in a silk undershirt. The prime minister said, “I think I see my way through.” Randolph was astounded and asked, “Do you mean that we can avoid defeat or beat the bastards?” His father responded, “Of course, I mean we can beat them.” When Randolph replied that he did not see how it could be done, Churchill, having dried off his face, said with great intensity: “I shall drag United States in.” Gilbert, War Papers, 70-71; Jon Meacham, Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship (New York: Random House, 2003), 51.

¹⁰ Dimpleby-Reynolds, 125.

marked the end of the reticence that had characterized Chamberlain's relations with the United States. It also freed Lothian from the constraints that had circumscribed his influence during the Phoney War. With German military success in the Low Countries and France, it grew profoundly and unmistakably clear that Britain had no real alternatives: there was no longer any realistic chance that the British blockade would starve Germany into submission; nor was there any longer a question that London could or should hold the United States at arms length to ensure the integrity of the British Empire. The only prospect for the survival of Britain rested in the hope of American support. As a result, Lothian understood the absolute and desperate urgency of securing weapons and material assistance -- and as soon as possible. In doing so, however, he also well understood that the president could only go as far as American public opinion allowed. Consequently, he saw his primary mission as fundamentally two-fold: to persuade the president to comply with Churchill's requests, and at the same time, to influence American public opinion, either in his public addresses or in private conversations, to adopt an attitude that would respond to the president's initiatives. Specifically, he sought to convince the American people, as he had since the war broke out, that their safety and security depended on Allied victory, and that it was in the interest of the United States to actively support Britain, although not necessarily to send an army to Europe.¹¹

Over the course of the next four months, Lothian made two significant contributions as ambassador. First, he played a central role in facilitating the Destroyers-for-Bases Deal, concluded on 2 September 1940, after months of negotiation. The United States agreed to provide Britain with fifty relatively obsolete American destroyers in return for 99-year leases of land on eight British possessions in the Western Atlantic and the Caribbean, on which the United States could construct naval and air bases. Second, Lothian also intensified the establishment of a public relations-propaganda apparatus in the United States, which helped to win greater and greater popular support for Britain. As a result, by the fall of 1940, the majority of the American people, although still determined to stay out of the war, nevertheless saw the survival of Britain as fundamental to American security.

¹¹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 282; Cull, 68; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 18.

Churchill and Lothian Begin the Dialogue with Washington

Fundamental to Britain's diplomatic efforts to win American support and material aid was the relationship between Churchill and Lothian. When the war began in September 1939, Lothian welcomed Churchill's return to power as First Lord of the Admiralty. For some time, he had favored bringing Churchill into the cabinet, not least for the effect this would have on opinion in the United States. Similar to many in the British government, however, his feelings about Churchill were initially ambivalent. In September 1939, for example, he told J. Pierrepont Moffatt, an official in the State Department, that "nine days out of ten Churchill was magnificent, but the tenth day during a crisis he was apt to lose his head, close his ears, and refuse to listen to reason." Lothian believed, moreover, that Churchill's periodic follies had prevented him from attaining the premiership. Nevertheless, Lothian felt that Churchill possessed the "exuberance, drive and leadership which England craved." Therefore, during the political crisis of early May 1940, he saw no obvious successor to Chamberlain, although he had concerns, like many in Whitehall, that the new prime minister would accept no advice and would become "a dictator."¹²

At the same time, it is clear that Churchill's opinions and feelings about Lothian were equally ambivalent. In his war memoirs, Churchill noted that throughout their association, "we had differed much and often from Versailles to Munich and later," and that Lothian "had given me the impression of high intellectual and aristocratic detachment from vulgar affairs."¹³ They had clashed at the Paris Peace Conference over Allied intervention in Russia, and during the 1930s over India and, above all, Germany. More recently, however, new tensions emerged during 1939 and 1940 as a result of Churchill's secret correspondence with Roosevelt. During the Phoney War, the messages had actually been relatively few in number and confined to naval affairs; after Churchill's assumption of the premiership, however, they quickly evolved into a more wide-ranging and crucial line of communication. In the summer of 1940, Churchill wanted to keep this correspondence personal and private, preferring to send messages through

¹² NAS, GD40/17/405/269, Lothian to Herbert Bayard Swope, 22 March 1940; NAS, GD40/17/405/161, Lothian to Frances Stevenson, 14 May 1940; Lash, 112; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 16.

¹³ Churchill, 354, 490.

Joseph Kennedy and the State Department, rather than through the Foreign Office and Lothian. By doing so, Churchill apparently felt that his correspondence with the president would thus seem like ordinary diplomatic traffic.¹⁴ Neither the Foreign Office American Department nor Lothian, however, were aware of some of the earlier messages. As a result, the ambassador periodically was embarrassed to find the State Department treating telegrams of which he was unaware as authoritative statements of British policy.¹⁵ Over the crucial summer months of 1940, therefore, Churchill and the Foreign Office reached agreement on a workable solution that would keep Lothian in the information loop. Furthermore, Lothian would ultimately play a vital role in this correspondence, interpreting and reinforcing London's messages to the president and to the State Department, and reinforcing back to London the attitude of the American leaders and policy makers. His familiarity with American policymaking processes, as well as the friendly relations that he had established in Washington, were invaluable, and stood particularly in contrast to the overwhelming distaste for Joseph Kennedy on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶ Nevertheless,

¹⁴ Leutze suggests that Churchill may have preferred to send messages to Roosevelt through Kennedy precisely because so many in London considered Kennedy to be unreliable. If Kennedy was that unreliable, he surmised, would it not be advantageous to have the Germans learn that Churchill and Roosevelt were maintaining such closer personal contact? Leutze, 50.

¹⁵ On 19 October 1939, for example, Lothian reported that Sumner Welles had shown him a message, of which he had not previously heard, from Churchill to the president on the subject of the American plan for a "security zone." The Foreign Office made inquiries at the Admiralty, and obtained copies of two messages, dated 5 October and 16 October 1939, both of which had been seen by Halifax before they were sent to the United States ambassador. Copies of the messages were then sent to Lothian by diplomatic bag on 15 November 1939. Before those messages reached him, however, he telegraphed on 16 November that he had been considerably embarrassed to hear from Mr. Welles of the message of 5 October, which appeared to conflict to some extent with his own instructions from the Foreign Office. Halifax wrote to Churchill on 8 December that Lothian ought to be kept informed of any messages; he thus asked Churchill to send in advance to the Foreign Office, drafts of his messages, so that Lothian could be told of them, and the Foreign Office could ensure that the messages were consistent with their own instructions. Churchill concurred. On 25 December 1939, the Admiralty gave the Foreign Office a copy of a message sent on that day to Roosevelt through the United States Embassy in London. Before the Foreign Office wired it on 26 December to Lothian, however, he had already heard of the message from the Argentine ambassador in Washington, who had been told of it by Mr. Welles. Halifax, therefore, wrote Churchill again on 6 January 1940, asking that the messages should be sent through the Foreign Office and Lothian, rather than through the United States Embassy and the State Department. Churchill replied on 12 January that he thought it a mistake to close down the Embassy channel, and that he had assumed that the Foreign Office had informed Lothian at once of his message of the previous day. He thus suggested that the messages should be sent to Lothian simultaneously with their dispatch through the United States Embassy in London, "thus keeping Lothian fully informed while giving the President the feeling that he has a special line of information." Lash, 65-66, 68; Leutze, 48-50; L. Woodward, 334-335.

¹⁶ Butler, Lord Lothian, 280-281; Lash, 66.

until the early fall of 1940, relations between Churchill and Lothian would remain professional, although somewhat cool and still mutually suspicious of one another's judgment.

In the meantime, Lothian, followed soon thereafter by Churchill, opened the dialogue with the Roosevelt administration they hoped would lead to American military and material aid. On the evening of 13 May 1940, Lothian met with Roosevelt, who described his administration's representations to Mussolini and explained that the tenuous state of American public opinion would not allow him to do more. Lothian immediately telegraphed London that, although it would be a mistake to press Roosevelt for further action, Churchill should nudge the president by presenting those British requirements that could be met within the limits set by the neutrality legislation and by American public opinion.¹⁷

Based on this communication, on 15 May 1940, as the German army broke through French lines at Sedan, and five days after becoming prime minister, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt. Among other things, he explained that German power was overwhelming and that Mussolini was likely to enter the war. Moreover, he anticipated that France would soon be driven out of the war and that Britain would have to carry on the fight against Germany alone: "We expect to be attacked here ourselves, both from the air and by parachute and air-borne troops in the near future, and are getting ready for them. If necessary, we shall continue the war alone, and we are not afraid of that." Nevertheless, he emphatically stressed, Britain could resist the Germans, but only with American assistance: "But I trust you realise, Mr. President, that the voice of force and the United States may count for nothing if they are withheld too long. You may have a completely subjugated Nazified Europe established with astonishing swiftness, and the wait may be more than we can bear." He thus asked the president to proclaim "non-belligerency, which would mean that you would help us with everything short of actually engaging the armed forces." Specifically, Churchill presented Roosevelt with essentially a "shopping list" of specific British needs: an American loan, "to bridge the gap between what we have now and the large new construction we put in hand at the beginning of the war," several hundred of the latest types of aircraft, anti-aircraft equipment

¹⁷ L. Woodward, 337.

and ammunition, American steel, the visit of the American fleet to Singapore and ports in Ireland. At the top of the list, however, was a “loan of 40 or 50 of your older destroyers,” in order to bridge the gap between Britain’s present shortage and the new construction to be completed by the spring of 1941. Throughout, the prime minister took pains to emphasize that British requests and the American response was urgent, and added that “We shall go on paying dollars for as long as we can, but I should like to feel reasonably sure that when we can pay no more, you will give us the stuff all the same.”¹⁸

Two days later, on 17 May, Roosevelt dispatched a cordial telegram to Churchill, but declined to grant the prime minister’s most urgent requests. For one thing, the United States needed all of its destroyers for patrolling the American coasts. More to the point, however, he explained that a loan of destroyers would require the authorization of Congress, and Roosevelt was “not certain that it would be wise for that suggestion to be made to the Congress at this moment.”¹⁹ While he promised to try to facilitate the sale of anti-aircraft equipment, ammunition, and steel, for now, at any rate, in place of destroyers, the president could only offer Churchill “the best of luck.”²⁰ On the same day, however, Roosevelt asked Congress for increased appropriations for defense and military equipment. While he emphasized the need to shore up American security, he also strongly urged them not to delay the delivery of aircraft to nations that had already ordered them or might order them in the future.²¹

¹⁸ PRO PREM 3/468, Churchill to Roosevelt, 15 May 1940, 211-213; Butler, 282; Cadogan, 284, entry for 15 May 1940; Churchill, 24-25; Davis, Into the Storm, 545-546; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 184-185; Gilbert, War Papers, 45-46; Philip Goodhart, Fifty Ships that Saved the World: The Foundation of the Anglo-American Alliance (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 3-11; Leutze, 73; Meacham, 48-49; L. Woodward, 337-338.

¹⁹ At the same time, Roosevelt promised to try to arrange for anti-aircraft equipment and ammunition, and for the purchase of steel, but remained non-committal with respect to the Irish port question and keeping the fleet in Hawaii for the time being. For Churchill, the president’s response was deeply discouraging, as France was being eviscerated. Replying to Roosevelt’s unsatisfying telegram, Churchill wrote on 18 May: “I do not need to tell you about the gravity of what has happened. We are determined to persevere to the very end whatever the result of the great battle raging in France may be. We must expect in any case to be attacked here on the Dutch model before very long, and we hope to give a good account of ourselves. But if American assistance is to play any part it must be available soon.” PRO PREM 3/468, Roosevelt to Churchill, 17 May 1940, 201-203; Butler, Lord Lothian, 282; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 185-186; Davis, Into the Storm, 546-547; Gilbert, War Papers, 69-71; Leutze, 74; Meacham, 49; L. Woodward, 338.

²⁰ Cull, 69.

²¹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 282-283; Goodhart, 12-13; Leutze, 74-75.

This initial exchange of messages between Churchill and Roosevelt very quickly established the Royal Navy's fate should Britain be defeated, as a central concern among Americans, one that would dominate discussions between London and Washington throughout the summer of 1940. Many believed or anticipated that even if British resistance collapsed, the British fleet, or what remained of it, would still be available for the defense of the Western Hemisphere. This hope was encouraged, in part, by remarks made by Churchill to Joseph Kennedy, on the evening of 14 May 1940, that Britain would not surrender even if Germans overran the island: "Why, the Government will move to Canada and take the fleet and fight on." From London's point of view, however, such talk was dangerous. The British government did not want Washington to be too certain that the Royal Navy would take refuge in the west and thus write off resistance to Hitler in Europe, expecting the vanquished British to give them "posthumous support."²²

It was along these lines that Lothian, on 17 May 1940, began to make Britain's case for destroyers and arms in a conversation with the president. He argued, as he had so many other times, that it was imperative for American security, as well as for the security of the British Empire, that the British fleet remain the dominant force in the Atlantic, and therefore in possession of bases in the British Islands and at Gibraltar. He further stated that if Britain fell for want of American help, it would generate a tremendous naval crisis for the United States. With the main American fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor to deter Japan, while only a weak Atlantic squadron patrolled the East Coast, the United States would have to face naval threats in both oceans in the event of a British defeat. If the United States navy were held in the Pacific, Germany and Italy could establish themselves in Brazil with the help of German and Italian "fifth columns" already in the country and rapidly developing. They could then be within bombing distance of the Panama Canal. Therefore, Lothian asserted, the United States should do everything possible by supplying food, destroyers, and aircraft, and by putting pressure on Spain not to enter the war, thus helping Britain maintain command of the navy and allowing the United States navy to maintain its predominance in the Pacific.

²² Butler, Lord Lothian, 283-284; Goodhart, 2; Hull, 765-766; Leutze, 73-74; Meacham, 49.

In response, Roosevelt agreed with Lothian's position but insisted that he could not move beyond the point at which Congress would consent; besides, public opinion, he believed, had not yet grasped the strategic equation. In the meantime, Roosevelt suggested that if the worst happened, the Royal Navy might cross the Atlantic Ocean to Canada or the United States. Lothian replied that this would probably depend on whether the United States had entered the war, as he could not truly imagine that the British people would entrust their fleet to a neutral America. The president, Lothian reported to London on 18 May 1940, "seemed impressed by this possibility."²³

This conversation established the framework for British and American tactics over the next several weeks. Roosevelt and his officials emphasized the importance of preserving the French and British fleets whatever happened in Europe; the loss of the fleet became, according to Lothian, the president's "paralyzing illusion."²⁴ In response, Lothian maintained the pressure, generally reiterating his warning that Britain was unlikely to entrust its navy to a neutral America. On 21 and 23 May 1940, for example, he discussed with Sumner Welles the position that his government might take in the event of a German invasion of Britain that either forced London's submission or caused extensive destruction from the air. Lothian told Welles "in very vigorous terms . . . that it was his positive conviction that so long as the Britain and French fleets remained intact and out of German hands and so long as the United States fleet remained in the Pacific, and the Allied fleets therefore controlled the Atlantic and the United States was able to act as counterpoise to Japan in the Pacific, Germany could not eventually win the war." Lothian maintained that no British government would surrender the fleet, and that the high ranking naval officers in command of the fleet would never agree to surrender it even if ordered to do so. Furthermore, even if a majority in the House of Commons voted into power a new government that would agree to

²³ Billington, 147; Butler, Lord Lothian, 284; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 186; Hall, 140; Meacham, 49-50; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 18; L. Woodward, 337-339. During this same conversation, Roosevelt administered a gentle upbraiding of the British for their inadequate provision of fighter aid to the French. He informed Lothian that the French had been "very critical" of the British failure to commit more of its air force to the Battle of France. William Bullitt, in the meantime, came close to charging the British on 16 May with a sellout. Lash, 134

²⁴ Leutze, 75; L. Woodward, 343.

surrender the fleet, the present British government would refuse to acquiesce in any such decision and would remove to Canada, where the British fleet could at least in part be based, while other portions of the fleet would likely be based in the British West Indies or perhaps South Africa. Welles got “the very definite impression from the positive terms in which the Ambassador spoke that he had received some communication upon this subject recently from Mr. Churchill -- presumably after the Ambassador’s last conference with the President.”²⁵

In a similar way, on 25 May 1940, the president, still anxious about the fleet since their 17 May conversation, suggested to Lothian that in the last resort, all available ships should be transferred to Canada or even Australia before they could be captured or surrendered. He even suggested that if it became necessary for the King and Queen to leave Britain and for the institutions of the British government to be moved out of the country, it might be better to establish a temporary capital at Bermuda, and not in Canada. The Canadians, after all, might balk at the transfer of Downing Street to Toronto, and American republicans might be “restless at monarchy being based on the American continent.” Lothian asked whether the United States would be in the war, “if such a catastrophe impended, because that fact would probably exercise a profound influence on the British decision.” Once again, Roosevelt replied that such a decision would not rest with himself but with the Congress and therefore could give no definite answer.²⁶

In London, the president’s attitude began to annoy Churchill, who grew impatient and frustrated. During a meeting of the War Cabinet on 19 May 1940, Halifax read a telegram from Lothian, reporting his conversation with Roosevelt. Halifax noted that while the president showed himself to be very friendly and emphasized to Lothian the efforts made by Washington to keep Italy from entering the war, he could not yet provide even the minimum of destroyers:

He had, however, said nothing which showed that he recognized our pressing need for immediate aircraft supplies; nor had he mentioned the suggestion that the United States

²⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 285-286; Goodhart, 59; Lash, 142-143; Leutze, 78.

²⁶ Butler, Lord Lothian, 284; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 19; L. Woodward, 342-343.

Government should let us have aircraft at once from their own supplies, to be replaced later from orders already placed in the United States.²⁷

Churchill said that, under the circumstances, he proposed to send Roosevelt a telegram that would make clear Britain's immediate needs. Consequently, shortly after his radio address to the nation that evening, 19 May 1940, Churchill drafted a letter to the president, in which he set out to address the concerns raised by Lothian's telegram of 18 May. In it, the prime minister said that he understood the president's difficulties and was very sorry about the destroyers. "If they were here in six weeks, they would play an invaluable part." More to the point, however, he painted his darkest portrait yet of the dangers he faced, referring to Roosevelt's discussion with Lothian about the future if the Germans carried the day. Specifically, Churchill strongly asserted that his own ministry would fight to the end. If Britain fell, however, and the United States was not an ally, a new peacemaking government might surrender the fleet as the only bargaining counter in order to secure better terms from Berlin, in which case Americans would have no grounds for complaint:

Members of the present Administration would likely go down during this process should it result adversely, but in no conceivable circumstances will we consent to surrender. If members of the present Administration were finished and others came in to parley amid the ruins, you must not be blind to the fact that the sole remaining bargaining counter with Germany would be the Fleet, and, if this country were left by the United States to its fate, no one would have the right to blame those then responsible if they made the best terms they could for the surviving inhabitants. Excuse me, Mr. President, putting this nightmare bluntly. Evidently I could not answer for my successors, who in utter despair and helplessness might well have to accommodate themselves to the German will. However, there is happily no need at present to dwell upon such ideas.

Finishing the letter, however, Churchill betrayed his frustration with the president. His private secretary, John Colville, wrote: "Considering the soothing words he always uses to America, and in particular to the President, I was somewhat taken aback when he said to me, 'Here's a telegram for those bloody Yankees. Send it off tonight.'"²⁸

²⁷ Gilbert, Churchill and America, 186; Gilbert, War Documents, 79-80.

²⁸ PRO PREM 3/468, Churchill to Roosevelt, 20 May 1940, 194-195; Butler, Lord Lothian, 284-285; Colville, 136, entry for 20 May 1940; Churchill, 50-51; Davis, Into the Storm, 547-548; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 186-187; Gilbert, War Papers, 93; Goodhart, 38; Lash, 136; Leutze, 75; Meacham, 53-54; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 19; L. Woodward, 339-340.

In their appeals to the United States, both Churchill and the American Division of the Foreign Office followed Lothian's initiative. Both quickly noted the value of the ambassador's argument that the destination of the British fleet depended upon the state of American belligerency. Consequently, the British position, although admittedly described in the Foreign Office as "rather like blackmail, and not very good blackmail at that," was that its fleet was a prize, and that unless the United States were a belligerent, Britain should "probably elect to send our fleet to Australia and New Zealand."²⁹

Roosevelt did not directly respond to Churchill's message, but Lothian informed London on 23 May 1940 that, according to Sumner Welles, the administration was giving urgent consideration to British requests. The extent of American action would depend on the willingness of Congress to make a "radical departure" from the policy embodied in the Neutrality Act, and from their interpretation of international law. The next evening, therefore, on 24 May, Lothian telegraphed a suggestion that London might allow the United States government to construct airfields and naval stations on British islands that Washington regarded as significant from the point of view of their defense. He pointed out that the United States was concerned primarily with Trinidad and Newfoundland; an air base at Trinidad would enable the United States to deal with possible German air threats through Brazil to the Panama Canal, while a base in Newfoundland would be useful to defend against a German attack on Iceland, which was at present undefended. In one respect, Britain had already granted the base rights to the United States.³⁰

²⁹ Leutze, 77.

³⁰ For years, various American groups had cast "covetous eyes" on British possessions in the Western Hemisphere. As a result, in April 1939, Sir Ronald Lindsay suggested ceding all or part of the West Indies to the United States in return for cancellation of the British war debt. It would be better to give it now, he advised, rather than be pressured to do it later. Lindsay's suggestion, however, met with immense opposition within the British government, especially the Colonial Office and the Admiralty. Moreover, in late June 1939, Roosevelt told Lindsay that, in the event of war, he wanted to the U.S. Navy to establish a neutrality patrol to keep the waters of the Western Hemisphere clear of all belligerents, which would also free British ships for more important duties closer to home. Not surprisingly, however, the president thought that Britain should grant base rights to the United States in Trinidad, St. Lucia, and Bermuda. Leutze, 43-45, 79. In September 1939, therefore, the British government had granted an American request to be allowed certain facilities in the islands of Trinidad, Saint Lucia, and Bermuda. For domestic reasons, however, to avoid appearing to enter the war, the Roosevelt administration had not proceeded with the matter. Specifically, the domestic struggle with Congress over the amendment of the Neutrality Act had made Roosevelt unwilling to do anything that could be interpreted by the isolationists as entangling the United States in the European war. Billington, 151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 294; Lash, 137; L. Woodward, 340-342, 360.

Furthermore, in his opinion, the American government would eventually ask for those bases anyway, so it would be wiser to appear generous and offer them simultaneously, although he was not suggesting that this involve any change in sovereignty. While Lothian did not suggest that the agreement be connected with the question of British war debts, or of its current material needs, he believed that a public announcement of Britain's readiness to help the United States organize its defense would make a deep impression, and would contribute to goodwill and a more active cooperation in naval and air defenses between the British Commonwealth and the United States. Moreover, if London pursued this proposal, it was possible, Lothian intimated, that Congress should vote the necessary appropriations before its adjournment in early June.³¹ This proposal would ultimately serve as the template for what would become the celebrated "Destroyers-for-Bases" agreement.

Lothian made this suggestion because anxiety in the United States about its security had recently begun to move the question, of British and French islands off the eastern coast of America, into the foreground of public discussion. For the United States, bases on these islands would greatly strengthen American defenses at the Panama Canal and along the East Coast. They would also help to prevent these colonies from falling into German hands as the result of any European peace settlement. One of the key problems, as Lothian pointed out in his telegram of 18 May, was that there was little faith in Washington about Britain's ability to withstand a German attack; even the president had expressed the concern. Although it appeared that Roosevelt wanted to help Britain, he found himself hindered by several institutional constraints. For one thing, he had to face significant opposition from American isolationists. Not only did the president have to carry public opinion, to say nothing of the United States Congress when legislation was required, he had to do so in a presidential election year.³² For example, on the same day as Churchill's broadcast of 19 May, celebrated American hero Charles Lindbergh delivered his own address over the CBS Radio network. He expressed the feelings of millions of isolationists when he said,

³¹ FO 371/24255, A3297/2961/45, Lothian to Foreign Office, 23 May 1940; PRO CAB 65/7, WM 141 (40) 9, WM 146 (40) 14; PRO CAB 65/8, WM 214 (40) 4; Lash, 203; Leutze, 78-79; L. Woodward, 340-341.

³² Butler, Lord Lothian, 281-282.

We need not fear a foreign invasion unless American peoples bring it on through their own quarreling and meddling with affairs abroad. . . . The only reason that we are in danger of becoming involved in this war is because there are powerful elements in America who desire us to take part. They represent a small minority of the American people, but they control much of the machinery of influence and propaganda. They seize every opportunity to push us closer to the edge.³³

Joseph Kennedy reinforced such sentiments with characteristically apocalyptic telegrams from London. He wrote Cordell Hull on 15 May 1940 that if Washington granted Churchill's request for a loan of about 40-50 American destroyers, the United States would "[hold] the bag for a war in which the Allies expect to be beaten."³⁴ On 27 May 1940, he wired Hull that "only a miracle" could save the British army from annihilation:

I suspect that the Germans would be willing to make peace with both the French and the British now -- of course on their own terms but on terms that would be a great deal better than they would be if the war continues. . . . I realize that this is a terrific telegram, but there is no question that it's in the air here. The result of that will be a row amongst certain elements in the Cabinet here; Churchill, Attlee, and others will want to fight to the death, but there will be other members who realize that physical destruction of men and property in England will not be a proper offset to a loss of pride.³⁵

While many in the Roosevelt administration were by this point placing less and less stock in their ambassador's opinions,³⁶ or flatly ignoring him altogether, Kennedy and his tactless public pronouncements of Britain's impending demise continued to find favor among isolationists. At the same time, public opinion polls in the United States continued to indicate strong American unwillingness to enter into the war. Only 7.7 percent of the population was in favor of entering the war at once and only 19 percent believed that the United States should intervene even if the defeat of the Allies appeared certain. At the same time, 40 percent were opposed to American participation under any circumstances.³⁷

³³ Meacham, 54.

³⁴ Beschloss, 206; Cull, 70; De Bedts, 202; Goodhart, 1-2; Hull, 763; Swift, 239-240.

³⁵ Beschloss, 206; Leutze, 80; Meacham, 56.

³⁶ On 10 May 1940, Cordell Hull called Kennedy to find out the news about the German invasion. According to Adolf Berle of the State Department, Kennedy said that he "hadn't heard of any news; he was as innocent as a babe unborn of the whole night's work." Hull put down the telephone after talking to Kennedy, and said, "His mind is as blank as uninked paper." Collier and Horowitz, 105; De Bedts, 198-199.

³⁷ Meacham, 55.

Roosevelt had to face powerful opposition not only from isolationists, but also from influential American circles that, while traditionally friendly to Britain, believed that its defeat was almost inevitable and that Britain was finished as a great power. For example, in early March 1940, William C. Bullitt, the American ambassador to France, came in from Paris and gave a gloomy report to party guests at the home of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. Ickes noted that, “Bill has no use for Chamberlain, and almost none for Churchill. He thinks that the British Government is in a bad way. There are no real leaders, as he sees it, in all of England in this time of grave crisis.” He further noted that, “Bill is not at all sure that England and France may not be utterly defeated in the present war.”³⁸ In addition, many remained suspicious of Churchill, that he might not be up to the job. Sumner Welles had met Churchill in London a month before, where he talked for nearly two hours, “a cascade of oratory, brilliant and always effective, interlarded with considerable wit.” Yet, his drinking bothered Welles, who told Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury, that Churchill was a “drunken sot” and a “third or fourth rate man.”³⁹ Similarly, Joseph Kennedy worried about Churchill’s drinking and bellicosity. Churchill was not particularly popular among many Americans, who remembered him as the chief spokesman for the “Big Navy” forces in Britain during the Anglo-American naval rivalry of the 1920s. Nor was Roosevelt a great admirer. When King George VI mentioned Churchill as a possible successor to Chamberlain during his visit in 1939, Roosevelt indicated his disapproval. Churchill drank too much, the president noted on a number of occasions, and was “tight most of the time.” Indeed, reflecting the tendency in Washington, as well as Whitehall, to question the new prime minister’s sobriety and balance, Roosevelt told his cabinet, according to Ickes, “that he supposed Churchill was the best man England had, even if he was drunk half the time.” Moreover, as a staunch conservative, Churchill had been fiercely critical of the New Deal.⁴⁰

³⁸ Harold Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: Vol. III, The Lowering Clouds, 1939-1941 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 146-147.

³⁹ Meacham, 47-48, 50, 56.

⁴⁰ Dimpleby-Reynolds, 125; Ickes, 3: 176; Lash, 112; Moser, 130; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 78; Swift, 240.

In the early summer of 1940, even the president grew doubtful that Britain could survive alone as America's front line. When the German offensive began in May, Roosevelt hinted to close associates that the United States might be in the war by mid-August. By late May, however, with the British army apparently trapped in Flanders, and the French about to collapse, Roosevelt "doubted if England would be able to bear up" against the Luftwaffe's five-to-one superiority and feared that the British would accept a German peace offer involving the surrender of the fleet. If Britain fell, any American aid could be turned against the United States by the victorious Germans within the year. His personal estimate of Britain's chances of survival fell to as low as one-in-three.⁴¹

Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, there also existed a fundamental lack of confidence among American military service chiefs, who proved extremely reluctant to risk selling munitions to the British, particularly as Britain faced the possibility of conquest and defeat. Specifically, they faced the dual dilemma of providing Britain with military hardware that the United States itself might need, or that might be captured by Germany and subsequently turned against American forces, if Churchill fell and a new government in London made peace with Hitler. As a result, in mid-June 1940, the joint planners of the War and Navy Departments informed Roosevelt that "further release of war material now in the hands of our armed forces will seriously weaken our present state of defense." Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, who had been assigned the task of transforming America's unprepared military, told the president that, "There was no doubt that we had sold so generously to the Allied Powers that our own stocks were below the safety point. One could argue that by giving more aid to Britain and Canada we would be increasing our own defensive strength. That might be true, but it was not provable, and if Britain were defeated the Army and the Administration could never justify to the American people the risk they had taken." Moreover, the War Department would "naturally and rightfully be subject to the most adverse criticism if it were to dispose of modern equipment which it needed to a foreign country."⁴²

⁴¹ Billington, 148; Cull, 72-73; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 24.

⁴² Billington, 148; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 126; Goodhart, 55; Leutze, 77; Meacham, 65-66; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 24; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 81-82.

Far more than the Roosevelt administration, the British were in an apprehensive mood during late May and early June 1940. Obviously in one respect, the military situation gave cause for immense anxiety. On 14 May 1940, German armored forces broke through the Ardennes region and advanced rapidly to the west, toward Sedan, then turned northwards to the English Channel. After a series of Allied counter-attacks failed to sever this German spearhead, the Germans broke through Sedan and reached the coast on 20 May 1940, separating the British Expeditionary Force [BEF], the French First Army, and the Belgian army, all further to the north, from the majority of French troops south of the German penetration. Upon reaching the Channel, the Germans turned further north along the coast, threatening to capture the ports and trap Allied forces before they could evacuate to Britain. Faced with no alternatives, General Lord Gort, the commander of the BEF, decided to evacuate British forces. From 25 May to 28 May 1940, therefore, British troops retreated about 30 miles northwest into a pocket along the French-Belgian border, near the coastal town of Dunkirk.⁴³

Compounding the nervousness created by the military situation, the British sought desperately for any way to press the Americans into action. London, after all, maintained a deep and ingrained skepticism about the United States and believed that only with difficulty would the Americans be moved to effective action. There emerged, furthermore, a slow growing sense in Whitehall that Britain was fighting America's battle and that the United States was doing virtually nothing to help. Roosevelt's belaboring the future of the Royal Navy only increased British resentment. On 27 May, for example, while the British army was trapped around Dunkirk, the War Cabinet complained that Roosevelt "seemed to be taking the view that it would be nice of him to pick up the pieces of the British Empire if this country was overrun. It was as well that he should realize that there was another aspect of the question."⁴⁴

In this context, of growing British despondency and American diffidence, the "miracle of Dunkirk" momentarily relieved the anxiety on both sides of the Atlantic. Over nine days, from 26 May to

⁴³ For the military developments on the Western front, see Davis, *Into the Storm*, 543-545, 549-550; Keegan, 64-83; Lyons, 85-91; Murray and Millett, 66-83; L. Woodward, 174-225.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 19.

4 June 1940, the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force [RAF], and a handful of civilian volunteers rescued approximately 338,000 soldiers from Dunkirk and the surrounding beaches. The British interpreted the outcome as a “miracle” and the British press presented the evacuation as a “Disaster Turned To Triumph” so successfully that Churchill found it necessary to remind the country, in a speech to the House of Commons on 4 June 1940, that “we must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the rescue of a trained army, at a moment when hope had all but disappeared, restored confidence and provided a psychological boost to British morale. In the United States, the dramatic rescue led to the first wave of the “Dunkirk Spirit” to pass over the country. In the days that followed, Britain carefully nurtured the Dunkirk myth in the United States. The War Cabinet, for example, in order to head off any criticism in the United States about Britain’s apparent abandonment of France, agreed to explain that the retreat was preliminary to its rejoining the battle in France, south of the German advance, “even though such a statement might represent an economy with the truth.” Lothian suggested to Charles Peake of the Foreign Office News Department that Britain should play up the “Little Ships” to excite the American public⁴⁶ and subtly direct attention to American dependence upon the survival of British sea power.⁴⁷ Such measures appeared increasingly critical because, in strictly military terms, the evacuation of Dunkirk was a disaster: the British had abandoned much of their equipment and weaponry. Hence Britain’s need for immediate American material aid was even greater than before, especially in terms of destroyers and other small craft.

Consequently, with his proposal of 23-24 May 1940, Lothian effectively took the position that the time had come for him to be authorized to offer the United States a carrot. Specifically, he suggested that he be given authority to inform Roosevelt that London recognized the seriousness of the new threat to

⁴⁵ Cull, 70-71; Davis, Into the Storm, 553-554; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 125; Gilbert, War Papers, 247; Goodhart, 31-37; Meacham, 58.

⁴⁶ The hastily assembled fleet of 860 boats included the famous “Little Ships of Dunkirk,” a mixture of merchant marine boats, fishing boats, pleasure craft, and RNLI lifeboats, whose civilian crews were called into service for the emergency. These small craft ferried troops from the beaches to larger ships waiting offshore. The “Miracle of the Little Ships” thus became a prominent folk memory in Britain and morale booster.

⁴⁷ PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Lothian to Peake, 1 June 1940; Cull, 70-71; Davis, Into the Storm, 553-554.

American security, and that while Britain was not prepared to discuss modifications of sovereignty, it was prepared to consider immediate leases of areas to the United States for the construction of airfields or naval stations on any of the islands that Washington regarded as significant for its defense. Lothian's proposal generated a diversity of opinion in Whitehall. The Colonial and Dominions Offices flatly opposed the suggestion on the grounds that bases would be the first step to United States domination in the Caribbean. In the meantime, however, the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff supported it. The War Cabinet considered the suggestion on 27 and 29 May 1940, and perceived several significant difficulties.⁴⁸ Churchill, however, opposed Lothian's proposal, and refused to consider such an offer unless it was part of a specific deal: "The United States had given us practically no help in the war," he told the War Cabinet, and now that they perceived the imminence of danger, if not disaster, "their attitude was that they wanted to keep everything which would help us for their own defence." Therefore, the War Cabinet telegraphed Lothian on 2 June 1940 that Britain could not consider any such arrangements unless there was a *quid pro quo*, some "definite assurance of concrete results sufficiently advantageous to us." In that respect, they asked Lothian to explain his reasons for thinking that, if the political objections could be overcome, Britain could obtain substantial advantages. Although Lothian did not reply to this telegram until the middle of June, it was clear that London would proceed with caution, as the offer might presumably imply panic on the part of Britain and thus encourage Washington to concentrate exclusively on American defenses rather than assist Britain.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, over the summer of 1940, Lothian

⁴⁸ If Britain made a formal offer, they believed, the question of sovereignty could hardly fail to arise. The United States after all would be spending, at Britain's invitation, huge sums of money on fixtures in the islands and would naturally expect some security of tenure. In addition, the only facilities in Newfoundland likely to interest the United States would be those of the airport. That airport had just been completed at a cost of £750,000, and negotiations were in progress for the assumption of responsibility for the port during the war by the Canadian government. Thus, the transfer of the airport to the United States might well cause resentment in the island. In any case, it would be necessary to consult Canada and Newfoundland, owing to the intimate connection of Canadian defense with that of Newfoundland. Finally, the War Cabinet thought it best that the matter should not be mentioned to Roosevelt at that moment. American isolationists might well misrepresent any offer that came from Britain as a sign that it was trying to involve the United States in the war, or that Britain was in despair. L. Woodward, 341-342.

⁴⁹ Billington, 151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 294; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 187; Gilbert, War Papers, 162-163; Lash, 203; Leutze, 79-80; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 26; L. Woodward, 342.

consistently and repeatedly urged London to woo the United States with attractive offers of cooperation, on the grounds that such cooperation would encourage reciprocal generosity and promote a spirit of Anglo-American amity he believed was essential for the future of the world.

France Collapses

In the meantime, amid the ongoing Anglo-American dialogue, the situation in France itself continued to disintegrate. On 28-29 May 1940, amidst fears that Italy was about to enter the war on the German side, the French Premier Paul Reynaud proposed that the Allies make an appeal to Roosevelt, for the dispatch of an American fleet to European waters, which might serve as a restraint upon Mussolini. The War Cabinet thought Reynaud's proposal entirely inexpedient and instead favored an approach suggested by Jan Christian Smuts -- an appeal to Washington on the basis that Britain was continuing the war in any event and sought nothing but to defend liberty in the world against Nazi domination. The War Cabinet therefore sent a telegram to Lothian, on 28 May, describing the various proposals and requesting an assessment of Roosevelt's opinion as to the effectiveness of either. Lothian responded on 29 May that Roosevelt would not move the American fleet to the Mediterranean, and did not regard an appeal as desirable for the present. Lothian further noted on 31 May, that Roosevelt telegraphed William Bullitt in Paris, reiterating his strong disapproval of such an appeal, on the grounds that it would become more difficult to procure materials for the Allies; it would also be taken as an attempt by foreigners to influence the United States in the direction of war, thus stirring up American public opinion.⁵⁰

In the midst of the French breakdown, and efforts to secure American aid in the early summer of 1940, Churchill found it increasingly necessary to strike and maintain a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, in view of London's skepticism about American assurances of goodwill, which were generally affirmed by Lothian's reports, Churchill continued to play upon Roosevelt's fears about the fleet. It was clear that the German victory in northern France had greatly intensified American interest in the fate of the Royal Navy. He sought to make clear that the vital battle was taking place in Europe, and that if

⁵⁰ L. Woodward, 211-214.

Americans did not provide adequate support for Britain and France, there would be no British fleet to help defend the Western Hemisphere. If defeated, a new cabinet in London, if not altogether pro-German but at least willing to accommodate the Nazi regime, might be compelled to hand over the fleet.⁵¹ In making this case, Churchill tended to restrict his gloomy warnings about the future of the fleet to private messages for American leaders, in order to ensure that Washington explicitly understood London's position. On the other hand, in public, he maintained a mood of indefatigable optimism, primarily to maintain morale at home, but also to show Americans the grounds for Britain's "reasoned optimism." For example, in his speech of 4 June 1940, following the "miracle of Dunkirk," he assured the House of Commons and the world that, in the unlikely event that Britain fell, the Empire would fight on, guarded by the Royal Navy, until the New World came to the aid of the Old. In this address's most famous passage, Churchill also suggested that if the island were subjugated or starving, the Empire overseas might carry on the struggle "armed and guarded" by the British fleet:

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, and our Empires beyond the Seas, armed and guarded by the British fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.⁵²

While Churchill's speech did indeed stir emotion and raise morale on both sides of the Atlantic, Lothian feared that the prime minister might also be raising the wrong types of expectations, especially in North America. When William Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, suggested that, in the event of a British defeat, the Royal Navy should be transferred to Canada, Churchill replied caustically on 5 June that the United States should not be allowed to become complacent:

⁵¹ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 19-20.

⁵² Churchill, 102-104; Davis, Into the Storm, 554; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 125; Gilbert, War Papers, 247; Lash, 148-149; Leutze, 80; Meacham, 58.

We must be careful not to let Americans view too complacently the prospect of a British collapse out of which they would get the British fleet and the guardianship of the British Empire, minus Great Britain. If . . . America continued neutral, and we were overpowered I cannot tell what policy might be adopted by a pro-German administration such as would undoubtedly be set up.

Churchill ended his message, which he fully expected would be passed on to Roosevelt, with a complaint that, while Roosevelt is “our best friend,” the United States has yet to send any practical help:

We have not expected them to send military aid, but they have not even sent any worthy contribution in destroyers or planes, or by a visit of a squadron of their Fleet to Southern Irish ports. Any pressure which you can supply in this direction would be invaluable.⁵³

Nevertheless, in Washington, Lothian became increasingly alarmed that Churchill’s stirring words, particularly those of 4 June, may have made American leaders more complacent. He feared, for example, that some Americans were becoming overly confident about Britain’s ability to resist. At the same time, and more significantly, he feared that many more were counting on getting the British fleet in the event of Britain’s defeat: “Unfortunately many Americans including some in the Administration try to persuade themselves that somehow or other the rest of the Empire is going to get the fleet for the United States even if Britain is overrun and that the U.S. need not face war until after this has taken place.”⁵⁴ Although undeniably, Churchill directed many of his great speeches of that summer principally at American audiences,⁵⁵ a few days later, on 9 June, Churchill assured Lothian that his words were largely for enemy consumption “to whom the idea of a war of continents, and a long war are at present obnoxious,” and to encourage the Dominions. The United States, in the meantime, must not expect to “pick up the debris of the British Empire” while remaining neutral. Consequently, he urged Lothian to continue taking the line that he, the ambassador, had initiated -- the idea that if Britain goes down, a pro-German government might give up the fleet:

⁵³ Churchill, 128-129; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 188-189; Gilbert, War Papers, 255; Goodhart, 39; Lash, 143; Leutze, 81.

⁵⁴ PRO FO 371/24239, A3316/131/45, Tel. 932, Lothian to Foreign Office, 8 June 1940; Churchill, 354-355; Lash, 150; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 20; L. Woodward, 345.

⁵⁵ At the suggestion of Sumner Welles, Churchill did not direct his speech of 4 June 1940 to the United States but to the British Empire and hoped that the Americans would “overhear.” Cull, 71.

If Great Britain broke under invasion, a pro-German Government might obtain far easier terms from Germany by surrendering the Fleet, thus making Germany and Japan masters of the new world. This dastardly deed would not be done by His Majesty's present advisers, but, if Mosley were Prime Minister or some other Quisling Government set up, it is exactly what they would do, and perhaps the only thing they could do, and the President should bear this very clearly in mind. You should talk to him in this sense and thus discourage any complacent assumption on United States part that they will pick up the debris of the British Empire by their present policy.⁵⁶

On the contrary," Churchill told Lothian, "they run the terrible risk that their sea-power will be completely overmatched." The Nazis would almost certainly claim Atlantic islands and naval bases to hold the United States in awe. "If we go down," Churchill stressed, "Hitler has a very good chance of conquering the world."⁵⁷

Not all the news reaching London from the United States, however, was disagreeable. For one thing, the United States was beginning to accommodate British requests for material aid. On 30 May 1940, following an appeal for the urgent purchase of 12,700 tons of steel bars, Churchill learned from Arthur Purvis that the British Purchasing Commission⁵⁸ had purchased 4,300 tons for shipment to Britain in June, July, and August, with a further 8400 tons to come by the end of August.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in early June, his confidence in Britain partially revived with the evacuation of Dunkirk, Roosevelt ordered the service chiefs to "scrape the bottom of the barrel" and determine how much of the United States Army's own arms and ammunition could be declared surplus and therefore legal to sell back to their

⁵⁶ Churchill, 355; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 189; Gilbert, War Papers, 270-271; L. Woodward, 345.

⁵⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 285; Churchill, 400-401; H. Montgomery Hyde, Room 3603: The Story of the British Intelligence Center in New York during World War II (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1962), 32.

⁵⁸ The British Purchasing Commission, based in New York City, was established in late 1939 as the Anglo-French Purchasing Commission, in order to arrange for the production and purchase of armaments from North American manufacturers. On 16 June 1940, however, with the disintegration of France, it became the British Purchasing Commission. Roosevelt had insisted that Allied purchasing not be handled by Wall Street firms, as it had been during the First World War, but through the United States Treasury, so that Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau could scrutinize Allied purchases to ensure that they did not conflict with American needs. Its chairman, Arthur B. Purvis, was a British-born Canadian industrialist. Purvis received almost daily from London the telegraphic details of British needs. He then transmitted these needs to those in Washington who could supply them, following each request with tenacity, and smoothing over the many difficulties that arose with skill and tact, and the strictest secrecy, so as not to stir up the isolationists. Butler, Lord Lothian, 282-283; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 513-514; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 66; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 71; Rock, 220.

⁵⁹ Davis, Into the Storm, 555; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 187.

manufacturers for resale to Britain. The president soon authorized the dispatch of a substantial quantity of American “surplus” war supplies, including almost 900 field guns with a million rounds of ammunition, 80,000 machine guns, and half a million rifles manufactured in the First World War with 125 million rounds of ammunition. Within two weeks, beginning on 11 June 1940, the first American supplies began making their way across the Atlantic. Churchill later wrote: “All this reads easily now, but at that time it was a supreme act of faith and leadership for the United States to deprive themselves of this very considerable mass of arms for the sake of a country which many deemed already beaten.”⁶⁰

Beyond that, Roosevelt also initiated the process by which the United States began to strengthen its defenses and better prepare for war. Because American armed forces remained pitifully small -- the United States Army could field fewer than one-third the number of divisions that Belgium had mobilized to meet the German invasion -- Roosevelt began to place large-scale military appropriations before the Congress. On 16 May 1940, the day after Churchill’s first plea for material assistance, he asked Congress for an increase of \$1.4 billion in national defense expenditures over and above the amount he originally requested in his budget message.⁶¹ At approximately the same time, in mid-May 1940, he supported the first steps toward national compulsory military training -- steps that would culminate in the Burke-Wadsworth Selective Service Act, the first peacetime conscription program in American history, passed by Congress in September 1940. In the meantime, Congress approved plans to expand the Army Air Corps to 84 groups and 7,800 combat aircraft, and in June, alerted National Guardsmen for active duty.⁶² The collapse of France and the early German attacks on Britain gave new urgency to these efforts. In July, Congress approved an emergency and expansionist “Two Ocean Navy” program in order to double the tonnage of the Navy’s combatant fleet. In mid-June 1940, in order to broaden the appeal of his

⁶⁰ Billington, 148; Churchill, 129; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 554-555; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 188; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 513-514; Leutze, 81-82.

⁶¹ Davis, *Into the Storm*, 548-549; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 78-79.

⁶² Davis, *Into the Storm*, 568-571; Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1984), 395-396; Moser, 132.

administration, Roosevelt brought two leading Republicans and ardent proponents of interventionism, Henry Stimson and Frank Knox, into the cabinet, to administer the War and Navy Departments, respectively. Knox, in particular, was convinced that the United States would be involved in the war within the year and thus believed that “the sooner we declare war the sooner we will get ready.”⁶³

The president’s rhetoric became more belligerent as well. In a “fireside chat” of 26 May 1940, he warned Americans of the “Fifth Column” danger. Far more heartening, however, Roosevelt delivered an inspiring statement of America’s position in his speech at Charlottesville, Virginia on 10 June, the day Italy entered the war by attacking France. In a commencement address at the University of Virginia Law School, he warned the graduates that the United States could not be permitted to “become a lone island in a world dominated by the philosophy of force.” But he also scornfully denounced the Italian attack:

On this 10th day of June, 1940, the hand that held the dagger has struck it into the backs of its neighbor. On this 10th day of June, 1940, in this university founded by the first great American teacher of democracy, we send forth our prayers and our hopes to those beyond the seas were maintaining with magnificent valor their battle for freedom. In our American unity, we will pursue two obvious and simultaneous courses: we will extend to the opponents of force the material resources of this nation; and, at the same time, we will harness and speed up the use of those resources in order that we ourselves in the Americas may have equipment and training equal to the task of an emergency in every defense. Signs and signals call for speed -- full speed ahead.⁶⁴

Listening to the speech on the radio, Churchill was ecstatic. In his war memoirs, the prime minister recalled that, when the president uttered the scathing words about Italy, “there was a deep glow of satisfaction. I wondered about the Italian vote in the approaching Presidential Election; but I knew that Roosevelt was a most experienced American party politician although never afraid to run risks for the sake of his resolves. It was a magnificent speech, instinct with passion and carrying to us a message of hope.” He immediately cabled the president:

We all listened to you last night and were fortified by the grand scope of your declaration. Your statement that the material aid of the United States will be given to the Allies in their struggle is a strong encouragement in a dark but not unhopeful hour.

⁶³ Cull, 73; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 573-574; Leutze, 99; Millett and Maslowski, 395.

⁶⁴ Burns, *The Lion and the Fox*, 421; Churchill, 116; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 556; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 279; Goodhart, 67-68; Leutze, 82; L. Woodward, 345.

Everything must be done to keep France in the fight and to prevent any idea of the fall of Paris, should it occur, becoming the occasion of any kind of parley. The hope with which you inspire them may give them strength to persevere.

Churchill further concluded that this presented a fortuitous moment to once again put Britain's immediate needs before the president, telling him that aircraft and flying boats were essential "in the impending struggle for the life of Great Britain." But even more pressing, he reiterated, was the need for destroyers, since Italy had just declared war on the Allies:

The Italian outrage makes it necessary for us to cope with a much larger number of submarines, which may come out into the Atlantic and perhaps be based on Spanish ports. To this only counter is destroyers. Nothing is so important as for us to have the thirty or forty old destroyers you have already had reconditioned. . . . If while we have to guard the East Coast against invasion a new heavy German-Italian submarine attack is launched against our commerce, the strain may be beyond our resources; and the ocean traffic by which we live may be strangled. Not a day should be lost. . . .⁶⁵

Churchill's optimism was short-lived, however, and almost entirely dashed by the events of the next ten days: the final collapse of France and the absence of any meaningful response from the United States. On 11 June 1940, shortly after Roosevelt's Charlottesville address, which had so inspired the prime minister with visions of American aid, Churchill informed the president, through Lothian, that France was about to collapse.⁶⁶ He requested that Roosevelt make a public profession of support for the French: "Anything you can say or do to help them [the French] now may make the difference."⁶⁷ The next day, 12 June, when Roosevelt did not reply, Churchill sent another message to the president, giving him a "full picture" of the existing situation, and pleading for him to make a public statement of support, which might stiffen the resolve of the French ministers, some of whom were already talking of making peace with the Germans: "If there is anything you can say publicly or privately to the French, now is the

⁶⁵ PRO PREM 3/468, Churchill to Roosevelt, 11 June 1940, pp. 167-169; Churchill, 116-117; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 556-557; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 190-191; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 492-493; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 287-288; Goodhart, 69-70; Meacham, 60-61; L. Woodward, 345.

⁶⁶ The French leaders had fled south from Paris to the Loire, and Churchill set off by air at the request of Paul Reynaud. Churchill quickly became convinced that effective help could only come in some form of American commitment. Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 191.

⁶⁷ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 191; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 497; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 285; L. Woodward, 346.

time.”⁶⁸ The president, perhaps emboldened by his day at Charlottesville, perhaps swept up in the spirit of Churchill’s latest cable, sent a message to French Premier Paul Reynaud:

As I have already stated to you and to Mr. Churchill, this Government is doing everything in its power to make available to the Allied Governments the material they so urgently require, and our efforts to do so still more are being redoubled. This is so because of our faith in and our support for the ideals for which the Allies are fighting. . . . It is most important to remember that the French and British fleets continue mastery of the Atlantic and other oceans; also to remember that vital materials from the outside world are necessary to maintain all armies.⁶⁹

Roosevelt’s reply to Reynaud, however, inspired the British with a false sense of confidence that the United States was about to enter the war. Churchill told the War Cabinet that the president’s message “came as near as possible to a declaration of war and probably as much as the President could do without Congress. The President could hardly urge the French to continue the struggle, and to undergo further torture, if he did not intend to enter the war to support them. If the President were not disavowed by his country, then it was clear that he would bring them in on our side in the near future.”⁷⁰ As no expression of support emerged from Washington, however, and as the situation in France became increasingly desperate, Churchill begged Roosevelt on the evening of 13 June 1940 to publicize the text of his telegram to Reynaud, which might stiffen the resolve of the French government.⁷¹ The only possibility of continuing French resistance, Churchill wrote Roosevelt, was if Reynaud could give his people the hope of ultimate victory; and such a hope “could only be kindled by American intervention up to the extreme limit open to you.” The publication of Roosevelt’s reply to Reynaud would be the decisive factor in this regard: “Mr. President, I must tell you that it seems to me absolutely vital that this message should be

⁶⁸ Gilbert, Churchill and America, 191-192; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 523-524; Gilbert, War Papers, 307-308.

⁶⁹ Gilbert, Finest Hour, 539; Gilbert, War Papers, 320; Meacham, 61-62.

⁷⁰ Gilbert, Churchill and America, 192; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 539; Gilbert, War Papers, 320.

⁷¹ On 13 June, Reynaud told Churchill that an unequivocal and categorical assertion of support from the United States would compel France to stand firm against Germany. The situation was not yet desperate, Reynaud maintained. The French were inflicting great losses on the Germans, and he believed that if French armies could fight on “yet awhile,” help would soon come from Britain and the United States. The imperative need, however, was to have “definite proof” that the United States would enter the war “with sufficient speed and force.” France, Reynaud asserted, could not carry on unless Roosevelt’s reply conveyed a “firm assurance of immediate aid.” Gilbert, Finest Hour, 529, 531; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 524-529.

published tomorrow 14th June in order that it may play the decisive part in turning the course of world history.” Roosevelt, however, refused permission to publish his reply to Reynaud.⁷²

The result in London was immense disappointment. John Colville noted that, “It seems the Prime Minister’s expectations . . . of immediate American help were exaggerated.” The United States, furthermore, appeared to be slow and ineffectual: “Roosevelt has got to proceed cautiously, but the plain truth is that America has been caught napping, militarily and industrially. She may be really useful to us in a year; but we are living from hour to hour. . . . America’s attitude is of vital importance to French morale; but America is the slowest to act of all the democracies, and that is saying much.”⁷³ Churchill, unable to accept the American response as final, wrote to Roosevelt on the evening of 15 June 1940, pleading with the president to intervene in order to save France. Otherwise, he suggested, Britain would be placed in peril; and if Britain were conquered by Nazi Germany, the prospect increased that the Royal Navy would be lost to the United States. Events, he emphasized to the president, were “moving downward at a pace where they will pass beyond the control of American public opinion when at last it is ripened.” But, he maintained, only a word of support from the United States would save the situation from catastrophe:

A declaration that the United States will if necessary enter the war might save France. Failing that, in a few days French resistance may have crumbled and we shall be left alone. Although the present Government and I personally would never fail to send the Fleet across the Atlantic if resistance was beaten down here, a point may be reached in the struggle with the present ministers no longer have control of affairs and when very easy terms could be obtained for the British Islands by their becoming a vassal state of the Hitler empire. A pro-German Government would certainly be called into being to make peace and might present to a shattered or a starving nation almost irresistible case for entire submission to the Nazi will. The fate of the British fleet . . . would be decisive on the future of the United States, because if it were joined to the Fleets of Japan, France and Italy and the great resources of German industry, overwhelming sea-power would be in Hitler’s hands. . . . This revolution in sea-power might happen very quickly and certainly long before the United States would be able to prepare against it. If we go down you may have a United States of Europe under Nazi command far more numerous, far stronger, far better armed than the New World.

⁷² Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 192-193; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 540-542; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 320-325; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 530-533.

⁷³ Colville, 155-156, entry for 14 June 1940; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 542, 547.

Churchill's draft ended with another plea to Roosevelt for the immediate dispatch of 35 American destroyers, to "bridge the gap" until Britain's naval construction "comes in at the end of the year."⁷⁴

Momentarily lost in the chaos over the imminent French collapse was indeed the question, raised once again by Churchill on 11 June 1940, of Britain's need for American destroyers. The prime minister's appeal for destroyers crossed with a telegram from Lothian, who raised serious questions of how Roosevelt might respond.⁷⁵ On 12 June, the ambassador urged Churchill to make his appeal for destroyers with facts, to illustrate the true dimensions of Britain's growing crisis:

Have just learned from authoritative source that the President is not convinced that our need for destroyers is serious, and is therefore concentrating on the Allies' other needs. I think it imperative that the Prime Minister should as soon as possible inform him confidentially through me of the numbers, types and tonnages of destroyers lost, the number damaged and time needed for repair and any other information necessary to convince him of our case. The press has been carrying statement here that we have already made good all destroyers lost.⁷⁶

Sir Robert Vansittart agreed with Lothian. He wrote the Cabinet Secretary Sir Edward Bridges that "Lothian's telegram No. 967 proves that Roosevelt has not sufficiently understood the urgency of our need of the destroyers . . . I think this is because we have not put the appeal to the President urgently or dramatically enough."⁷⁷

Due in large part to Lothian's appeal, Churchill included a paper on destroyer strength, prepared by the Naval Staff, in his first telegram to Roosevelt on 15 June: "Here is a definite practical and possibly decisive step which can be taken at once and I urge most earnestly that you will weigh my words."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 194; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 548-549; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 337-338; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 537-539; Leutze, 85; L. Woodward, 346-347.

⁷⁵ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 191.

⁷⁶ PRO PREM 3/468, Lothian to Churchill, 12 June 1940, 165; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 493; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 304.

⁷⁷ PRO PREM 3/468, Vansittart to Bridges, pp. 162-164.

⁷⁸ The Naval Staff paper estimated the combined British and French destroyer losses since the outbreak of the war at 32, of which 25 had been lost since 1 February 1940. The paper noted that of the 133 destroyers then in commission in Home Waters, only 68 were "fit for service." It further asserted that if a German invasion took place, "it will almost certainly be in the form of dispersed landings from a large number of small craft, and the only effective counter to such a move is to maintain numerous and effective destroyer patrols." To meet the threat, the Royal

Britain needed these destroyers, Churchill stressed, to escort convoys across the Atlantic. The month of June 1940 had been disastrous in the toll of British merchant ships sunk by the Germans. The figures were 140 ships lost, of 585,496 tons, more than double the tonnage lost in May and far more than in any previous month. Moreover, the losses of destroyers in the Norwegian campaign and off Dunkirk had been heavy. The obsolete American vessels would be invaluable as escorts during the fall and winter of 1940, while the ships Britain had ordered at the outbreak of the war were being built.⁷⁹

In the meantime, Lothian followed Churchill's lead in Washington. In one respect, he continued to impress upon the president and his advisers the British determination never to surrender. In public, he stressed Britain's confidence and determination, while he reserved his warnings about the fleet for the Roosevelt administration and small groups of opinion-makers. On 11 June 1940, Cordell Hull reiterated the administration position that the United States expected the British to wage all-out war against the Nazis: "Any friend of Great Britain like myself would expect her to fight to the last dollar, to the last man and to the last ship, if necessary." Lothian responded that the Churchill ministry would never surrender the fleet; the only danger would be the emergence of "some successor government of the Mosley . . . or Communist type," a point he reiterated on 24 June.⁸⁰

At the same time, however, and more critically, as the French government teetered toward collapse, and the possibility of a German invasion of Britain appeared imminent, Lothian lamented that the United States Congress still did not grasp the seriousness of the British situation. Therefore, he strongly believed that the Roosevelt administration ought to speak out publicly and forcefully, and lay out

Navy only had the 68 mentioned; only ten small-type new construction destroyers were due to be completed within the next four months. The position became even worse "when we have to contemplate diverting further destroyer forces to the Mediterranean, as we may be forced to do when the sea war there is intensified." PRO PREM 3/468, Churchill to Roosevelt, 15 June 1940, 135-138; PRO PREM 3/468, Churchill to Roosevelt, 15 June 1940, 139-141; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 551-552; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 338; Goodhart, 73-75; L. Woodward, 347-348.

⁷⁹ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 291. That evening, Churchill telegraphed Roosevelt in a further appeal for an American entry into the war, in order to keep the French government, which had fallen back to Bordeaux, from concluding a separate armistice. He stressed that France simply would not be prepared to continue the war, even from its territory in North Africa, if the United States declined to enter the war. Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 194; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 552; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 341; Leutze, 85-86.

⁸⁰ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 285; Hull, 796-797; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 519-520.

the truth in its “stark brutality.” To this end, Lothian and the French Ambassador, René Doynel de Saint-Quentin, saw Roosevelt and Hull on 15 June. Lothian asked what response the president might be able to make to Reynaud’s last appeal. Roosevelt reiterated that the question of entering the war rested exclusively with Congress and that it would be useless to initiate a campaign “by radio and platform” in favor of a declaration of war. Both Roosevelt and Hull were adamant that for the president to do so at this point would be to commit political suicide; at the very least, it would involve the “political destruction of the authority” of Roosevelt’s government. The president emphasized particularly the importance of not allowing Hitler or Mussolini to get hold of the French fleet, since the possibility of an Allied victory, and the restoration of France would then be much less likely. As long as Britain, France, and the United States controlled the oceans, the blockade would eventually be effectual.⁸¹

Lothian responded that, while the case of France was most urgent, that of Britain might soon be analogous. Britain would fight desperately, but in the end, the question about peace and the destiny of the British fleet, like that of France, might depend on whether “the United States had thrown its heart and soul into the business of resisting Hitler’s aggression or not.” What were the chances, he asked the president, that the United States would enter the war “before these final and critical decisions had to be made?” Roosevelt stated that no one could answer the question, since the answer depended on the movement of American opinion, and, even more so, whether the dictators “had taken some action which compelled the United States to go to war” in self-defense. Lothian noted that if Britain were overrun, and the United States were not in the war, and if Hitler “threatened torture” unless the British fleet were surrendered, the fleet would sink itself either at sea or in a hopeless attack on Germany. If, on the other hand, the United States were in the war, then France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Britain might be

⁸¹ Roosevelt said to the French ambassador that it was very difficult in the circumstances even to suggest giving advice to France, but that, in his opinion, the French would be no worse off if they allowed Germany to occupy the whole of their country and if the government, part of the army and the fleet then moved across the seas, than if they asked for an armistice now and came to terms. The French ambassador responded that this was cold comfort for France at a time when it was confronted by a terrible decision and needed immediate aid for any real prospect of victory. L. Woodward, 270-271.

willing to submit to a period of violent repression by Germany in the hope of ultimate victory. Congress, therefore, had to decide whether it could grapple with this issue in time or drift to disaster.⁸²

That evening, 15 June, Lothian wired the Foreign Office that the Roosevelt administration felt almost helpless to do anything at the moment to impact the French decision, “beyond sending supplies as quickly as possible to help France and ourselves in the present juncture.” He maintained, as he had throughout the spring, that American public opinion was almost unanimously pro-Ally, but that owing to the constitution, nothing except a direct challenge to vital American interests and honor would drive the Washington “across the Rubicon.” The United States, he wrote, “has not yet faced the fact that the only way in which it can save itself from being confronted by totalitarian navies and air forces three or four times as powerful as its own in the near future is by setting the situation in all its stark brutality in front of Congress without delaying and inviting it to go to war with all its resources in the hope of saving Britain and France while there is still time.”⁸³ Cadogan commented rather fatalistically, “U.S. looks pretty useless. Well, we must die without them.”⁸⁴

Lothian saw the president again on the evening of 16 June 1940, after Roosevelt had learned of Paul Reynaud’s resignation and the formation of a new government under Marshall Pétain. The president praised Churchill’s telegrams to Reynaud, urging the French fleet to sail forthwith to British harbors pending negotiations with Germany, as “perfectly grand,” and added that if he were asked to act as an intermediary, he would make the transfer of the French fleet to Britain a condition of his mediation. He expressed the hope that as many French airmen, sailors, and others as possible would help to carry on the war in Algiers or in Britain, and that, if ever a similar crisis arose in Britain, the war would be carried on overseas and the British fleet would not be surrendered. Responding to the president, Lothian reiterated his position from the previous evening that Britain could not be expected to transfer its fleet across the seas and associate it with any country that was not going to use it, as well as its own resources, to the

⁸² Leutze, 86; L. Woodward, 270-271.

⁸³ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 20; L. Woodward, 271, 348.

⁸⁴ Cadogan, 299.

limit in order to rescue Britain from conquest. Roosevelt told Lothian that in the event of Britain becoming useless as a naval base, the Fleet ought to be withdrawn to Capetown, Singapore, Aden, and Sydney, while the main American navy reinforced the Atlantic and undertook the defense of Canada and other British possessions. He added that, if the crisis reached this point, the United States would certainly allow British ships to use American facilities for reforming and supply, and that, while they might not have formally declared war on Germany because of its constitutional difficulties, the United States would in effect be a belligerent, “assisting the Empire in every way and enforcing the blockade on Germany.”⁸⁵

Lothian’s report of this conversation to London crossed with a message from Churchill for transmission to the president. On 16 June 1940, when France asked the Germans for an armistice, Churchill made yet another appeal for the immediate dispatch of 35 destroyers: “The most effective thing he can do is to let us have destroyers immediately. Our need of them is vital, and their addition to our fleet might be decisive. It is most important that not a day should be lost.” When Lothian presented this appeal to Roosevelt on 17 June, however, the president once again rejected it. Roosevelt said that he was presently having great difficulty in persuading the Senate Naval Affairs Committee to release motor boats requested by London, and that, in the present anxiety about American defense, it was proving impossible to get Congress to consent to a release of the destroyers. Lothian repeated his suggestion that, because up until this point the realities of the situation had not been brought home to the American public, perhaps the time had come for the president to make a full and completely frank statement to Congress about the gravity of the naval situation and the consequences for the United States of Britain’s defeat, in order to convince the American public that assistance to Britain was the best line of defense. Roosevelt was noncommittal, however, and promised only to consider a press statement for the next day.⁸⁶

Lothian also asked the president whether he did not think that staff talks should take place to consider how the British and American fleets and, if necessary, air forces, should deal with the various

⁸⁵ Hyde, 32-33; L. Woodward, 348-349.

⁸⁶ PRO FO 371/24240, A3582/131/45, Tel. 1019, Lothian to Foreign Office, 17 June 1940; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 20-21; L. Woodward, 349-350.

situations that might arise in the near future. Roosevelt agreed with Lothian's proposal, and suggested that the talks should begin at once. Although influential parties on both sides of the Atlantic had long seen staff talks as a minimal prelude to collaboration, there was little unanimity. Cordell Hull, for one, was not enthusiastic about staff conferences, even though Lothian suggested that they cover that issue that so intrigued the Americans -- the movement of the British fleet. Consequently, in the end and once again, Roosevelt would take no immediate action.⁸⁷

In mid-June 1940, therefore, the prevailing position in Washington was disengagement and detachment. In part, Roosevelt was receiving depressing reports from his military advisers. Major General George Strong, chief of army war plans, reported on 17 June 1940 that Germany might be capable of launching an attack on South America within sixty days. Captain Alan G. Kirk, the American naval attaché in Britain, wrote on 11 June 1940 that the Allies were short of aircraft, tanks, antiaircraft weapons, motorized transport, and all other supplies needed to wage modern warfare. He noted that,

from where I sit here in London . . . the Germans will be all around and all over these Islands before the first of August. . . . [Britain] will be mined in, torpedoed by submarines, harassed by the air and hamstrung by political considerations. This Island is no more fortified or prepared to withstand invasion in force than Long Island, New York. There will be plenty of grief, and a great deal of destruction of historical monuments but I just don't see what is going to stop this German machine.

Therefore, Kirk advised, before rushing to the assistance of the beleaguered democracies, the United States should attend to its own strategic interests.⁸⁸

The American refusal to publicly support the French was highly distressing to London. In part, Churchill recognized that American detachment from Allied resistance to Hitler might potentially undermine his efforts to maintain a unified front at home. The imminent fall of France, for example, confronted Churchill with the possibility that Roosevelt might agree to mediate. Specifically, the prime minister feared that Roosevelt might "issue an appeal to all belligerent Governments to call the war off."

⁸⁷ PRO FO 371/24240, A3582/131/45, Tel. 1019, Lothian to Foreign Office, 17 June 1940; Leutze, 82; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 20-21; L. Woodward, 349-350.

⁸⁸ Leutze, 83.

Churchill told the War Cabinet that such an appeal “might to some extent shake some sections of British public opinion, the whole of which was at present united and inflexible”:

At the present juncture all thoughts of coming to terms with the enemy must be dismissed so as far as Britain was concerned. We were fighting for our lives and it was vital that we should allow no chink to appear in our armour.⁸⁹

Unity and steadfastness, Churchill believed, were even more necessary, given the relentless challenges and dangers that increasingly confronted Britain, including the possibility of a German invasion of Ireland and the prospect that Spain might enter the war against Britain.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the fact remained that, although American military hardware to Britain was just beginning to cross the Atlantic,⁹¹ up until this point, Roosevelt had done really very little to assist Britain. Lothian pointed out, however, that the United States had little surplus equipment available and that new legislation, the National Defense Act, passed by Congress in late June, contained a clause forbidding the transfer of any ship or other war material belonging to the United States unless the professional head of the service concerned had certified that it was “not essential” to the national defense. Furthermore, Roosevelt, a lame-duck president trying to engineer a third term, was in an unprecedented and extremely delicate political position. More significantly, Lothian reported on 27 June 1940 that the president had been affected by the “wave of pessimism” about Britain’s chances of survival that had passed over the United States since the French collapse: “a wave of pessimism . . . to the effect that Great Britain must now be inevitably defeated, and that there is no use in the United States doing any more to help it.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Gilbert, Churchill and America, 195; Churchill, War Papers, 345-346.

⁹⁰ Gilbert, Finest Hour, 577, 584.

⁹¹ Beginning on 15 June 1940, Churchill was given a daily secret report of the loading and departure, from various ports on the American east coast, of the guns, rifles, and ammunition that had been authorized by Roosevelt two weeks earlier. Although he told the House of Commons on 20 June that the United States was providing the fullest aid,” his comments represented an “optimist gloss on what Churchill knew” to be the case. When he asked General Hastings Ismay, the Chief of his Defense Staff, for a list of American aircraft and munitions “which have actually arrived in this country,” Ismay answered with one word: “Nil.” Nor was anything expected for another two weeks. In another setback, the Americans turned down a request for an additional quarter of a million rifles. Gilbert, Churchill and America, 194-195, 196-197; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 587.

⁹² PRO FO 371/24230, A3464/26/45, Tel. 1135, Lothian to Foreign Office, 27 June 1940; Butler, Lord Lothian, 282-283; Moser, 131; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 109, 112, 119-120; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 24.

Moreover, it was clear that not all Americans considered the prospect of a British defeat to be a necessarily negative or traumatic result. Shortly before his death, Senator Borah pondered the possibility and concluded, “Would it be a serious catastrophe if the three hundred and odd million Indians were given their freedom? Or, if the possessions scattered all over the earth passed under the control of the people who possess them?” Senator Sheridan Downey of California asked, “Why not be realists? For years the greatest historians and philosophers of England and of the world have been declaring that the British Empire is crumbling.” Senator Gerald Nye sunk even further by claiming that not only was the British Empire doomed, but that its demise ought not cause Americans “due alarm”; after all, he suggested, a German victory might help American trade “by removing our chief competitor.”⁹³

The military situation, however, became dramatically more clear and more stark when, at 3:00 p.m., on 22 June 1940, French officials signed the armistice in Ferdinand Foch’s railway car at Compiègne. The terms were not made public, but it quickly became known that the Germans demanded surrender of the French fleet. Some ships, however, were seized by the British, others made for colonial ports such as Oran, Mers el Kèbir, and Martinique, while those in mainland ports remained under French control. The final French collapse, although it had been almost entirely expected by the middle of June, nevertheless sent seismic waves through the governments of Britain and the United States. In Washington, pessimism deepened, while in London, many engaged in brave talk about how much easier it would be to defend Britain now that they were relieved of continental responsibilities.⁹⁴

Lothian Takes the Offensive -- Reopening the Destroyers Question

With the fall of France, efforts to establish greater Anglo-American cooperation assumed a new sense of urgency. The issue was no longer one simply of alerting Roosevelt to the dangers; he was already quite alive to them. Instead, Britain’s ability to secure American support depended increasingly upon the professional assessments of British chances of survival. In London, while some talk continued

⁹³ Moser, 131.

⁹⁴ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 576-590; Keegan, 86-87; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 542-544, 557-560; Leutze, 88-89; Lyons, 92-93; Murray and Millett, 82.

about how the fall of France probably simplified its problems, attention focused more immediately upon winning material support from, and closer cooperation with, the United States. Certainly, there were considerable differences regarding how best to win over Washington; some called for open-handed generosity, while others called for hard bargaining.⁹⁵ In Washington, over the next six weeks, Lord Lothian pursued two parallel lines of attack: he reopened the issue of offering British bases in the Western Hemisphere to the United States and he accelerated his efforts to win over American public opinion, principally by selling the bases proposal.

Lothian's immediate response to the collapse of France was to reopen the question of offering British air and naval facilities in the Western Hemisphere to the United States. On the evening of 22 June 1940, in a telegram to the Foreign Office, he argued that the immediate national defense requirements of the American army and air forces included the right to land aircraft at Trinidad, Georgetown in British Guiana, and Jamaica. Lothian's fundamental position, therefore, was that Britain should endeavor to control the nature of the bargain by acting with apparent generosity. Providing the United States with arrangements to operate out of British bases, he maintained, would not only stimulate "defensive collaboration" and good will between the two countries, it would also "cut away part of the ground from under [the] growing demand in [the] popular press that the United States should take over all islands off [its] coasts."⁹⁶ Lothian also encouraged some form of agreement on technical and scientific matters, reporting several days later that Roosevelt favored such agreements. Although the United States might well get the "better bargain," he urged that the British government unilaterally should consider making a "generous offer."⁹⁷

Lothian's suggestions generated favorable comment in London, especially in the Foreign Office, which thought it would be the "height of folly" to ignore his proposal. Moreover, at an interdepartmental

⁹⁵ Leutze, 94-95.

⁹⁶ FO 371/24255, A3297/2961/45, Lothian to Foreign Office, 22 June 1940; Leutze, 95; L. Woodward, 359.

⁹⁷ Leutze, 95.

meeting, called on 1 July 1940 to discuss the suggestion that bases be granted to the United States, the Air Ministry and the War Office expressed no objections, and even the Colonial Office took a “wait and see” approach. The Admiralty, however, favored a *quid pro quo*. It strongly opposed Lothian’s proposal to make a “generous offer,” and argued that no offer should be made to the United States except as part of a more balanced arrangement in which the United States would offer something in return; namely, destroyers. In his message of 2 July, Lothian continued to urge London to take the initiative due to a popular demand in the United States that favored taking over all the Caribbean islands in the interest of American defense. The demand, he noted, was gaining force, particularly as Americans began to understand the risk to themselves from the French collapse and the impending attack on Britain. For the time being, the Foreign Office on 6 July 1940 advised Lothian that the provision of bases might best be considered at the staff conferences to which the Americans had agreed, where a wider range of Anglo-American issues might be addressed at one time.⁹⁸

Churchill in particular did not like Lothian’s suggestion of a unilateral “generous offer,” but favored some sort of *quid pro quo* instead. He was aware, through Lothian, that Americans had at last begun to realize that the United States might lose the British fleet if they remained neutral and the war went against Britain, while a number of influential people thought that the United States should enter the war at once or at least give more effective help over the next critical months. At the same time, however, Lothian telegraphed another message to Churchill, on 5 July, and tried to impress upon the prime minister that it would be hard to get public opinion to consider American belligerency without an assurance that the British fleet or what was left of it would cross the Atlantic if Britain were overrun. Lothian urged Churchill to give Washington a guarantee of the Fleet. If Britain was formally asked, “we should give such an assurance because the problem of winning the war would take a new aspect with American

⁹⁸ FO 371/24255, A3297/2961/45, Foreign Office to Lothian, 6 July 1940; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 623-624; Leutze, 95-97; L. Woodward, 359-360. The Admiralty in particular hoped to raise and settle a number of issues and believed that staff conferences would provide the ideal forum. At such a general bargaining session, the Admiralty believed that Britain’s much greater experience in international diplomacy and superior organization would put them at a real advantage. Leutze, 97.

participation.” In spite of considerable prodding, he could only compel Churchill to draft a telegram to Roosevelt on 5 July. In the letter, Churchill urgently appealed for more ships and material aid:

It has now become most urgent for you to give us the destroyers and motorboats. The Germans have the whole French coastline from which to launch U-Boat attacks upon our trade and food, and in addition we must be constantly prepared to repel threatened invasion by sea action in the narrow waters and also to deal with a break-out from Norway towards Ireland. Besides this we have to keep control of the exits from the Mediterranean . . . and prevent war spreading seriously into Africa. I know you will do all in your power. The consequences to the United States of our being hemmed in or overwhelmed are so grievous, [it seems to me very hard to understand why] this modest aid [is not given at the time when it] could be perhaps decisively effective. Pray let me know if there is [no] hope.⁹⁹

The telegram, however, was never sent, apparently due to disagreements over the wording. The decision might have reflected Churchill’s continuing reluctance to channel his correspondence with Roosevelt exclusively through the British Embassy. Since January, under pressure from Halifax, Churchill had dispatched messages to Lothian simultaneously with those sent through Joseph P. Kennedy. This arrangement lasted until late May when, following a major security leak in the United States Embassy in London, Churchill agreed to communicate exclusively through Lothian.¹⁰⁰ After two weeks, however, when the prime minister reverted to the former procedure, Lothian protested anew, pointing out that the president was so busy that unless there was a message from Churchill to deliver, it was frequently difficult for him to gain access. Eventually, Churchill once again agreed in July 1940, and again under

⁹⁹ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 653; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 482-483. The passages in brackets were deleted by Kennedy when Halifax showed him the final draft of the telegram. In response, Churchill wrote to Halifax on 7 July, that “I do not agree with the comments which Kennedy made upon my draft telegram. I fancy it was because it was not sent through him that he crabbled it.” Churchill knew that Kennedy was sensitive to being ignored and decided not to send it. In doing so, the prime minister noted that, “As it now stands I do not see much use in sending any telegram. I am sure it is much better when I do to send through [Kennedy] whose help is then enlisted; and if Lothian gets a copy almost simultaneously he really has not much to complain of.” Colville, 185, entry for 5 July 1940; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 198.

¹⁰⁰ On 20 May 1940, British Military Intelligence arrested an employee of the American Embassy in London, Tyler Kent, a 28-year old cipher clerk, in whose flat they found thirty folders containing secret 1,500 cables and Embassy documents, which Kent had stolen. Kent was a fanatical isolationist who thought that the United States should avoid contact outside of the Western Hemisphere; he thus collected copies of documents with some vague idea of using them as “evidence” that American foreign policy was moving toward involvement in the war. His intention, therefore, had been to smuggle these documents back to the United States, to serve as ammunition for the isolationist organizations opposed to Roosevelt’s pro-British policies. In October 1939, he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment, but was deported to the United States after the war. Beschloss, 206-207; De Bedts, 204-205; Lash, 137-139; Swift, 245-249.

pressure from Halifax, that some cables should be sent via Lothian and some via Kennedy, the method of transmission to be determined by Churchill in each case. This practice remained in place for the remainder of Lothian's ambassadorship.¹⁰¹

Churchill's obstinate opposition to a British lease initiative notwithstanding, Lothian continued to explore possible avenues of Anglo-American cooperation. A significant opportunity presented itself, when, on 8 July 1940, Lothian met with the new Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who suggested that Washington might cancel Britain's war debt in return for Britain's Caribbean possessions. Knox's suggestion provided Lothian with an ideal springboard to once again press London about offering base facilities to the United States. He wrote on 11 July 1940 that American public opinion and the Roosevelt administration were growing more deeply concerned with the question of defense and were anxious to organize communication with South America in order to intervene there in the event of "fifth column" or any other German action in Brazil. Furthermore, he anticipated that in the upcoming Havana Conference, the Pan-American nations would likely raise the issue of European possessions in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁰² Consequently, reiterating his position from 23 May, Lothian argued that Britain could most effectively counter any possible American demands for rights in British possessions if London had already made a generous offer simultaneously.¹⁰³

Once again the Foreign Office received Lothian's proposals with enthusiasm. In forwarding the ambassador's suggestion to the Chiefs of Staff, John Balfour wrote on 10 July that Britain should take action promptly that would "minimize the possibility of our being confronted with demands of a more

¹⁰¹ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 17; L. Woodward, 334-335. Halifax often defended Lothian. On 20 June 1940, still influenced by lingering suspicions of Lothian's judgment due to his earlier adherence to appeasement, Churchill suggested that "there is something to be said for a strong mission to the United States" to handle all threads of Anglo-American relations -- diplomatic, military, financial, and supply. Halifax responded firmly: "Personally, I have confidence in Lothian. I doubt the necessity of a 'strong mission' alongside of him, and fear that it might be embarrassing, if not perhaps a little unfair to him, and might produce some confusion." Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 17.

¹⁰² The United States invited the Pan-American nations to Havana in late July 1940 in order to obtain their cooperation in keeping German control from extending to possessions of European nations conquered by the Nazis.

¹⁰³ FO 371/24255, A3297/2961/45, Foreign Office to Lothian, 6 July 1940; Lash, 205; Leutze, 104; L. Woodward, 360.

extensive character and [would] show a forthcoming attitude towards America's defense requirements." The Admiralty, however, as well as the Colonial and Dominion Offices, which opposed the proposal on the grounds that base rights might represent the first step toward American assumption of sovereignty, sought a *quid pro quo* such as destroyers or financial credits. Although there was some minimal dissent within the Foreign Office,¹⁰⁴ Halifax favored Lothian's proposal, arguing that the effect would be to "bond the Americans closer to us by giving practical evidence of our unity of interests." The Chiefs of Staff agreed that it was desirable to meet the American requirements. The governors of Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana also gave their approval, as did the governments of Canada and Newfoundland. Nevertheless, the issue became bogged down in interdepartmental bickering through much of July, in spite of repeated pleas from Lothian. Eventually, the Foreign Office's American Department forced it before the War Cabinet on 29 July 1940. While the Colonial Office still feared American designs in the Caribbean, the War Cabinet decided to deal with the United States on the basis of Lothian's limited proposal: Britain should offer to lease to the United States those facilities that Lothian had proposed, without suggesting any *quid pro quo*. It agreed, therefore, to offer Pan American Airways, as agents for the United States government, leases of land to build a small store and radio station on Trinidad, and airfields in British Guiana and Jamaica, as well as giving the United States landing rights for military aircraft in those three colonies. Nevertheless, the War Cabinet's decision remained tied very closely to Britain's continued pressure for United States destroyers.¹⁰⁵

Lothian Takes the Offensive -- Selling the Drama

While not otherwise engaged in private consultations with American policymakers or on the telegraph with his superiors in London, Lothian continued to monitor and analyze the currents of public

¹⁰⁴ Sir Robert Vansittart, in particular, disagreed vigorously with Lothian's suggestion that the United States might be preparing to make "imperious demands" on Britain. He argued that Lothian had "lost his balance" and was viewing things in far too "panicky" a light. He wrote that "for once . . . we are . . . in the position of bargainers and not supplicants. Lord Lothian apparently doesn't like that position. I do." Lash, 205-206; Leutze, 104.

¹⁰⁵ PRO CAB 65/7, WM 141 (40) 9; PRO CAB 65/7, WM 146 (40) 14; PRO CAB 65/8, WM 214 (40) 4; Leutze, 105-106; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 26; L. Woodward, 360-361.

opinion in the United States. He found it generally volatile and difficult to pin down with any degree of precision. On May 20, for example, he wrote to Lady Astor that the prospect of Britain's collapse has shaken up many Americans and finally opened their eyes:

The U.S.A. is at last profoundly moved and frightened. It had been dreaming on that it could keep out and that the allies would keep the tiger away. And now the spectre has suddenly arisen that the British fleet may disappear and then [what is] to happen to itself? It has only one navy. Is it to keep it in the Atlantic or Pacific? If it keeps it in the Pacific, Germany and Italy will be able to take Brazil, and the Monroe Doctrine [*sic*] and threaten the [Panama] Canal. If it keeps it in the Atlantic the Japanese will take over the Pacific. If it divides its fleet it will be impotent in both oceans. It has only a very small air force and 400,000 badly equipped soldiers. If we went could it protect Greenland and Alaska, and Hawaii and S. America and the Canal -- obviously not. So there is very grave heart searching. The old isolationism is dead.

Most people, he added, agreed that a vast armament programme would not be ready for years. As a result, Washington should give the Allies everything possible to keep them fighting. He pointed out again, however, that although Britain will “doubtless get what help we want, short of war,” the United States would not enter the war “unless its own vital interests are affected and that, I think, Hitler and Goebbels are too clever to do, for the present.”¹⁰⁶ Following the evacuation of Dunkirk, Lothian observed that, while the “tide of opinion is running very fast towards intervention,” Americans remained “volatile” and unpredictable: “When the allies get a success they say, Well, that's fine. They can win without us. When Hitler is winning they say, It's all over. There's nothing effective we can do so we had better stay out.” Furthermore, while he reiterated his position that nothing “but a direct challenge to U.S. honour or vital national interests will make them take the plunge as they did in 1917,” the Roosevelt administration was too sufficiently timid to take any measures that might stir up public opinion:

The President is afraid that if he goes too fast you will get another “battalion of death” in the Senate like Wilson did over the League of Nations -- a group which will exploit the natural human reluctance to war, excite the women (saying they are going to keep their boys out of the war) and get the Senate so balled up as to produce complete paralysis of action in any direction.

For that reason, he expressed the hope that people in Britain would remain circumspect about the United States, so as not to stir up American isolationists:

¹⁰⁶ Butler, Lord Lothian, 287; Goodhart, 27; Lash, 132.

Hardly a critical word of U.S.A. has been cabled over to the press, though there has been plenty of bitter correspondence. Please prevent people from saying things in public -- not because lots of criticism isn't warranted, but because U.S.A. is coming along and one doesn't want to do anything to give a handle to isolationists over here. Generosity of spirit is a powerful persuasive, and really the British haven't much ground on which to attack U.S.A. because they are only doing today what we did yesterday.¹⁰⁷

On 12 June, however, amidst the excitement and outrage generated by Italian entry into the war, Lothian wrote that the Americans feared that if the British fleet went down, so too would the Monroe Doctrine, leaving the United States defenseless. Consequently, he noted that "the change has been staggering in the last fortnight" and that it would take very little to carry the United States into the war now -- "any kind of challenge by Hitler or Mussolini to their own vital interests would do it."¹⁰⁸

The fall of France, however, seemed to paralyze American public opinion. In early July, Lothian wrote two old friends, Sir Abe Bailey and Captain Victor Cazalet, that opinion in the United States was badly divided. On one side, isolationists see no point in helping Britain, which cannot now possibly prevail; therefore, they ask, should not the United States better prepare the defense of the Western Hemisphere? On the other side, interventionists reply that Britain and its fleet is America's Maginot Line and "if the United States lets it go, it will only be a short while before she is imprisoned herself."¹⁰⁹

Far more important, furthermore, the collapse of France seemed to paralyze the United States government into even greater inaction and passivity. Lothian reported on 24 June that the fall of France was producing a "stream of defeatist articles," generally stimulated by German propaganda agencies, to the effect that the Allied cause was hopeless, that Britain faces inevitable defeat, and that the United States "should not burn its fingers" by intervening in the war. The solution, he continued to maintain, was to stress, through American news correspondents in London, Britain's determination to fight on.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 287-288; Lash, 151.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 288; Lash, 161.

¹⁰⁹ NAS, GD40/17/398/465, Lothian to Sir Abe Bailey, 1 July 1940; NAS, GD40/17/399/508, Lothian to Captain Victor Cazalet, 1 July 1940.

¹¹⁰ PRO FO 371/24230, A3464/26/45, Tel. 1093, Lothian to Foreign Office, 24 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24230, A3464/26/45, Tel. 1104, Lothian to Foreign Office, 24-25 June 1940.

Beyond that, however, Lothian decided to take matters into his own hands, in order to push American public opinion, overtly as well as covertly, toward a deeper appreciation for Britain's growing crisis. He understood that in order to secure material aid to Britain quickly, Congress, and therefore public opinion, had to be cultivated and won. Therefore, one of his most significant achievements in the summer of 1940 was not only his role in helping to broker the destroyers agreement, but also his activities in building a stronger and more widespread base of popular support for Britain throughout the United States. This was principally the result of his efforts to "sell" the agreement to the American people. In the end, Lothian's efforts helped to condition public opinion to the idea of a destroyers-for-bases deal and, thereby, to create a political environment that made the terms of the agreement acceptable and justifiable.

In one important respect, he began to take every available opportunity to lay the facts and their implications, as he saw them, before the American people. In June 1940, he made two important speeches, in which he proceeded to pound away on a now-familiar theme. In a speech to Columbia University alumni on 4 June 1940, he said that one reason why the democracies were in "this present confusion and distress" was that they had failed to live up to their own moral standards and were "unwilling to abate their own sovereign selfishness sufficiently to create any effective unity or law among themselves." The other reason was that they had "lost the heroic self-discipline of their early ideals and lost those soldierly qualities which are essential to any healthy society." He warned that "there is not now the slightest doubt" that Nazi Germany intended to dominate "not only Europe, but the world." Consequently, just as he swallowed up seven previously independent states, "Hitler is now bent on doing exactly the same thing, probably with the assistance of Italy, to France and England." With a nod to Abraham Lincoln, Lothian explained that, because "We do not think that it is going to be possible for the world to remain for long half Nazi and half free," the British meant to fight on until they were either conquered or until they had won victory over this latest despotism:

You may ask, do we want your help. My answer is, "of course we want your help, any help in munitions you can give us. And without delay." But what you do about this is for you yourselves to decide . . .

What Hitler is now after, of course, is the British fleet. For if he can seize that, he steps from the domination of Europe to the domination of the world. The free world was

protected for a century after Napoleon by the power of the British Fleet, because Britain for all its mistakes has been a liberal power. Since 1920 that control of the seas has been exercised by you and us jointly. We have controlled the Atlantic, you the Pacific. If Hitler were to get our fleet, possessed, as he and his associates would then be, of many of the resources of Britain, France, Holland, and Belgium, as well as of most of the rest of Europe, he would have made a most formidable breach in that naval Maginot line which has hitherto defended us both. Our control of the seas has hitherto kept that defence line at the borders of Europe and Asia and not at the borders of the Americas and the British Dominions. . . . He means to get control of the British and French fleets and the naval bases which are essential to world power, or to destroy them, this year, if he can.

Lothian concluded with a direct appeal to the United States. Napoleonic tyranny, he maintained, had not been defeated by British naval strength alone, but was ultimately crushed because “there remained somewhere a free country which would not give up the fight, which could not be conquered, which kept afloat the banner of liberty. This it was that gave to the oppressed the hope and the will to resist and which undermined Napoleon’s support among his own exhausted and disillusioned compatriots and in the end won the victory of 1815. And so it will be again -- so long as we resist.” The free and the unfree alike, Lothian suggested, plead for American leadership.¹¹¹

At Yale University, on 19 June 1940, after the French request for an armistice, Lothian again focused his remarks on the naval situation, emphasizing the danger to the United States should Hitler secure or destroy the British fleet. After all, “so long as we were superior at sea . . . no hostile fleet or army could approach our shores. . . . That sea system of security is now under challenge, because of the development of air power, and because Hitler seeks to capture the British and French fleets”:

The outcome of this grim struggle will affect you almost as much as it will affect us. For if Hitler gets our fleet, or destroys it, the whole foundation on which the security of both our countries has rested for 120 years will have disappeared. Hitler . . . will then control the sea communications between Great Britain and its dependencies, which will be the end of the British Commonwealth as we have known it. . . . You will then have only one navy to protect a two-ocean front.

In particular, Lothian tried to alert his audience that, in spite of the impression they might have been given by Churchill’s remarks on 4 June, they should not be so complacent or confident in British victory. He

¹¹¹ NAS GD40/17/402/424-428; Lothian, “Speech at the Annual Columbia University Alumni Luncheon, 4 June 1940,” in *Speeches*, 97-101. A journalist, Ernest E. East, wrote Lothian to inquire whether his words had in fact been inspired by Lincoln. In any event, East stated that, “As a clear statement on behalf of the Allies I think the Ambassador’s words are entitled to historic recognition.” NAS, GD40/17/400/358, East to Lothian, 4 June 1940.

warned that the United States, in planning for its own future defense, should not expect the Royal Navy to be available to defend North America. That, he suggested, might well prove “an illusion” -- and for two reasons. First, as he had emphasized in virtually every speech since his appointment as ambassador, it would “make a very great difference on which side of the ocean the British Fleet was based.” The Royal Navy was far more effective in controlling the exits from Europe into the Atlantic, as it had done during the nineteenth century to America’s great benefit, than in trying to patrol a vast seaboard on the other side of the ocean. Second, most of the fleet would probably be lost in defending Britain. Only if Britain had been beaten down, and the greater part of the fleet sunk in action would the remnants of the navy leave for overseas ports to defend the other parts of the Commonwealth: “Quite apart from the difficulties which would arise, if you were neutral, of handing over a fleet designed to protect the British Commonwealth to a power which could not use it for that belligerent purpose, there would be little left over for you.” In essence, Lothian, maintained, the only way to insure the transfer of the British fleet to American waters was for the United States to enter the war as a belligerent. He stressed that, while he was not pessimistic about the outcome of the impending German attack on Britain, nor was he trying to tell Americans their business, he was simply being truthful, in order to prevent any later misconceptions or misjudgments; that if the worst came to pass, Americans would not turn to Britain and ask, “Why did you not warn us about these facts . . . before it was too late?”¹¹²

Lothian told Duff Cooper that he had “put the realities . . . as nakedly as it is possible for an Ambassador to do.”¹¹³ After all, he wrote Helen Ogden Reid of the *New York Herald Tribune*, he needed to “do something to correct the wishful thinking which so many people here were beginning to entertain about the future of the British fleet.”¹¹⁴ The newspapers, both British and American, gave wide coverage

¹¹² PRO FO 371/24246, A3007/301/45, Tel. 1080, Lothian to Foreign Office, 22 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24246, A3007/301/45, Tel. 1081, Lothian to Foreign Office, 22 June 1940; Lothian, “Speech at the Annual Luncheon of the Yale University Alumni, 19 June 1940,” in *Speeches*, 104-109; Billington, 148-149; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 289-290; Leutze, 88; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 21.

¹¹³ PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/2, Lothian to Duff Cooper, 13 July 1940; NAS, GD 340/17/399/614.

¹¹⁴ NAS, GD40/17/404/130, Lothian to Helen Ogden Reid, 21 June 1940.

to his remarks and British leaders were full of praise; both Halifax and Churchill wrote him to convey their approval and congratulations.¹¹⁵

At the same time, however, Lothian's Yale speech might have undermined the political credibility of Roosevelt's diplomacy, on two levels. For one thing, it became harder for Roosevelt to maintain the existing division between the American fleet in the Pacific and the Royal Navy in the Atlantic. The president in fact had warned Lothian of this possible consequence. On 17 June, when the ambassador urged Roosevelt to speak out about the naval consequences for the United States if Britain fell, the president pointed out that such a statement "might produce a demand for the removal of the American fleet from the Pacific to the Atlantic which would have disastrous effects in the Pacific Ocean."¹¹⁶ Lothian, therefore, was fully aware in principle of the American fleet's value as a deterrent against Japan. He apparently did not realize, however, the extent of the political pressure currently on the president to do just that -- move the American fleet back to the Atlantic. Roosevelt was in fact under considerable pressure from some senior State Department officials, as well as the Army and Navy chiefs, to abandon the Pacific and move most of the fleet back through the Panama Canal to defend the Atlantic coast. The immediate crisis was resolved in early July, however, when the British boldly neutralized the French fleet at Oran.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ PRO FO 371/24246, A3007/30/45, Tel. 1515, Churchill to Lothian, 14 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24246, A3007/30/45, Halifax to Lothian, 15 July 1940.

¹¹⁶ PRO FO 371/24240, A3582/131/45, Tel. 1019, Lothian to Foreign Office, 17 June 1940; Billington, 149; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 21-22.

¹¹⁷ As part of the Franco-German Armistice, France had agreed to transfer its warships to German control. Part of that fleet was at Oran, in French North Africa. Churchill insisted that the Allies could not allow the French fleet to fall into German or Italian hands, and thus decided to destroy it. When Lothian asked Roosevelt if he would support Britain's "forcible seizure" of the ships, the president replied, "certainly;" he expected the French ships to be seized rather than "fall into German hands." Churchill instructed his admirals to offer the French the opportunity to join the British or take refuge in a distant colony. On 3 July 1940, when negotiations with the French broke down, the British warships opened fire. The Royal Navy sank one battleship, disabled three other capital ships, and killed more than 1,250 French sailors, Britain's allies two-and-a-half weeks earlier. It was one of the hardest, and harshest, of Churchill's wartime decisions. Nevertheless, seven months later, Roosevelt's personal emissary to Churchill, Harry Hopkins, told a member of the prime minister's Private Office that it was the British action at Oran that convinced the president, in spite of Kennedy's "defeatist opinions," that Britain would and could continue to fight. Gilbert, Churchill and America, 198; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 596-598, 628-644; Lyons, 104-105; Taylor, 62.

In the second place, although Lothian had merely hoped to point out that Britain was America's first and only line of defense, his remarks very well may have made the president more hesitant about actually providing the destroyers that Britain continued to request. Because Roosevelt needed the consent of Congress for such a deal, significant criticism, even from a handful of determined senators, could undermine the domestic consensus on which such a policy absolutely had to be based. Consequently, a public statement by the British ambassador that the British fleet might not come to the United States in the event of Britain's defeat, as well as any suggestion that, if Britain fell, those destroyers might be surrendered to Hitler and possibly used against the United States, made it politically more difficult for the Roosevelt administration to sell the deal to Congress. Lothian's Yale speech was thus very likely one reason why the president became so insistent through the summer and the subsequent negotiations that, as a prerequisite for the transfer of the destroyers, Churchill must affirm that his comments on 4 June, about the fleet fighting on, if necessary overseas, were in fact official British policy.¹¹⁸

In spite of the attention generated by these two public addresses, Lothian understood that speeches would never be enough. During the summer of 1940, particularly following the collapse of France, he conscientiously set out to sell the deal to the American public, primarily through a more robust public relations and propaganda campaign in the United States. He did so, furthermore, frequently on his own initiative, without the approval, or sometimes the knowledge, of the War Cabinet. Principally and fundamentally, Lothian believed that British publicity and propaganda policy should follow the lead of American opinion. Therefore, he helped to shape that opinion and thereby sell the deal to the American people through unofficial, non-party, pro-British, pro-interventionist, but American, pressure groups.¹¹⁹

Since late June 1940, he and members of his staff had been in touch with pro-British pressure groups, notably the William Allen White Committee and the Century Group. The better known of these groups was the White Committee, founded by William Allen White, a widely respected editor of the

¹¹⁸ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 22.

¹¹⁹ Chadwin, 74-108; Cull, 76; Walter Johnson, The Battle Against Isolation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 58-96; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 746-748.

Emporia (Kansas) Gazette. White, a Republican but an old friend of the president, formed a grassroots movement during the fall of 1939 in order to support revision of the neutrality laws. The German invasion of the West, however, prompted him to organize a new movement in May 1940 called the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. The group, which became known as the White Committee, quickly made itself the leading advocacy group in favor of American aid to Britain. On 21 May, the *Chicago Daily News* quoted White: “Here is a life and death struggle for every principle we cherish in America: For freedom of speech, of religion, of the ballot and of every freedom that upholds the dignity of the human spirit. . . . Here all the rights that the common man has fought for during a thousand years are menaced.” Taking their lead from White, numerous local chapters quickly formed across the country – so many that, by the end of May, the American press began to note the emergence of an “Aid For Allies Tide.” On 1 July 1940, there were 300 local chapters; by November, the total would be 750, in every state, with about 10,000 active members. The White Committee tended to concentrate on direct and overt publicity in the country at large, working through local chapters, newspaper ads, and radio addresses, and usually with the blessing of the administration. Its objective was to “fill the radio and the newspapers and the Congressional mail with the voice of prominent citizens urging America to become the nonbelligerent ally of France and England.” During the Senate confirmation hearings for Knox and Stimson, for example, White arranged for a deluge of telegrams in support of the nominees from the home states of key senators; the result was a disappearance of any significant opposition. Similarly, in July, when the Committee came out strongly for the release of 50 or 60 old destroyers to Britain, they ran advertisements in major eastern and midwestern newspapers declaring that the British fleet was America’s first line of defense: “Between Us and Hitler Stands the British Fleet.” It further encouraged readers to write Washington to request the sale of destroyers to Britain. The Committee was, however, perturbed at the president’s inaction in this matter and thus encouraged a large number of members and supporters to send telegrams to the White House urging Roosevelt to act.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Billington, 149; Chadwin, 78-79; Cull, 73-74; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 128-129; Johnson, 31-71, 92; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 486-487, 745; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 92.

A smaller group, which ultimately came to be known as the Century Group, emerged at approximately the same time and proceeded to operate on parallel lines. It emerged out of a June 1940 meeting in Virginia at the home of Colonel Francis P. Miller, a former Rhodes Scholar,¹²¹ although it did not formally organize until 11 July 1940. Unlike the White Committee, the Century Group tended to act more covertly in order to rally elite opinion in Washington D.C.¹²² Its members typically endeavored, individually and specifically, to influence other national leaders to speak or act for aid and intervention. Thus, they conducted a “private” propaganda campaign, dispatching copies of meeting memoranda, speeches, columns, and editorials by Group members to journalists and influential public figures on a private mailing list, on the grounds that time was too short to make a successful direct assault on the isolationists in Congress who were obstructing aid to Britain.¹²³ They went so far as to declare themselves in favor of immediate belligerency; the United States, they argued, should enter the war immediately on the Allied side. The Group recruited thirty distinguished citizens¹²⁴ to join them in signing a “Summons to Speak Out,” which urged the United States to join the war alongside Britain and

¹²¹ A 1919 Rhodes Scholar, Miller worked for the Council on Foreign Relations and had joined the Committee to Defend America. His wife, Helen Hill Miller, was a correspondent for *The Economist* of London. Other members included Whitney Shepardson, a 1910 Rhodes Scholar and businessman, and Richard Cleveland, a Baltimore attorney and son of former president Grover Cleveland. Ultimately, the group expanded its membership to include attorneys, business executives, clergymen, and university leaders from around the country. This gathering, originally called to consider the implications of a German victory, concluded that Britain could not be allowed to fall. Billington, 150-151, 229, note 54; Chadwin, 43-73, 75-76; Francis Pickens Miller, Man from the Valley: Memoirs of a 20th-Century Virginian (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 89-90.

¹²² Unlike the White Committee, the Century Group saw Roosevelt as a problem and actively sought to undermine his intransigence. For example, during the Phoney War, certain interventionists, such as the journalist Joseph Alsop, had discovered that Roosevelt was “susceptible” to “a combination of stories in the press and the coordinated persuasion of people close to him.” Therefore, by discreetly lobbying Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins, the Century Club persuaded Roosevelt to allow British evacuees into the United States. Chadwin, 79; Cull, 74-75. Alsop wrote that the key had been the “very visible effect on the President of a combination of stories in the press and the coordinated persuasion of people close to him. He proved that he was ready to act, in short, when he felt that the atmosphere was propitious; but he had to have this feeling before he would take positive action.” NAS, GD40/17/516/1, Alsop to J. R. M. Butler, 28 June 1956.

¹²³ Chadwin, 74-77-78; Miller, 93-96.

¹²⁴ This group included Herbert Agar, a Pulitzer Prize-winning editor from Louisville, Kentucky; Admiral William Standley, retired chief of naval operations; the Right Reverend Henry W. Hobson, Episcopal bishop of Cincinnati; Dr. Edwin Hubble, a 1910 Rhodes Scholar and astronomer; and Walter Millis, a writer for *The New York Herald Tribune*, whose 1935 book had denounced American entry into the First World War.

France. It declared that “the survival of the British Commonwealth is an important factor in the preservation of the American way of life,” and called for the United States to act “in weeks not years.” It urged the Roosevelt administration to provide war credits, arms exports, and the loan of American ships for convoying evacuated children and transporting food, in return for a guarantee that London would not surrender the fleet to the Germans. Newspapers across the country printed or reported the Summons on 10 June, but news of Mussolini’s invasion of France drowned out the story. Nevertheless, the Century Group on 25 July drew up a memorandum urging that, in the interest of its own national defense, the United States should transfer 100 destroyers to Great Britain at once.¹²⁵ In return, Washington should ask for some guarantee that the British fleet would be neither scuttled nor surrendered, and in the case of a successful German invasion, would operate thereafter from Canadian or American bases. Otherwise, in return for the destroyers, the United States should receive immediate naval and air concessions in British possessions in the Western Hemisphere.¹²⁶

Over the summer of 1940, Lothian met and worked with both interventionist groups, although his actual contacts with their members were rather minimal prior to the collapse of France. For example, he secretly conferred with White, at the end of May, regarding British needs and requirements. Shortly after this meeting, Lothian prevailed on Churchill to promise that Britain would continue to fight Germany “whatever the issue of the battle in France.” The prime minister obliged by pledging that Britain would “fight on the beaches.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ The Century Group maintained that the most vulnerable sector in the American defense line was the North Atlantic. Consequently, the primary immediate responsibility of the United States government was to ensure adequate defense in that area. If Germany won control of the North Atlantic, prior to the completion of the two-ocean navy, the risk of German invasion of North America became more significant. In order to remove the risk of invasion, the government should take all possible steps to prevent German control of the north Atlantic. “The most certain preventive (until our two ocean navy is built) is the continued existence of the British fleet. . . . The British chances of success are at present doubtful; but responsible British officials believe that they could successfully withstand invasion if they had 100 more destroyers.” Miller, 96-97.

¹²⁶ NAS, GD40/17/516/1, Alsop to J. R. M Butler, 28 June 1956. Billington, 150; Butler, Lord Lothian, 292-293; Chadwin, 32-39, 80-85; Cull, 74; Johnson, 115-117; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 746-748; Meacham, 54-55; Miller, 91-92.

¹²⁷ PRO CAB 65/8, WM 127 (40) 5; Cull, 76.

Lothian indeed firmly maintained that British publicity and propaganda policy should complement the work of American pro-interventionist groups. One of his most significant obstacles, however, was in fact the prime minister. In contrast to Lothian, Churchill saw only limited value in propaganda. He felt that words were worth nothing without a determined display of resistance, and he relentlessly resisted appeals to cultivate American newspaper reporters and radio correspondents. During his tenure as the First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill had been unfailingly uncooperative in providing information to the media, whether British or American. Many American reporters, including Edward R. Murrow, routinely complained about stonewalling and obstruction on the part of the Admiralty under Churchill.¹²⁸ His assumption of the premiership, moreover, did not fundamentally alter Churchill's perspective, as American reporters continued to plead for a relaxation of restrictions on their access to information and news.¹²⁹ Therefore, when a War Cabinet colleague urged him to take twenty minutes off to speak to the American press, the prime minister angrily replied: "I am sure that only events will serve to turn opinion in the United States. We have a Minister of Information and I cannot consume my limited life and strength in the task you set before me."¹³⁰ Churchill consistently maintained faith and trust in what he considered the two principal and natural arguments on Britain's side. The first argument was the United States dependence on the Royal Navy, and the second was the intrinsic heroism of the Allied stand; the more heroic the stand, he argued, the greater the Allies' chance of winning American sympathy. For example, upon rejecting Mussolini's offer to mediate peace on 28 May 1940, he assured the French Premier Paul Reynaud that, if Britain and France maintained "stout hearts and confidence," they would strengthen their negotiating position and "draw the admiration and perhaps the material support of the United States." Following the fall of France, Churchill sharpened this argument. On 20

¹²⁸ Sperber, 143, 150, 151-152. On 14 October 1939, following the sinking of the British battleship *Royal Oak* by German submarines, in a daring raid on the naval base at Scapa Flow, Murrow and two of his colleagues found their efforts to procure accurate information obstructed by Admiralty silence. They appealed directly to Churchill to intervene, but were told by a private secretary that "certain naval facilities" had already been arranged and suggested pointedly that they use proper channels in the future. Sperber, 144-145.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 157-160.

¹³⁰ Cull, 76.

June, he informed a secret session of the House of Commons that nothing would stir American opinion “like the fighting in England” and that the “heroic struggle” offered the “best chance of bringing them in.” If Britain could hold off Hitler until Roosevelt had been reelected, he believed, “the whole English speaking world” would shortly “be in line together.”¹³¹ Even later, on 21 August 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain, while the British government desperately awaited material assistance from the United States, Churchill wrote to Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air, that he did not see the point or value of allowing American newspaper correspondents access to the air squadrons. He continued to maintain that only events will impress and drive the United States into the war and therefore expressed frustration with the constant effort and energy expended on appealing to American public opinion:

The important thing is to bring the German aircraft down and to win the battle, and the rate at which American correspondents and the American public are convinced that we are winning, and that our figures are true, stands in a much lower plane. They will find out quite soon enough when the German air attack is plainly shown to be repulsed. . . . I should be more inclined to let the facts speak for themselves. There is something rather obnoxious in bringing correspondents down to air squadrons in order that they may assure the American public that the Fighter pilots are not bragging and lying about their figures. We can, I think, afford to be a bit cool and calm about all this. . . . I must say I am a little impatient about the American skepticism. The event is what will decide all.¹³²

Lothian, however, refused to be deterred. He urged Churchill to make a short news reel statement, as soon as possible, with regard to Britain’s determination to carry on, since “Prime Minister is very popular with American news reel audiences.”¹³³ Moreover, on 26 June 1940, he warned the War Cabinet about a “wave of pessimism passing over this country . . . to the effect that Great Britain must now inevitably be defeated,” an opinion that was even beginning to affect the president himself. Therefore, Lothian urged the prime minister to make a “resolute and cheering broadcast to the Empire with arrangements for it to be relayed to the United States.” This would, he argued, have far more effect on American opinion than any direct broadcast. The War Cabinet shared Lothian’s concern and, on 28

¹³¹ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 188, 196; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 549-550, 579; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 186, 217-218, 307, 336, 341, 385; Meacham, 68.

¹³² Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 203; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 700-701.

¹³³ PRO FO 371/24230, A3461/26/45, Tel. 1076, Lothian to Foreign Office, 22 June 1940.

June, commissioned Halifax to report on the “arrangements for propaganda in the United States.”¹³⁴ Churchill, however, remained unmoved. In a letter of 28 June, he told Lothian that, “I don’t think words count for much now”:

Too much attention should not be paid to the eddies of United States opinion. Only force of events can govern them. Up till April they were so sure the Allies would win that they did not think help necessary. Now they are so sure we shall lose that they do not think it possible. I feel good confidence that we can repel invasion and keep alive in the air.

Instead, Churchill reasserted his continuing faith in the power of events to bring the United States into the war. Furthermore, he instructed Lothian to remind Roosevelt that, in the event of defeat, the British Fleet would be a bargaining chip with Germany:

Never cease to impress on President and others that if this country were successfully invaded and largely occupied after heavy fighting, some Quisling Government would be formed to make peace on the basis of our becoming a German Protectorate. In this case the British Fleet would be the solid contribution with which this peace government would buy terms.

After all, Churchill reminded Lothian, “We have really not had any help worth speaking of from the United States so far. We know President is our best friend, but it is no use trying to dance attendance upon Republican and Democratic Conventions. . . . Your mood should be bland and phlegmatic. No one is downhearted here.”¹³⁵

By early July 1940, however, as the Germans began to intensify their air attacks on British shipping in the English Channel, Churchill’s attitude began to change, and he ordered the Ministry of Information to develop its American plans “with all speed.” But the initiative in the United States itself remained with Lothian -- and in July 1940, Lothian went on the offensive. He began to outline plans to outflank American isolationists by stressing that Britain needed material, not human, aid -- that “machines not men are the Allies’ primary need.” Both Lothian and the War Cabinet hoped that “by depriving isolationists of their main argument . . . Congress would thus be able to move faster over measures

¹³⁴ PRO FO 371/24230, A3464/26/45, Tel. 1135, Lothian to Foreign Office, 26 June 1940; Colville, 173-176, entry for 28 June 1940; Cull, 77.

¹³⁵ PRO, FO 371/24230, A3464/26/45, Tel. 1304, Churchill to Lothian, 28 June 1940; Churchill, 201; Cull, 77; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 197; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 436; Lash, 167; L. Woodward, 353, note 1.

designed to help us.” In one respect, Lothian continued to make public appearances and speeches, in which he continued to focus on the theme of Anglo-American sea power. In his private conversations and consultations, however, he emphasized the uncomfortable truth that it was “extremely unlikely that either Great Britain or the Dominions would ever hand over the fleet to a neutral America.”¹³⁶ Lothian was, to be sure, at his most effective in private conversation, both at the lunch and dinner table, and in the interviews that he granted unsparingly. Having made himself so approachable and so accessible to newspaper reporters and Americans of all sorts, they often came to him directly for information. They knew that he would not consciously mislead them, and he knew whom he could trust. Some of them, such as Walter Lippmann, were friends of long standing.¹³⁷

More important, however, in the weeks following the French capitulation, Lothian intensified his contacts with members of the interventionist groups. On 4 July 1940, he met with the interventionist theologian Dr. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, a professor at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and member of the Century Group, which was in the early stages of organization. As the Group wished to arouse all-out assistance and support for Britain, Van Dusen asked Lothian how they could help.¹³⁸ The ambassador replied that Britain badly needed American destroyers. London expected a German invasion of Britain to cross where the English Channel narrowed, and a supply of small and maneuverable warships was crucial to British defense. Van Dusen returned to New York and reported to his associates that the British ambassador intended to cooperate with them. For his part, Lothian wrote hopefully to Churchill on 5 July of “encouraging” new developments in “informed American opinion.”¹³⁹

¹³⁶ PRO CAB 65/8, WM 159 (40) 5; Cull, 76-77.

¹³⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 292.

¹³⁸ In his offer of assistance, Van Dusen outlined certain conditions of importance to the Century Group: “that Britain would undertake under no circumstances to surrender but, in the event of a successful invasion, [would] move the royal family and the government to Canada.” Britain must also assure the United States that the Royal Navy would not capitulate but would continue the fight from bases in Canada and elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Chadwin, 41.

¹³⁹ NAS GD40/17/405/517a, Van Dusen to Lothian, 1 July 1940; NAS GD40/17/405/517c, Lothian to Van Dusen, 2 July 1940; Billington, 150; Chadwin, 41-42; Cull, 77.

On 22 July 1940, Lothian gave a broadcast interview with Drew Pearson and Bob Allen of the National Broadcasting Corporation [NBC] “Blue” network. He dealt honestly, openly, and adroitly with questions about his support for appeasement in the 1930s and Britain’s current unpreparedness. He said that Britain did not act more vigorously in Manchuria, Ethiopia, and Spain because of the British people’s determination to resist aggression, but only by means short of war, adding that, “You must understand that policy well enough, because it is precisely your own policy to-day.” At the same time, however, Lothian strongly asserted Britain’s determination to hold out against Germany. When asked what type of war material Britain would like to get from the United States, he replied that “most urgently we needed destroyers and armed motor-boats to assist in preventing the invasion of Britain and to deal with submarines. A hundred of these now might make the difference between success and failure.” In doing so, he suggested that it was in the interest of the United States to do everything possible to keep Great Britain going: “It is for you to decide what is in your own interest. But I should have thought that it was vital to you that Britain and the British Navy should stay in being until your own rearmament, your two-ocean navy, your 50,000 airplanes, and your big army were ready. To-day we are your Maginot line. If that goes, there is nothing left between Hitler and his allies and yourselves in one ocean or the other.” When asked if there was any chance of the British fleet crossing the Atlantic and fighting for America, he answered that, in the last resort, the Royal Navy, officers and men, would never go to American ports if that meant their becoming neutral and thereby debarred from continuing the fight. All in all, Lothian’s skillful conduct of this interview won much praise in the American Department of the Foreign Office. Even Victor Perowne of the Foreign Office, who habitually complained of Lothian’s language, “entirely approved” of the ambassador’s performance: “a very courageous and successful effort.” One unidentified Foreign Office official further minuted: “I think this is excellent stuff: it was favorably reported on at the time in the U.S.”¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ NAS GD40/17/403/258-271; NAS GD40/17/405/50-56; NAS GD40/17/406/81-87; Miller to J. R. M. Butler, 21 September 1956. PRO FO 371/24246, A3732/301/45; Butler, Lord Lothian, 291-292; Hall, 142; Lothian, “Broadcast Over the N.B.C. Wave-Length, 22 July 1940,” in Speeches, 110-115.

This interview, which Lothian gave on his own initiative, effectively kept the issue before the American public. More important, however, as a result of this interview, members of the Century Group approached Lothian for a full statement of Britain's situation and needs, for dissemination to editors, columnists, and radio commentators, as the basis for a new campaign to secure release of the destroyers. Francis P. Miller of the Century Group later wrote that it was felt that "in order to secure the most authoritative statement of British needs certain questions should be put directly to the Ambassador":

These questions were carried to Lothian by my wife, Helen Hill Miller. This was done to protect both the Ambassador and the Century Group. Our Group had no authority whatever for dealing with the British Government and charges that we were doing so could, in the climate of July, 1940, have been very damaging to our cause.¹⁴¹

On 25 July 1940, therefore, Lothian cabled London for the information. He did not, however, mention precisely who wanted the data; he referred ambiguously to a request from "authoritative quarters," implying that he was asking on behalf of the administration. Two days later, Churchill sent the ambassador an Admiralty memorandum explaining in detail Britain's needs and setting them in the context of the overall strategic situation. The memo stated that in 1918, Britain had 433 destroyers in service, while in September 1939, Britain had 176, of which 133 were in home waters. By mid-June 1940, however, the latter figures had been reduced to 68 serviceable destroyers, with the prospect of no more than ten new ships in the next four months. Since the collapse of France, furthermore, Britain had to patrol both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean on its own, at a time when Italian patrols were increasing in the Mediterranean, and Germany controlled the Baltic and the Channel ports.¹⁴²

On the basis of the Admiralty memorandum, Lothian prepared a detailed "Private and Confidential Memorandum on British Defense," in which he requested 40 to 100 destroyers and 100 flying boats. He also asked that America's diplomatic status be shifted from formal neutrality to non-

¹⁴¹ NAS GD40/17/516/1, Miller to J. R. M. Butler, 21 September 1956. Van Dusen and Helen Hill Miller, who served as the Century Group's liaison to the British embassy in July and August, could have been charged under the Foreign Agents Registration Act for not notifying American authorities of their contact with the embassy, as they apparently neglected to do. Chadwin, 100.

¹⁴² Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 32.

belligerency, not that it would “imply any military action,” but that it would give “great moral encouragement” to the British people. On 28 July 1940, he sent copies, or versions of it, to members of the Century Group, the White Committee, Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, and to influential friends such as Norman Davis, an influential adviser to Roosevelt and Hull, and John L. Balderston, a Hollywood screen writer but former London correspondent of the old *New York World* -- all apparently without the permission of London.¹⁴³ In addition, through the British Embassy’s legal adviser, John Foster, Lothian also leaked accounts of Churchill’s appeals to Roosevelt for aid. This had the effect of strengthening the Century Group’s frustration with the president’s intransigence.¹⁴⁴

There is little doubt that Churchill and the War Cabinet would have disapproved had they known. Lothian had to be circumspect because Churchill continued to insist upon an almost pathological control over information, if not outright secrecy. Moreover, while the Foreign Office approved of the pressure groups, it nevertheless believed that the embassy should keep its distance from them, for fear of reviving the American phobia about British propaganda. The official British view, as expressed strongly by Churchill on several occasions, was that “only events will serve to turn opinion in America” and that “it would be wiser to leave the President to manage his own public in this matter.”¹⁴⁵

Lothian strongly believed that the urgency of the situation justified this calculated risk. Nevertheless, in providing this information, he asked his various correspondents not to use the exact figure of 68, apparently to prevent London from guessing who had leaked the information. Lothian wrote Whitney Shepardson, an old friend and member of the Century Group, and one of the individuals to whom he sent the memorandum, “Please keep the source of this information confidential”:

¹⁴³ NAS, GD40/17/516/4-5, “Confidential Memorandum on Needs of Great Britain,” 28 July 1940 [Miller added the initials “PK” to the memorandum to indicate the source]; NAS GD40/17/516/1, Miller to J. R. M. Butler, 21 September 1956; PRO 800/398, Lothian to Luce, 28 July 1940; PRO 800/398, Lothian to Shepardson, 28 and 30 July 1940; Butler, Lord Lothian, 292-293; Chadwin, 100-101; Cull, 78; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 748; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 32; Miller, 97-98.

¹⁴⁴ NAS GD40/17/516/1, Alsop to J. R. M. Butler, 28 June 1956; Cull, 78.

¹⁴⁵ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 32.

Provided the use of the substance of it is likely to lead to the need being met I would take a chance on publicity. You may bet that the Germans know the position pretty accurately. The only people who don't are the great American and British publics who are going to get it in the neck because they are never told facts. Why America sits by and watches its own front door being taken while all top people realise that if it is taken this year America itself is doomed, and that it can save that front door for the matter of 100 destroyers or so, is a mystery to me. No, it is not a mystery because I have dwelt amongst politicians all my life.¹⁴⁶

As Lothian recognized, during the summer of 1940, there appeared a substantial gap between the Roosevelt administration and the general American public, with respect to their awareness of America's stake in Britain's survival. The basic problem, as Lothian understood it, was the lack of hard data about Britain's strength in destroyers, even among informed military commentators and congressmen. Raw statistics, however, failed to distinguish between the Royal Navy's total nominal complement of destroyers and the number fit for service in home waters around Britain. The latter was the crucial figure in Britain's defense against invasion; and it was this statistic that Lothian's memo provided. Respecting Lothian's request to approximate all figures and statistics, the material circulated by the Century Group and the White Committee quoted a rough figure of 60 to 70 serviceable destroyers.¹⁴⁷

Assisted by the material information provided by Lothian, the interventionist groups initiated their campaign to drive home the gravity of Britain's position to opinion leaders in the United States. Journalists Walter Lippmann and Joseph Alsop argued powerfully for the sale of American destroyers to Britain in their syndicated columns. The Century Group persuaded the retired General John J. Pershing, the commander of American forces in France during the First World War and American hero, to broadcast a speech on 4 August 1940, written by Lippmann, in favor of American rearmament, conscription, and the transfer of American destroyers to Britain. "By sending help to the British," the general asserted, "we can still hope with confidence to keep war on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, where the enemies of liberty, if possible, should be defeated." Pershing's speech was the first major public discussion of the destroyer issue and, coming from a national hero, it commanded nationwide

¹⁴⁶ PRO 800/398, US/40/18, Lothian to Shepardson, 25 July 1940; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 32.

¹⁴⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 293; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 748; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 33.

attention.¹⁴⁸ In a similar way, Joseph Alsop wrote a radio address that Admiral William Standley, retired chief of naval operations, delivered on 10 August. In the meantime, the White Committee took out newspaper advertisements and held rallies in favor of the destroyers agreement, while the Century Group enlisted a number of Britons to present their case directly to the American public. For example, Henry Van Dusen arranged, through the ambassador, a series of trans-Atlantic Sunday broadcasts by leading British clergymen, Catholic as well as Anglican, beginning on 4 August 1940. Furthermore, and again, with the cooperation of Lothian, Van Dusen initiated a program that brought representatives of various segments of British society -- the Church, labor, women, educators, Catholics -- to the United States on speaking tours.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, in late August 1940, the two groups established a joint information service, which was administered by John L. Balderston, another old American friend of Lothian. Balderston provided material information about Britain's needs to selected daily newspapers outside Washington and New York, which had a total circulation of over 100,000, but lacked easy access to the information themselves. Lothian was one of his principal sources of information. On 24 August, in his telegram to the fifty newspapers, Balderston stated elliptically:

British now have only about sixty destroyers available [in] their home waters and it would be useful [to] print this fact without indicating [the] source. . . . great numbers [of] light ships have been damaged [by] . . . under water explosions at some distance . . . [The] British hoped [that the] Germans wouldn't find out and now when figures have reached such alarming proportions British [are] unwilling [that the] home public learn[s] truth. [The] British [are] now losing hundred thousand tons [per] week [of] merchant shipping by planes and submarines . . . due [to a] lack of destroyers for convoy. . . . Without our help . . . until [the] new crop destroyers [comes in] service most serious situation will develop which might be fatal even without successful invasion.

¹⁴⁸ Billington, 151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 296; Chadwin, 89-91; Cull, 77; Davis, Into the Storm, 609; Lash, 209. In giving Pershing's speech such widespread attention, many editors across the nation relegated accounts of Charles Lindbergh's address to Chicago isolationists to less prominent space. *The New York Times* headline read: "Pershing Warns U.S. to Aid Britain by Sending 50 Destroyers Now." *The New York Herald Tribune's* front-page photo of Cordell Hull congratulating Pershing after the broadcast appeared to affirm administration sanction to the speech. Pershing himself received over seven hundred letters, telegrams, and postcards; the favorable responses outnumbered the unfavorable by nearly four to one. Many who wrote him declared that they were sending copies of their letters to Roosevelt, Hull, and Knox. Chadwin, 91.

¹⁴⁹ NAS GD40/17/405/523, Van Dusen to Lothian, 2 August 1940; Billington, 150-151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 296; Chadwin, 92-94; Cull, 77; Davis, Into the Storm, 609.

By this point, although the negotiations for the destroyers-bases deal were in their final stages, the editors were most appreciative of Balderston's material and used it immediately in columns and editorials.¹⁵⁰

At the same time, and perhaps most significant, Lothian became increasingly committed to the development of a British news service in New York City. Over the spring and summer of 1940, when the staff of the BLINY pressed for a more assertive publicity campaign, Lothian made it a priority to secure the appointment of a press officer for the BLINY.¹⁵¹ In letters to Halifax and David Scott of the Foreign Office, Lothian argued that, because the isolationist "no-meddling-in-Europe-brigade" remained formidable, especially within the Republican Party, "We can afford to lose no opportunity of reinforcing the present trend of opinion toward aiding the Allies as America's first line of defence. Such opportunities occur daily," he argued, "and we should be equipped to take every advantage of them and to cut off each Hydra-head of argument on the other side as it appears."¹⁵²

In addition to laying the foundations for a British news service, which would not be put into operation until the fall of 1940 with the establishment of the British Press Service, Lothian gave his support and encouragement to the British Secret Intelligence Service [MI6], which enlarged its office in New York City over the summer of 1940 under the direction of a Canadian businessman Sir William Stephenson. Lothian, who could still take very little effective action to solicit American aid openly without stirring up the isolationists, fully endorsed the need for such an organization that, although independent of the embassy, essentially constituted a covert counterpart of it. For his part, Stephenson described his work as "covert diplomacy inasmuch as it was preparatory and supplementary to negotiations conducted directly by H.M. Ambassador." Taking the name "British Security Coordination," Stephenson's office recruited a mostly Canadian staff in order to prevent sabotage of

¹⁵⁰ NAS GD40/17/516/1, Miller to J. R. M. Butler, 21 September 1956; Butler, Lord Lothian, 293; Chadwin, 101-102; Johnson, 117-120; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 33.

¹⁵¹ Billington, 145; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 91.

¹⁵² PRO FO 371/24229, A3464/26/45, Lothian to Foreign Office, 3 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A2998/26/45, Lothian to Scott, 3 June 1940.

British munitions purchases in the United States, combat German propaganda and influence, and assist pro-interventionist groups.¹⁵³

While Lothian's attitude continued to concern some in the Foreign Office, the new Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, welcomed it. On 8 July 1940, Halifax informed Churchill that he and Cooper had agreed that, with respect to British publicity in the United States, "the time has come to adopt a more positive policy." Cooper, in particular, firmly believed in the need for an all-out propaganda campaign in the United States. He was not only prepared to finance such an expanded campaign, but also expected to play a major role in directing its policy. Within a week of his appointment, therefore, Cooper launched an effort to create a more active role for the Ministry of Information in the United States.¹⁵⁴ When rumors of a new British initiative began to spread, however, Edward R. Murrow included a call for London to retain its "No Propaganda" policy in his evening news report. Alarmed by this broadcast, Lothian asked London to confirm that no change of policy would be inaugurated "without first giving me an opportunity of commenting on it." He stressed that influential Americans, who were presently making demands for unlimited help to the Allies and demands for American intervention, were being denounced as warmongers. Therefore, London should be very cautious about embarking on any propaganda operation; otherwise, he argued, it will "undermine their influence if we give Isolationists the excuse to say they are inspired or paid by Britain."¹⁵⁵ T. North Whitehead of the Foreign Office minuted that "There could be no better evidence of the futility of sending British propagandists over, to add their mite of grit to this well-oiled '100% American' propaganda machine."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Billington, 145; Hyde, 26, 40, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Cooper proposed to set up in New York a small office under the Ministry of Information, which would contact American journalists and, through other sources, carry out the publicity work. He suggested that the BLINY might be used as a "cover." PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 968, Lothian to Foreign Office, 1 June 1940; PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/1, Cooper to Lothian, 18 June 1940; Cull, 78.

¹⁵⁵ PRO FO 371/24229, A3183/26/45, Tel. 839, Lothian to Foreign Office, 26-27 May 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3183/26/45, Tel. 939, Foreign Office to Lothian, 29 May 1940.

¹⁵⁶ PRO FO 371/24229, A3183/26/45, Chancery of the British Embassy to the American Department, Foreign Office, 3 June 1940.

Cooper's initiative, however, set off bureaucratic infighting within the British Government -- specifically, between the British Embassy in Washington and the Ministry of Information -- that threatened to undermine its publicity efforts. His plan called for the establishment of a New York press office, with branches to be added eventually in Chicago and San Francisco, and insisted that the new office fall under his own jurisdiction.¹⁵⁷ As early as 1 June 1940, Cooper complained to Halifax that in every other neutral state, there were branches of the Ministry of Information working quite well with the embassy or legation, but that only in the United States did no such system exist. He thus urged Halifax to allow him to press on with the work, although Lothian and the American Department in the Foreign Office would likely discourage the enterprise.¹⁵⁸ The ambassador, indeed, expressed serious reservations about the plan. Lothian wired London on 9 June that opening a small branch of the Ministry of Information in New York "fills me with alarm," principally because it would be "universally interpreted as the commencement of an underground campaign to get America into the war." He strongly urged the continuation of efforts to influence the United States through American press correspondents and broadcasters on Allied fronts and in Allied capitals, in one respect, because it "comes through as news." Far more important, however, "because it comes through independent Americans, it is not unduly suspected of being propaganda."¹⁵⁹ He reminded Cooper that London had to work particularly hard and be particularly careful not to even *appear* that they were trying to inveigle or intrigue the United States into the war; after all, "Americans for historical reasons are more sensitive about being given advice by Englishmen than by anybody else." In a telegram to the Foreign Office, Lothian insisted that he must have direct control of press relations: "Any idea that Ministry of Information [*sic*] were establishing a sub-agency which could not be concealed from the press, would be extremely harmful at this time."¹⁶⁰ He

¹⁵⁷ Cull, 78.

¹⁵⁸ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Cooper to Halifax, 1 June 1940.

¹⁵⁹ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 943, Lothian to Foreign Office, 9 June 1940.

¹⁶⁰ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 925, Lothian to Foreign Office, 7 June 1940.

feared, most significantly, that a Ministry of Information office would soon “get at cross purposes” with the British Embassy and the BLINY, and thus subsequently provide ammunition for the isolationists: “But if only [Cooper] would help to get us the assistance we propose and improve the arrangements for the press in London he will do a thousand times more than by opening an office in New York.”¹⁶¹

Lothian reiterated to his old friend Robert Brand that the best way to influence the United States was to disseminate the British message through the American media and that the real place in which the British needed to state its case and put forward its views was in London, not the United States. The British government needed “to supply the American correspondents and broadcasters in London with the fullest possible information about British policy, action, and personalities, of its operations by land, air and sea, and so on”:

This information which includes speeches of notable personalities comes through channels which are not suspect and which themselves are extremely anxious to retain their reputation for independence. But everything they write or say is printed or heard all over the United States by practically all newspapers or radio stations of repute.

Otherwise, Britain risked the very real danger of reawakening the habitual American suspicion of British propaganda. Lothian intimated, furthermore, that Cooper did not seem to appreciate that Americans tuned out, and will continue to tune out, the plethora of British lecturers sent over to tell the United States. For some reason, he complained, Cooper, as well as the average Briton “seems to think that what is needed in the U.S. is a flood of British speakers”:

That of course, you will understand, is both futile and harmful. Duff Cooper spent four or five months lecturing in the U.S. So far as I can make out, the lectures, as lectures, were quite good, but the effect of his visit was, on the whole, definitely harmful, for the reason that he was represented constantly to 130 million people as being a paid British agent sent over to get America into the war.

The problem, Lothian argued, is that it takes Americans a long time to process the facts. Even after respected American journalists, such as Walter Lippmann and Dorothy Thompson, have made the issues crystal clear, it still “takes a terribly long time for these considerations to force their way into the public

¹⁶¹ PRO FO 371/24229, A2998/26/45, Lothian to Scott, 3 June 1940; PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/1, Cooper to Lothian, 18 June 1940; PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/2, Lothian to Cooper, 13 July 1940.

consciousness. . . . The public does not pay much attention to publicists and Ambassadors because it prefers wishful thinking.” Thus, Americans dismiss foreigners who say too much as propagandists.¹⁶²

Lothian therefore attempted to head off the Information Minister with his own long-planned initiative to expand British publicity efforts in the United States, primarily through the establishment of a British press service. Earlier, in May 1940, he dispatched Sir William Wiseman to London. Wiseman, a prominent figure in Anglo-American intelligence cooperation during the First World War, sounded out Churchill and the Foreign Office on the matter.¹⁶³ Cooper, however, denounced Lothian’s scheme on 14 June as “underhand and indirect work”: “He is against anything for improving our contacts with American opinion beyond sending one journalist to the British Library of Information.” Four days later, Cooper complained again that Lothian seemed “quite determined to ignore the existence of the Ministry of Information and to undertake the work of it himself.” He argued that the embassy was not sufficiently equipped to assume the task and that he had received complaints from individuals in the BLINY, who deplored “in the strongest terms the inadequacy of our efforts.”¹⁶⁴ In late June, Cooper successfully prevailed upon Halifax to consent to the establishment of a Ministry of Information bureau in New York and, in the process, reject Lothian’s nomination of Mr. Keith Officer as “chief press officer” in New York City.¹⁶⁵ Instead, Halifax appointed Cooper’s nominee, Mr. Stephen Lawford Childs, to oversee the founding of a Ministry of Information office in New York. Not long after arriving in the United States, however, Childs promptly adopted Lothian’s vision of a British Embassy press agency in New York.¹⁶⁶ Increasingly, planning ground to a halt, with the British Embassy in Washington and the Ministry of

¹⁶² NAS, GD40/17/399/189-190, Lothian to Brand, 25 June 1940.

¹⁶³ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 968, Foreign Office to Lothian, 1 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 943, Lothian to Foreign Office, 8 June 1940; Cull, 79.

¹⁶⁴ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Cooper to Halifax, 18 June 1940.

¹⁶⁵ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 1254, Foreign Office to Lothian, 25 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 1161, Lothian to Foreign Office, 28 June 1940.

¹⁶⁶ PRO FO 371/24231, A3772/26/45, Childs to Foreign Office, 25 July 1940; Cull, 79.

Information “alarmed” by and “gloomy” at the behavior of the other. Each believed that it alone knew how to manage British publicity in the United States.

Nevertheless, in early July 1940, Cooper began implementing his program to expand the operations of the Ministry of Information in the United States. Among other things, he recruited journalists to his staff in order to attune the ministry to the needs of the American press.¹⁶⁷ This represented a clear break with tradition and proved too progressive for traditionalists, such as Sir Frederick Whyte, the head of the Ministry’s American Division; when he complained, Cooper fired him. In a letter of 4 September, Whyte wrote Lothian that Cooper “is apparently unconscious of the ironical inappropriateness of making a change at this moment, just when we are getting from the United States almost all we could possibly expect in the circumstances.”¹⁶⁸ In response, Lothian noted that he “always felt a sense of security” knowing that Whyte headed American operations at the Ministry. The loss of Whyte, however, sharpened the ambassador’s concern that the Ministry of Information might become a loose cannon, and thus fortified his determination to ensure that the British Embassy controlled all British propaganda within the United States.¹⁶⁹

In the meantime, Lothian continued to observe and monitor the ongoing evolution of American public opinion. On 7 August 1940, he wrote Lady Astor that, with the party conventions over, public opinion is “warming up again”:

It is getting very concerned with the possibilities opening up in the battle for Britain. Americans are at last beginning to realize that if Britain were to go this autumn, they would immediately lose the Pacific to Japan, South America to Hitler, and that Hitler would have 3 or 4 times the airplane and naval building power as themselves and could therefore paralyse their rearmament. Hence the growth of the demand to send us 50 destroyers etc. now. You’ll see from the papers how the debate goes in Congress. It cannot be done without legislation. Tempers too are rising as the war comes nearer.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Cooper had been a former journalist himself, a regular correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and thus understood the needs of the American press. He was not above rewarding friendly journalists with the occasional scoop. Cull, 83.

¹⁶⁸ The destroyers-for-bases agreement had just been formally concluded. PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/4, Whyte to Lothian, 4 September 1940.

¹⁶⁹ PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/4, Lothian to Whyte, 24 September 1940.

¹⁷⁰ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 296-297.

A week later, on 16 August, as the Battle of Britain was intensifying, he again noted that American public opinion was changing, but that it was “paralysed at the moment, partly by the fact that it has no armament and therefore no means of effective intervention and partly by the Presidential election.”¹⁷¹

Lothian Leads the Roosevelt Administration to Water

During the summer of 1940, Lothian directed his most significant and most strenuous efforts toward one principal objective: the British acquisition of 50 obsolete American destroyers. Toward the end of July, as he intensified his public relations efforts to create a more favorable political atmosphere in Washington, Lothian also took more specific diplomatic initiatives in order to move his superiors in London and the Roosevelt administration toward a resolution of the destroyers’ issue.

In part, Lothian began to accelerate his efforts in late July due to the political environment in Washington. In June and July 1940, the two major American political parties held their nominating conventions for that fall’s presidential election. The Republicans nominated Wendell Willkie on 28 June, while the Democrats nominated President Roosevelt on 18 July to run for an unprecedented third term. Lothian welcomed the Republican selection of Willkie, gratified that they chose not to nominate an isolationist. Willkie, a former Democrat who still supported the New Deal, had no real experience in politics, especially with respect to international politics. “That’s his charm,” Lothian wrote London. Most important, Willkie essentially shared Roosevelt’s position with respect to the war. Willkie, Lothian noted, was “personally in favour of doing everything possible to see that Great Britain did not get beaten in the war.” He endorsed the Burke-Wadsworth bill and even referred to Britain as “our first line of defense and our only remaining friend.” Consequently, Lothian did not think it would make much difference to Britain which of the two won in November; the United States would not enter the war until its own vital interests were attacked in any event, and it was a point of common agreement between the parties that they would fight if and when the time came.¹⁷² As it turned out, however, although initially a

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 297.

¹⁷² Butler, Lord Lothian, 290; Goodhart, 108; Moser, 134.

critic of isolationism, Willkie's need for isolationist votes made his position on material aid to Britain increasingly uncertain. In particular, as he began to lag behind Roosevelt in the polls, Willkie sought to bolster his support among isolationists by accusing Roosevelt of planning to bring the United States into the war. He claimed that American boys were "already almost on the transports to be shipped abroad, and declared that if the president were re-elected the U.S. would be in the war by the following April."¹⁷³

As the domestic political environment in the United States began to heat up toward the end of July, Lothian decided to accelerate his own efforts. On 22 July 1940, he cabled London that, with the conventions over and Roosevelt's nomination secured, American attention was turning back to the war. He noted that when asked by various Americans what action the United States should take, he had generally replied that the United States should send 100 destroyers, some flying boats manned by Americans, who, if necessary, would be volunteers. Assistance of this kind would be decisive against attacks on the fleet and on merchant shipping, and would enable Britain to hold Gibraltar and Suez indefinitely, while maintaining a fleet around its home waters. The American fleet could then be kept in the Pacific, and the United States could carry on its rapid production of armaments behind the shield of the two navies. A refusal to send these reinforcements, however, would risk the betrayal of vital American interests. If Britain was defeated in the fall, the United States would be unable to defend South America or to complete its rearmament because Hitler would control resources for building ships and aircraft on a scale three times greater than the resources of the United States.¹⁷⁴

Now was the opportune moment, he stressed in several messages, for the British government to push for a settlement of the destroyers' question. In order to do so, Lothian, along with other officials in the Foreign Office, implored Churchill to send a personal and urgent plea to the president that clearly laid out Britain's military and material needs. For example, on 25 July, he wired London that he had broadcast a statement referring to Britain's need of destroyers and seaplanes. Unfortunately, the

¹⁷³ Billington, 149; Burns, *The Lion and the Fox*, 442-446; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 611-615; Moser, 134.

¹⁷⁴ L. Woodward, 362.

American press also quoted an Admiralty statement that Britain had as many destroyers as at the outbreak of the war and had thereby given the impression that Britain was not worrying about the problem. Therefore, Lothian asked whether Churchill could make a statement that would clarify British needs.¹⁷⁵ The prime minister, however, was hesitant to write the president. For one thing, he and Roosevelt had not been in touch for six weeks. More important, perhaps, Churchill was reluctant to write about the destroyers because, weeks earlier, Joseph Kennedy had warned against further rhetorical appeals that might seem like emotional blackmail. Kennedy told the prime minister that “the President had all the information in regard to destroyers and that he would settle it in his own way in his own time and that to try to give him the ‘hurry up’ or to put out again the dangers to America was not likely to influence him much.” Churchill, therefore, proved willing to do little more than make yet another appeal to Roosevelt that emphasized the urgency of British needs.¹⁷⁶ In a letter of 27 July 1940, Churchill ordered Lothian to reactivate the request for American destroyers:

Need of American destroyers is more urgent than ever in view of losses and the need of coping with invasion threat as well as keeping Atlantic approaches open and dealing with Italy. . . . There is nothing that America can do at this moment that would be of greater help than to send fifty destroyers, except sending a hundred. The flying-boats are also of the greatest importance now and in the next two months. As I have repeatedly explained, the difficulty is to bridge the gap until our new war-time production arrives in a flood.

On 30 July, however, Lothian telegraphed Churchill: “Strong pressure is being brought on the President to reconsider possibility of supplying us with destroyers. Now is the moment to send him most moving statement of our needs and dangers in respect of destroyers and flying boats you can, if you have not already done so.” Largely on the basis of this telegram, Churchill decided to appeal directly to the president. Now was the time “to plug it in,” he told Halifax.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, in a long telegram to Roosevelt on 31 July 1940, Churchill set out Britain’s naval predicament in detail, listed its recent

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Lash, 205; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 27.

¹⁷⁷ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 199-200; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 551; L. Woodward, 362-363.

destroyer losses, and explained that 50 American destroyers could tide the Royal Navy over the next few critical months, thereby possibly deciding “the whole fate of the war”:

It is now become most urgent for you to give us the destroyers, motorboats and flying-boats for which we have asked. The Germans have the whole French coastline from which to launch U-boats and dive-bomber attacks upon our trade and food, and in addition, we must be constantly prepared to repel by sea action threatened invasion in the narrow waters. . . . Latterly the air attack on our shipping has become injurious. In the last ten days we have had the following destroyers sunk . . . total ten. All this in the advent of any attempt which may be made at invasion. Destroyers are frightfully vulnerable to Air bombing, and yet they must be held in the Air bombing area to prevent sea-borne invasion. We could not keep up the present rate of casualties for long, and if we cannot get us a substantial reinforcement, the whole thing of the war may be decided by this minor and easily remediable factor. I cannot understand why, with the position as it is, you cannot send me at least 50 or 60 of your oldest destroyers. I can fit them very quickly with Asdics and use them against U-boats on the Western Approaches, and so keep the more modern and better gunned craft for the narrow seas against invasion. Mr. President, with great respect I must tell you that in the long history of the world this is a thing to do *now*.¹⁷⁸

This represented a distinct shift in British tactics, summarized by Lord Beaverbrook in a conversation with Joseph Kennedy that same day, 31 July. Beaverbrook told Kennedy that until recently, British policy, in seeking American aid, had been to make things look “as black as possible;” now, London was trying to make things look “as good as possible.” On the surface, Beaverbrook’s comment to Kennedy defies the litany of nearly crippling problems outlined by Churchill. Nevertheless, the prime minister and the War Cabinet did not refer, as they tended to do since May, to the ever-present threat of a German invasion, the possible assumption of power in Britain by a pro-German cabinet, or the possibility of having to dispatch the entire Royal Navy to the ports of the Empire.¹⁷⁹

An equally significant shift in American tactics, however, was occurring at approximately the same time. Specifically, by the time Churchill’s message arrived, the Roosevelt administration was considering an offer to the British -- American destroyers in return for the bases. The chief impetus for this shift emerged out of the personal contact between Lothian and pro-British elements inside and close

¹⁷⁸ Churchill, 356; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 606; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 688-689; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 593-594; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 748-749; Lash, 206; Leutze, 106-107; Meacham, 70-71; L. Woodward, 363-364.

¹⁷⁹ Leutze, 106-107.

to the Roosevelt administration. Lothian had been in close contact for several weeks with Anglophile leaders in the Cabinet -- the Cabinet “hawks” -- Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury, Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, Henry Stimson, Secretary of War, and Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior.¹⁸⁰ With respect to the question of destroyers, the driving force was Knox, who had long advocated that the United States should enter the war at the earliest possible date, and had long sought acquisition or access to British bases in the Caribbean. Lothian had been in touch with Knox since the latter’s appointment in late June, reminding him of the need for destroyers and relaying to London Knox’s interest in bases. On 20 June, Knox wrote the ambassador following Lothian’s speech at Yale University and noted their common position that “those in America who are counting on the British fleet to patrol the Atlantic even if Britain is defeated are possibly ignoring what many of us know will happen, and that is, that before England surrenders, the fleet will be gone”:

I made as strong an appeal as I know how for immediate aid of every description to Britain in the present grave hour of danger. It is simply unthinkable that the American people will not comprehend the danger to us of permitting Hitler to achieve mastery of both land and sea in Europe. In that event, the ocean which we now regard as a bulwark of defense will become merely an avenue of attack.¹⁸¹

On the basis of these conversations, Lothian reported on 1 August 1940 that Roosevelt’s principal advisers wanted to sell 50 to 60 destroyers to Britain but that legislation would be necessary. This legislation, however, would be opposed by isolationists, of both parties, in a Congress that did not yet understand the strategic dangers of the present situation. Hence the issue might be brought into the election campaign and so cause “complete paralysis.”¹⁸²

On the evening of 1 August, Knox found Lothian “almost tearful in his pleas for help and help quickly.” In response, Knox suggested, as he had done before, that Britain should transfer her Western Hemisphere bases to the United States. This time, however, Knox’s argument was different. If Britain

¹⁸⁰ Leutze, 107; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 27-28.

¹⁸¹ NAS, GD40/17/402/153, Knox to Lothian, 20 June 1940.

¹⁸² L. Woodward, 364.

transferred those bases, it would make it easier to get a bill through Congress concerning the destroyers: The administration could argue that the bases were of greater value than the ships and therefore that the administration had struck an advantageous bargain: “If you could do this, we could point out to Congress that what we are receiving from you was of greater value for defense purposes than the fifty reconditioned destroyers that we would be surrendering to you.” Lothian, not revealing that his own government had already agreed to offer the bases, said he would query London about such a trade.¹⁸³

In his report of this conversation to London, Lothian strongly endorsed Knox’s suggestion of selling to the United States naval and air bases in Newfoundland, Bermuda, and Trinidad. As he pointed out, the principal objections to such a sale, which had been previously raised in London, had involved the unilateral nature of such an offer to the United States. Knox’s suggestion, Lothian emphasized, resolved that dilemma. Although the British proposal of 29 July 1940 involved admittedly fewer facilities than the current American suggestion,¹⁸⁴ the United States was nevertheless offering destroyers in return. In London, where the need for the American destroyers was growing more acute, the War Cabinet responded favorably on 3 August, although Churchill insisted that “we prefer that it should be on lease indefinitely and not sale. Go ahead on these lines,” he instructed Lothian, “and full steam.”¹⁸⁵

Knox, in the meantime, concerted tactics with Stimson and Ickes for the cabinet meeting of 2 August 1940; they also had the support of Henry Morgenthau. It is quite likely that their pressure helped to prod Roosevelt into action. During the meeting, Knox reported his conversation with Lothian and

¹⁸³ John Morton Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries: Years of Urgency, 1938-1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 177-178; Ickes, 3: 283; Lash, 207; Leutze, 107-108; L. Woodward, 364-365. On that same day, 1 August 1940, three members of the Century Group saw Roosevelt and laid before him the substance of their memorandum of 25 July: Clark Eichelburger, also Executive Director of the White Committee; Herbert Agar; and Ward Cheney. The president was non-committal and decidedly unenthusiastic. The three men therefore left with the impression that Roosevelt was fearful that the destroyer sale might hurt his chances for re-election. William Allen White, on hearing of the president’s reaction, wrote that Roosevelt seemed to have “lost his cud.” Butler, Lord Lothian, 293; Chadwin, 86-87; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 749.

¹⁸⁴ On 29 July 1940, the War Cabinet had offered United States limited facilities on three sites, while the United States, under Knox’s proposal, would trade 50 or 60 destroyers for full bases on seven sites.

¹⁸⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 295; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 202; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 690; Gilbert, War Papers, 607; Leutze, 108; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 27; L. Woodward, 365.

proposed that Britain be allowed to sell some of its Western Hemisphere possessions to the United States in exchange for 50 or 60 destroyers. The cabinet agreed to pursue negotiations with London. Ickes noted that if Britain went down, the American people would want to know why American destroyers had not been sent to help prevent an invasion. Shortly after the cabinet meeting, he wrote the president, and made use of a metaphor that Roosevelt would later adopt and employ with great effect in connection to the Lend-Lease program: “It seems to me that we Americans are like the householder who refuses to lend or sell his fire extinguisher to help put out the fire in the house that is next door, although that house is all ablaze and the wind is blowing from that direction.” The cabinet also agreed that legislation would be necessary, but recognized that Congress was not in a mood to pass it at present. Therefore, in order to sweeten the proposal and thus win congressional support, they believed that London should give an “iron-clad” assurance that the Royal Navy would not be permitted to fall into German hands. Such an assurance, they believed, would be far more important than the offer of bases in convincing Congress that the arrangement would enhance United States security. Although Lothian was not mentioned by name, it seems likely that his unsettling Yale speech was much in the cabinet’s mind. The cabinet agreed, therefore, to find out through Lothian whether the British government would be prepared to give a satisfactory assurance about the fleet for the information of Congress.¹⁸⁶

On 3 August 1940, Roosevelt informed Lothian of the administration’s offer -- American destroyers in return for air and naval facilities -- and that legislation would be necessary. Because Congress, however, did not appear inclined at the present moment to pass a measure with such far reaching consequences, the president emphasized that London would have to offer Congress some “molasses” to sweeten the proposal; specifically, a public assurance by His Majesty’s Government that,

¹⁸⁶ Burns, The Lion and the Fox, 438; Butler, Lord Lothian, 293-294; Chadwin, 87-89; Davis, Into the Storm, 607-608; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 201; Ickes, 3: 291-294; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 746, 749-752; Leutze, 108; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 28; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 84. The Cabinet also agreed to ask William Allen White to put the power of the White Committee behind the proposal and to serve as an intermediary between the president and Wendell Willkie. Roosevelt hoped that Willkie would not only personally and publicly approve of the deal, but would also pressure Republican members of Congress to support it with their votes. Chadwin, 88; Davis, Into the Storm, 608; Ickes, 3: 292-293.

“if things went badly, in no circumstances would the British fleet, or such of it as remained in tact at the end of the summer, be handed over to Germany but would, if necessary, leave British waters and continue the fight for the British Empire overseas.” It became clear to Lothian, therefore, that the Roosevelt administration placed the greatest significance upon the assurance about the British fleet; the air and naval bases were highly desirable, but were largely intended to be a sop for public opinion. The president expressed great concern about the possibility of filibustering by 15 or 20 determined isolationists in the Senate, which might wreck the project until after the election; hence the “molasses.” Still, Roosevelt realized the urgency of Britain’s situation and indicated that he wanted to introduce the bill by mid-August. In his report to London, therefore, Lothian asked for authorization to state that, on the understanding that the destroyers would be speedily available, the president could inform Congress of Britain’s willingness to provide the facilities and an assurance about the future of the fleet.¹⁸⁷

Lothian believed that time was of the essence and thus decided to take the initiative. He was by this point intimately acquainted with the forcefulness of Churchill’s objection to offering British base facilities without equal compensation. Lothian, however, had little sympathy with Churchill’s objections. For months, he had been pressing the Roosevelt administration for destroyers, and, at the same time, his own government to make an offer of bases. He firmly believed that the deal would resolve several political problems for both sides and thus lay the foundation for the sharing of naval responsibilities that he had long believed was essential for Britain’s survival. His growing sense of urgency, therefore, compelled him to take initiatives and to make assertions, some of which he was not authorized to take or make. On the morning of 3 August 1940, for example, he seized enthusiastically on Roosevelt’s proposed destroyers-bases-assurance idea. Although circumspect about the fleet assurance, he told Roosevelt that he had been authorized to say that the naval and air facilities would be made available as soon as Britain got the destroyers. It is possible that Lothian may have simply anticipated Churchill’s approval, since the War Cabinet made the bases offer of 29 July partly in the hope of nudging the

¹⁸⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 295, 296; Lash, 208; Leutze, 109; Meacham, 66; Moser, 132; L. Woodward, 365-366.

Roosevelt administration toward providing Britain with American destroyers. At this point, however, London had not given Lothian any such authorization.¹⁸⁸

Lothian's sense of urgency also compelled him to reverse his position on the fleet assurance. In early July 1940, he had been prepared to give assurances to Washington that the British fleet would cross the Atlantic to American waters, but *only* in the event that the United States had committed to the war. By August, however, when the negotiations began to stall, Lothian became increasingly prepared to give the Roosevelt administration the assurance it wanted, rather than conditionally tying the movement of the Royal Navy to American belligerency, especially as there remained popular support for an outright American seizure of all the Caribbean islands in the interests of American defense. While the prime minister stuck to his original position and still wanted to retain the fleet as a bargaining counter, Lothian was flatly ready to give the fleet assurance in order to get the destroyers.¹⁸⁹

During the first week of August, Lothian's haste to conclude the deal as quickly as possible also contributed to confusion over the contents of the transaction.¹⁹⁰ In one respect, the ambassador's lack of clarity resulted from the almost interminable confusion that infected the Roosevelt administration. For example, on the morning of 4 August, Lothian met with Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles at the State Department to discuss the possible transfer arrangement. Hull, however, knew little about it and suggested that the whole arrangement sounded illegal; moreover, legal or not, Hull thought the chances of

¹⁸⁸ PRO FO 371/24241, A3670/131/45, Tel. 1606, Lothian to Foreign Office, 4 August 1940; Leutze, 108; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 29. Reynolds suggests that Lothian either confused certain telegrams or else anticipated Churchill's approval of a simple destroyers-for-bases transaction. He also suggests that, in early August, Lothian was suffering from one of his periodic bouts of depression. The "almost tearful" pleas to Knox on 1 August were not contrived. Overworked, troubled by rheumatism and by the Washington heat, Lothian was again pessimistic about Britain's chances of survival. Leutze, 286, n. 70; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 294; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 30.

¹⁹⁰ Roosevelt tended to be secretive and something of an enigma, even to his closest associates. Harold Ickes once told him that, "You are one of the most difficult men to work with that I have ever known. You keep your cards close up against your belly. You never put them on the table." This was a deliberate policy. Roosevelt once told Henry Morgenthau, "You know, I am a juggler, and I never let my right hand know what my left hand does." General Douglas MacArthur would put it more bluntly in 1945, when he referred to Roosevelt as "a man who would never tell the truth when a lie would serve him just as well." This secretiveness was particularly acute with respect to his conduct of foreign policy. He put very little on paper and tended to rely on individual associates, to serve as his eyes and ears, such as Sumner Welles and Harry Hopkins. Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 32-34.

congressional approval almost “nil.” Welles, however, who supported the plan, urged Lothian to make a straightforward guarantee that the fleet would sail to North America if necessary. The entire exchange left Lothian frustrated; when he met a member of the Century Group for lunch that afternoon, he appeared “haggard and worn.”¹⁹¹ It is likely, indeed, that Lothian’s emotional state probably contributed to the confusion. His message to London on 5 August about this meeting with Hull and Welles was sloppy, his spelling and syntax garbled. He noted that, in order to satisfy Washington, all that was needed was a simple declaration that the fleet would go on “fighting for the Empire even if it is compelled to evacuate Great Britain if and when the President asks for it.” Lothian’s construction and lack of punctuation led Churchill to understand that Roosevelt wanted the right to decide when the fleet should leave British waters. The prime minister hit the ceiling, and it took several days to clear up the misunderstanding.¹⁹²

Beyond the confusion caused by Lothian’s rushed telegrams, by the middle of August, political considerations were beginning to outweigh the military considerations on both sides of the Atlantic. As a result, negotiations descended into stalemate. The British government had initially agreed to offer bases without asking for destroyers. The United States government, before learning of that initiative, had offered destroyers in return for bases and a guarantee of the fleet. In London, Churchill could not give assurances about the fleet that would probably appear defeatist and thus risk undermining British morale and his own position of leadership. At the same time, however, the prime minister badly needed the American destroyers, not only for their strategic value but also as an indication of American commitment.

In Washington, Roosevelt confronted equally powerful and equally dangerous political perils. Because the cabinet initially accepted that legislation was necessary, the president became most concerned about the political ramifications of the exchange. For one thing, he was in a reelection

¹⁹¹ PRO FO 371/24241, A3670/131/45, Tel. 1606, Lothian to Foreign Office, 4 August 1940; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 751; Leutze, 109; L. Woodward, 366. Lothian went from lunch to play golf with Joseph Davies, the American ambassador to Russia. Davies found Lothian very “grim” and muttering about retiring to Canada. Leutze, 286, note 70.

¹⁹² PRO FO 371/24241, A3670/131/45, Tel. 1606, Lothian to Foreign Office, 4 August 1940. The ambiguous sentence in Lothian’s telegram read: “All you have to do at the moment is to inform me privately that His Majesty’s Government is willing to make a declaration to the effect that His Majesty’s Government is determined that the British fleet will go on fighting for the Empire even if it is compelled to evacuate Great Britain if and when the President asks for it.” Leutze, 110; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 30; L. Woodward, 366.

campaign and, therefore, could not appear too eager to assist Britain. Furthermore, under American law, the transfer of the destroyers could only be made against a *quid pro quo* that represented such an obvious increase in American security that the administration could safely transfer part of its naval forces to a foreign power. Such a transfer on a narrow interpretation of international law, however, might still be taken as a breach of neutrality. Therefore, Roosevelt had to proceed cautiously so as not to arouse significant obstruction in the Congress. As a result, the negotiations would be prolonged and would require the settlement, in Lothian's words, of "endless difficulties about a matter on which there is complete agreement of purpose on both sides." He attributed most of the difficulties "to the consequences of a written constitution and a system of government in which legislature and executive are equal and co-ordinate powers." Consequently, Roosevelt needed a public guarantee concerning the fleet that would disarm his critics, and until he got that guarantee, the president would continue to stall.¹⁹³ Beyond the purely domestic political considerations, the president at this point was still largely exploring the feasibility of the destroyers-for-bases concept, with respect to its potential military impact. In spite of the powerful and stirring rhetoric from 10 Downing Street and the British Embassy in Washington D.C., Roosevelt remained fundamentally uncertain that, if Britain were defeated, American destroyers would not fall into German hands.

Over the next ten days, however, Roosevelt became increasingly confident about Britain's prospects for survival. Several factors ultimately helped convince the president to take action. First, he was supremely impressed by the British attack in early July on the French fleet at Oran, in Algeria. Lothian, forwarding the daily military report to the president, wrote in longhand at the bottom, "You will see that Winston Churchill has taken the action in regard to the French fleet which we discussed and you approved." As a matter of fact, very few actions as much as the destruction of the French fleet convinced Roosevelt that Churchill was indeed prepared to "fight them in the streets" and "never surrender."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Chadwin, 85, 87, 89, 96-98; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 608; Leutze, 108-109, 115; L. Woodward, 364.

¹⁹⁴ Cull, 94; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 198; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 643-644; Lash, 165; Lyons, 104-105; Meacham, 66; Moser, 132; Taylor, 62.

Second, two professional military assessments, undertaken in July and August 1940, fundamentally confirmed the capacity of Britain to hold out against Germany. Roosevelt dispatched the fact-finding missions in order to gauge the chances for British survival, following the traumatic military developments of the summer of 1940 -- the surrender of France and, in early July, the commencement of German air attacks on Britain. In spite of assurances and reassurances by Lothian that Britain could hold out if given American aid, the Roosevelt administration and congressional leaders proved reluctant to send military assistance to Britain, particularly in the face of continually pessimistic reports from Joseph Kennedy. In early July 1940, Kennedy wrote Roosevelt that "England is fighting for her possessions. They are not fighting Hitler . . . They will spend every hour figuring how to get us in." He warned American businessmen that Britain was broke and lacked even gold to pay for American arms. In London, furthermore, he told Chamberlain that "everyone in the United States says" Britain would be beaten "by the end of the month." On 2 August, he reported to Washington that, if the Germans possessed the air power that they claimed, they could certainly put the Royal Air Force "out of commission," after which a British surrender "would be inevitable."¹⁹⁵ Therefore, in the second week of July, Roosevelt sent Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services to Britain for a full and candid estimate of not only that nation's survivability, but its will to resist. The British were hopeful that his report would offset Kennedy's pessimism,¹⁹⁶ and were immediately cheered by the colonel's evident sympathy for the British cause. The British therefore went all out in showing Donovan the most secret installations, hidden air fields, and coastal defenses. He visited aircraft and munitions factories, and saw first hand the use of the new British technological discovery, radar. He observed industrial output. He conferred at length with British army, navy, and air officers, including Sir

¹⁹⁵ Beschloss, 209; De Bedts, 210; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 694; Leutze, 100; William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid: The Secret War* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 126; Swift, 260.

¹⁹⁶ Donovan's visit was in part an effort to bypass the American ambassador. Although the State Department informed Kennedy about the mission on 11 July 1940, William Stephenson telegraphed British Intelligence on 15 July that, "Colonel William J. Donovan personally representing President left yesterday by Clipper . . . United States Embassy not repeat not being informed." Collier and Horowitz, 105; De Bedts, 206-207; Stevenson, 113-114.

Admiral Dudley Pound, the first sea lord, and the director of naval intelligence, Rear Admiral John H. Godfrey. He interviewed cabinet members, members of the loyal opposition, and street corner civilians. Donovan conferred with the American military attachés at the embassy and found that they were in the process of filing reports that differed radically from the ambassador's overly negative views. Lt. Colonel Carl Spaatz, later the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, said that "American Air Corps observers were convinced that the Germans could not beat the Royal Air Force." General Raymond E. Lee, the newly arrived army attaché, told Donovan that the conclusions of military attachés were expected to be quite independent of the Ambassador and the Embassy staff; Lee in particular found Kennedy depressingly defeatist. Most important, Donovan met with Churchill, who stated that "if worst came to worst, he, after defending Britain to the last, would send the Fleet and the Air Force to Canada and fight from there." Consequently, when Donovan returned to Washington in early August, he reported to the president that Britain would hold out. The British army and navy were ready to fight and morale was excellent. Defense preparations and production, of aircraft and munitions, were making good progress, and the British were planning retaliatory bomber attacks on Germany. In effect, Donovan affirmed what Lothian had been arguing all summer, that Britain was indeed America's first line of defense, that the extreme depression in Washington was not justified, and that the United States should accelerate military aid to Britain.¹⁹⁷

No sooner had Donovan left London in early August than a General Staff mission arrived, which included Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, Assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations, Brigadier General George V. Strong, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, and General Delos C. Emmons, Commanding

¹⁹⁷ Beschloss, 208; De Bedts, 205-208; Hyde, 37-38; Raymond E. Lee, The London Journal of General Raymond E. Lee, 1940-1941, ed. James Leutze (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 19-20, 27-28; Leutze, 97-103, 112-113; Stevenson, 113-126. Ironically enough, at almost the same time that Donovan was briefing the administration, Kennedy wired Washington that Britain was finished. On 2 August 1940, the day the cabinet decided to pursue the destroyers-for-bases deal, Kennedy reported from London that if the Germans possessed the air power they claimed, they could put the RAF "out of commission," after which a British surrender "would be inevitable." He also noted that, "This war, from Great Britain's point of view, is being conducted from now on with their eyes only on one place and that is the United States. Unless there is a miracle, they realize they haven't a chance in the long run." At the end of July, he told a *Daily Mail* correspondent that Hitler would be in London by the middle of August. By late August, when that date had come and gone, he told his friend George Bilainkin that it would be all over by the end of the year. De Bedts, 208, 210; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 200-201.

General, General Headquarters. Their mission was not only to retrace and expand the military area covered by Donovan, and thus reassure the American General Staff, but also to hold the first staff conversations between senior military personnel on both sides. Their report fully corroborated Donovan's and added new information on the relatively small loss of British aircraft and the comparatively small damage done by German air bombardment, in spite of Kennedy's efforts to place a heavily negative accent on the findings.¹⁹⁸ Since the Germans could not permanently ground the RAF, Strong concluded, they would not be able to invade Britain.¹⁹⁹

The third and perhaps most critical factor that helped stir American sympathy, if not sell the deal to the president, was the publicity generated by the Battle of Britain. In London, since the outbreak of the war, when the British government imposed strict military censorship,²⁰⁰ Minister of Information Duff Cooper struggled against Whitehall's continuing obstruction to provide the American media with access to the British war effort. Similarly, within the Foreign Office News Department, deputy-director Sir William Ridsdale argued that, in order to win American support, it was essential to allow American reporters to see the Royal Air Force in action:

¹⁹⁸ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 690-691. When the Germans bombed the important Vickers aircraft plant, Kennedy asserted that it was completely out of commission. General Strong, however, made a personal inspection trip, in which he talked to workmen as well as executives. He returned to London convinced that some production would be possible within a week and back to normal within 25 days. When the Germans began night bombing, there was a nearly 50 percent drop in production caused by factory workers taking refuge in shelters at the mere rumor of coming raids. Kennedy assured the General Staff officers that production was thus doomed to failure. Within a week, however, a solution had been found. Each factory designated several air raid watches, which notified their own factory when the warning system indicated that bombers were actually headed in their direction. Workers then left their benches for the shelters. When the German planes were over the Bristol docks, for example, the aircraft factories in Coventry continued to operate. Production was only slightly curtailed, therefore, not collapsed. De Bedts, 209; Swift, 270.

¹⁹⁹ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 201-202; De Bedts, 209-210.

²⁰⁰ The broadcast regulations for radio correspondents, imposed by Whitehall, were narrow and prohibitive: no ad-libbing before the microphone; no on-the-spot reporting; restrictions on travel; prepared scripts only, read in the studio and checked beforehand by the liaison people of the BBC. Furthermore, a British devotion to protocol and established procedures, of formal applications to the proper people in the proper time and place also significantly circumscribed reporters' efforts to obtain news and interviews. For example, Ministry of Information regulations involved long, elaborate applications on a case-by-case basis, with appropriate copies to appropriate quarters, plus appropriate covering letters, indicating that the applicant was fully conversant with the rules -- all of which guaranteed that a story would be old news by the time the networks got to it if, in fact, they got to it at all. Sperber, 143-144, 158-159.

To see British planes getting back, but only just getting back because they have been battered and riddled by the enemy, would provide the material for an impressive picture of the drain on our resources. These American correspondents would know the delicacy of such a position; they would not worry weary pilots; they could provide invaluable evidence of our spirit and our needs. And they are straining at the leash to give this help, which lies within their power, for a cause for which they have intense sympathy.

T. North Whitehead of the Foreign Office American Department was even more blunt. He said that Britain was not very likely to win this war without the whole-hearted cooperation of the United States. “We shall not obtain this unless we demonstrate in a manner vivid and convincing to the Americans that we can not only resist but can also attack”:

The only way to make our power for offensive vivid to Americans is 1) to attack as often and as dramatically as possible, and 2) to let the Americans see us doing it through their countrymen. This involves a constant appreciation of their own importance as political instruments on the part of the fighting services.²⁰¹

As a result, Halifax pressed Anthony Eden at the War Office and Archibald Sinclair at the Air Ministry to allow increased American news coverage.²⁰²

From Washington, Lothian continued to appeal for greater access by American correspondents covering the British Expeditionary Force. On 1 June 1940, he urged the War Office to relax restrictions because the “reporting by American correspondents of recent fighting,” notably the evacuation from Dunkirk, “has produced an excellent effect on opinion here.” Furthermore, American correspondents did not want military secrets or statistics; they wanted human interest accounts of the fighting, crashed aircraft, stories of heroism and valor, “all of which awakens human sympathy.” Halifax agreed with Lothian’s argument and thus appealed to War Minister Anthony Eden and Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair on 6 June. Halifax stated that the success or failure of Britain’s efforts to secure destroyers and additional aircraft “may depend upon the response of the United States to our appeal.” While the Roosevelt administration appeared willing to help, “the final say lies with public opinion.”²⁰³

²⁰¹ Cull, 88-89.

²⁰² PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Lothian to Eden, 1 June 1940; Cull, 89.

²⁰³ PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Tel. 887, Lothian to Foreign Office, 1 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Halifax to Eden, 6 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Halifax to Sinclair, 6 June 1940.

Largely for that reason, Lothian suggested that, because human interest might promote American confidence in the RAF, one or two real ace fighter pilots should visit the United States. He found his ideal candidate in an American pilot named Billy Fiske, a 29-year-old officer in an RAF fighter squadron based on the southern coast of Britain. He was the son of a leading New York banker, a gold-medal winning member of the United States Bobsled team in the 1928 and 1932 Winter Olympic Games, and ultimately a partner in Dillon, Read and Company of New York. He married an Englishwoman, Rose Bingham, and, on the eve of the war, moved to Britain. In March 1940, he enlisted in the RAF volunteer reserve. In June, Lothian requested that Fiske be given leave to visit the United States and speak with “influential Senators, editors and others, in order to convince them as to the quality of our air force and its ability to deal with the German air force.”²⁰⁴ The ambassador agreed, however, with the Air Ministry’s insistence that Fiske see combat first if he was to have any credibility with the American press. On 13 July, therefore, Fiske was assigned to the 601 City of London Squadron, and very soon saw combat, particularly as the Battle of Britain intensified in early August 1940. By the middle of August, Fiske had several enemy kills to his credit and was described by his commanding officer, Sir Archibald Hope, as “unquestionably . . . the best pilot I’ve ever known” and “a natural as a fighter pilot.”²⁰⁵

As a result, the concept of using Americans in the RAF for propaganda gained momentum. Lothian wired the Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair that, “If you have one or two real ace fighters who need a rest and who could impress people here by their confidence through actual experience and superiority of our Air Force, it would be a good thing to send them over for a fortnight.”²⁰⁶ On 17 August 1940, the Foreign Office circulated a secret memo that “publicity of exploits of individual American pilots in our service, even if exaggerated, would have an excellent effect, and would give the hero-worshipping public of the United States a feeling of identity with the conflict; and that interviews,

²⁰⁴ PRO FO 371/24230, A3464/26/45, Tel. 1137, Lothian to Foreign Office, 27 June 1940.

²⁰⁵ NAS, GD40/17/400/274, Lothian to Clarence Dillon, 27 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Lothian to Sinclair, 26 June and 18 July 1940; Alex Kershaw, The Few: The American “Knights of the Air” Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2006), 63-67, 111-113.

²⁰⁶ PRO FO 371/24230, A3352/26/45, Lothian to Sinclair, 18 July 1940; Kershaw, 67.

photographs and newsreel shorts etc. might also be followed up.” In Washington, Lothian envisioned Fiske as an attractive dinner guest on the Washington social round and the “next hero of every American schoolboy.” On 17 August, however, the same day that the Foreign Office memo began to circulate, Fiske suffered horrific burns during a skirmish against a pack of German Junkers 87 fighters. Hours later, he was sitting up in his hospital bed wisecracking with his squadron adjutant, who described him as “perky as hell.” Nevertheless, very rapidly, his condition worsened and he died shortly before dawn the next morning, the result, his doctors maintained, of post-operative shock.²⁰⁷

In spite of Billy Fiske’s death, the Battle of Britain began to clarify the British predicament in the United States. In one sense, the battle began to stir the emotions of Americans in a way that academic debates over bases and destroyers could not. Fiske’s death and funeral provoked tributes on both sides of the Atlantic. Most significant, perhaps, more and more Americans were following the battle. As the British government increasingly relaxed its censorship and control of information during the summer of 1940, American reporters such as Edward R. Murrow of CBS and Quentin Reynolds of *Collier’s Magazine* thrilled huge radio audiences and readers with stories of dogfights over the White Cliffs of Dover and live reports from the rooftops of London.²⁰⁸ Britain’s ability to withstand the German onslaught, and therefore, its chances of survival, suddenly could be expressed in a simple statistic: the ratio of the losses suffered by the Luftwaffe to the losses suffered by the RAF. Consequently, Americans grew increasingly confident in Britain’s chances as early reports indicated that the RAF was shooting down greater numbers of German aircraft than it was losing. They became quickly aware, however, that there existed marked disparities between British and German news accounts. In spite of efforts to loosen the official control over military information, Churchill persisted in his almost incomprehensible inability to see this as a significant problem, and therefore continued to see no utility in working to answer American doubts by opening up Air Ministry calculations to press scrutiny. “I must say,” he minuted to

²⁰⁷ Cull, 90; Kershaw, 126-128, 129-130.

²⁰⁸ Kershaw, 130, 160; Sperber, 161-165.

Sinclair, “I am a little impatient about the American skepticism. The event is what will decide all.” He argued that, “The important thing is to bring the German aircraft down and to win the battle, and the rate at which American correspondents and the American public are convinced that we are winning, stands in a much lower plane. They will find out quite soon enough when the German air attack is plainly shown to be repulsed. . . . There is something rather obnoxious in bringing correspondents down to air squadrons in order that they may assure the American public that the fighter pilots are not bragging and lying about their figures.”²⁰⁹

Lothian, however, emphatically urged London to authenticate the credibility of British figures. He knew that American officials, such as Ed Stettinius of the National Defense Commission in Washington, had noted the discrepancy between the losses declared by Britain and those estimated by United States Military Intelligence. The result, he warned, was that Americans began to distrust the reliability of British communiqués: “Claims of aircraft destruction are now so wildly contradictory that juxtaposition of communiqués and news stories produces the impression that both sides are lying wholesale.” Therefore, Lothian emphasized, it was absolutely necessary to assure Mr. Stettinius “that the figures for losses given out by the Admiralty and Air Ministry are as accurate as possible and that no British losses are being purposely concealed.”²¹⁰ Lothian’s alarm compelled Halifax to write directly to the Air Ministry: “Whatever you can do to give the American correspondents an inside view of your organization and personnel may, I firmly believe, have the most important and influence on the help we get from the United States in the near future.”²¹¹ As a result, in late August, Sinclair arranged for American correspondents to visit two RAF fighter bases and witness at first hand the compilation of British and German losses. The Americans were impressed to note that the British counted only the

²⁰⁹ Cull, 90; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 743.

²¹⁰ PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Tel. 1695, Lothian to Foreign Office, 14 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Tel. 1700, Lothian to Foreign Office, 14 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Tel. 1702, Lothian to Foreign Office, 14 July 1940.

²¹¹ PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Halifax to Sinclair, 19 August 1940; PRO CAB 65/8, WM 228 (40) 2.

“confirmed kills” -- the German aircraft actually seen to have crashed in flames. In this way, the British finally convinced the American press corps in London of the accuracy of their figures. Very soon, the Admiralty followed suit and also began providing the American press, for the first time, with reliable statistics on British shipping losses.²¹²

The fourth and final factor that helped convince Roosevelt to take action was a shift in the political atmosphere in Washington. It appeared that Wendell Willkie, although still critical of Roosevelt’s foreign policy and hesitant to take any public position in favor of the deal, might be persuaded to express approval of the destroyers-for-bases negotiations, which would likely defuse adverse reaction by Republicans in Congress. On 17 August 1940, during his acceptance speech for the Republican nomination, Willkie stated that “We must admit that the loss of the British fleet would greatly weaken our defense”:

That is because the British fleet has for years controlled the Atlantic, leaving us free to concentrate in the Pacific. If the British fleet were lost or captured, the Atlantic might be dominated by Germany, a power hostile to our way of life, controlling in that event most of the ships and shipbuilding facilities of Europe. This would be a calamity for us. We might be exposed to attack on the Atlantic. Our defense would be weakened until we could build a navy and air force strong enough to defend both coasts.²¹³

At the same time, it grew increasingly clear that American public opinion supported the deal. The bill received the unexpected endorsement of the reliably isolationist *Chicago Tribune*, which had been demanding the acquisition of bases from the British since the 1920s. In addition, the results of two public opinion polls taken in the middle of August were highly encouraging. In one poll, 61 percent of those surveyed favored selling the destroyers to Britain; in the other, 62 percent supported the deal.²¹⁴

²¹² PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Tel. 1968, Halifax to Lothian, 20 August 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Tel. 1997, Halifax to Lothian, 21 August 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A3799/26/45, Tel. 2077, Halifax to Lothian, 23 August 1940; Cull, 90-91.

²¹³ Chadwin, 102-103; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 761-762; Leutze, 115-116. Willkie sent Lothian a personal message over a week later that he would not oppose the transfer of bases. He was, indeed, in favor of doing everything possible to ensure that Britain was not defeated, as he realized that the continued existence of Britain and its fleet was essential to the safety and security of the United States. PRO FO 800/398, US/40/23, Lothian to Halifax, 29 August 1940.

²¹⁴ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 297; Chadwin, 104; Leutze, 121; Moser, 133-134; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 29.

Furthermore, and perhaps decisively, the administration's legal and constitutional concerns began to clear up. On 11 August 1940, a letter appeared in *The New York Times*, signed by Dean Acheson, a member of the Century Group, and three other distinguished lawyers.²¹⁵ This long and closely reasoned letter argued persuasively that, since time was of the essence and since congressional action would delay matters, the president had the legal authority to dispense with legislation and transfer the destroyers. Roosevelt, although still relatively hesitant to circumvent Congress, quickly converted to this view, provided that the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Harold Stark, would certify that the destroyers were not essential to the defense of the United States.²¹⁶

The Destroyers-for-Bases Agreement

By late August 1940, therefore, as a result of Britain's ability to withstand sustained aerial bombardment, along with the German failure to follow up their conquest of France with an all-out invasion, Roosevelt increasingly came to the conclusion that Britain might not be such a lost cause after all. It appears clear that the accumulating evidence of Britain's capacity and will to fight, along with increasing indications of tacit Republican support, convinced the president that it was now politically safer to take action.²¹⁷

In spite of the Roosevelt administration's decision to proceed with negotiations, the primary obstacle to an expeditious settlement was in fact Winston Churchill. Having for months advocated a *quid pro quo* approach to Anglo-American cooperation, and having accepted in early August the idea of a limited bases-for-destroyers deal, the prime minister began to have reservations as the scope of the American proposal became apparent. He feared that the American proposal, which demanded far greater British concessions, would be politically unacceptable in Britain. After all, the United States would receive the far greater value in the proposed deal; in return for a few dozen obsolete warships from the

²¹⁵ Charles C. Burlingham, George Rublee, and Thomas D. Thacher.

²¹⁶ Billington, 151; Burns, *The Lion and the Fox*, 439-440; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 296; Chadwin, 97-98; Davis, *Into the Storm*, 609; Hyde, 38; Langer and Gleason, 757.

²¹⁷ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 295, 296; Cull, 94; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 643-644; Moser, 132; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 29.

period of the First World War, Washington would receive a number of strategically placed base facilities with a monetary value of hundreds of millions of dollars. Of course, the prime minister noted, there was “no comparison between the intrinsic value of these antiquated and inefficient craft and the immense permanent strategic security afforded the United States by the enjoyment of the island bases.”²¹⁸ More important, Churchill remained adamantly opposed to the requirement that London give any assurance about its fleet. He was particularly perturbed by a telegram from Roosevelt asking for a public guarantee that if Britain were overrun, the Royal Navy would neither be surrendered nor sunk; he was equally annoyed by an American suggestion that Britain transfer its ships to Canada in the event of defeat. Churchill believed that such assurances were quite out of the question, partly because it gave the United States too much, but primarily because he feared that further public mention of the matter would unsettle domestic morale at a crucial moment. “Only a war alliance,” he wrote, could justify “any stipulations about the disposition of the fleet.” Under any circumstance, Britain must be the sole judge of when the fleet should cross the Atlantic. Any other course of action, particularly at the moment when the War Cabinet anticipated a German invasion, would be “disastrous on British morale.” He was therefore averse to any public statement that might create “the impression that the Government had in mind the collapse of Britain as a possible contingency.”²¹⁹

Consequently, when the War Cabinet considered the American proposals on 6 August 1940, Churchill was, according to Colville, “in a nervous and irritable frame of mind.” Although he was willing to accept the American insistence on full bases on seven sites, he insisted that, since the deal was clearly to the United States’ benefit, the two elements should not be explicitly related and should be treated as mutual gifts, offered in a spirit of friendship and cooperation.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Chadwin, 96; Churchill, 357; Davis, Into the Storm, 609.

²¹⁹ Churchill, 358; Colville, 209-210, entry for 6 August 1940; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 201; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 715; Gilbert, War Papers, 627.

²²⁰ Billington, 151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 297; Chadwin, 98-99; Davis, Into the Storm, 610; Leutze, 110; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 29; L. Woodward, 366.

A new message arrived from Lothian early in the morning of 7 August 1940, that Roosevelt wanted an immediate answer to the question about the fleet. The ambassador stressed that “It is evident that this argument is the one which has the most effect on Congress in the matter of destroyers.” As the prospects for legislative action were steadily increasing, Lothian asked whether a reply could be telephoned as early as possible.²²¹ Churchill, however, remained firm. In letters to both Lothian and Halifax, on 7 August, Churchill reemphasized the need for destroyers, but that His Majesty’s Government would under no circumstances surrender the British Fleet to the United States. He would not consent to any discussion of the fleet that might give the Americans a blank check that they could present for collection, saying “we think the time has come for you to send your Fleet across the Atlantic”:²²²

We were, as you know, very ready to offer the United States indefinite lease facilities for naval and air bases in West Indian islands, and to do this freely on grounds of inevitable common association of naval and military interests of Great Britain and the United States. . . . But all this has nothing to do with any bargaining or declaration about the future disposition of the British fleet. It would obviously be impossible for us to make or agree to any declaration being made on such a subject. I have repeatedly warned you in my secret telegrams and those to the President of the dangers United States would run if Great Britain were successfully invaded and a British Quisling Government came into office to make the best terms possible for the surviving inhabitants. . . . We have no intention of relieving United States from any well-grounded anxieties on this point. . . . I have already several weeks ago told you that there is no warrant for discussing any question of the transference of the Fleet to American or Canadian shores. I should refuse to allow the subject even to be mentioned in any Staff conversations, still less that any technical preparations should be made or even planned. Above all, it is essential you should realise that no such declaration could ever be assented to by us for the purpose of obtaining destroyers or anything like that. Pray make it clear at once that we could never agree to the slightest compromising of our full liberty of action, nor tolerate any such defeatist announcement, the effect of which would be disastrous.²²³

Halifax wrote to Lothian on 8 August, at Churchill’s request, and stated that there was great difficulty in making any statement more specific than the one the prime minister had made on 4 June 1940; any other declaration on the matter would provoke rumors of irresolution and timidity in Britain.

²²¹ PRO FO 371/24241, A3670/131/45, Tel. 1606, Lothian to Foreign Office, 4 August 1940; Churchill, 358; Leutze, 111; L. Woodward, 366-367.

²²² Leutze, 111; L. Woodward, 367.

²²³ Churchill, 359-360; Gilbert, War Papers, 627-629.

He instructed Lothian, therefore, to inform Roosevelt that Britain would provide the facilities as soon as it received the destroyers. Otherwise, Halifax advised the ambassador to find a way to reconcile British difficulties and American desires, but to make as few concessions as possible. Lothian replied on the evening of 8 August that he presented a letter to Sumner Welles, which outlined Churchill's position, that "if Great Britain were overrun, the present Government would certainly send the Fleet . . . to defend the Empire overseas and would neither sink nor surrender it." He reiterated the prime minister's view that any public statement in Britain or America regarding the fleet would stimulate unhealthy fears, and thus confined himself to the offer of a lease of bases to Pan American Airways. In return, he asked for twelve flotillas of eight destroyers, twenty motor torpedo boats [MTBs], five Flying Fortresses [heavy bombers], fifty Catalina flying boats and 250,000 rifles with ammunition.²²⁴

Nevertheless, on 13 August, Roosevelt made up his mind once and for all to proceed with the negotiations. He met that afternoon with Welles, Stimson, Knox, and Morgenthau, who all agreed that Britain's chances were growing slimmer and that the destroyer exchange, "while a very serious step," had to be undertaken. They collaborated on a message to Churchill that suggested a reduced list of items that the United States might offer, but noted that this equipment could be furnished only "if the American people and the Congress frankly recognized that in return therefore the national defense and security of the United States would be enhanced." In order to convince the American people that such a deal would enhance their security, however, the president still wanted, first and foremost, an unequivocal fleet assurance. He also insisted that the British give more bases than they had originally offered, as well as more explicit and more encompassing rights to their use. To make things easier for Churchill, he changed his mind about the type of fleet declaration. Therefore, in his message to the prime minister, Roosevelt wrote that a "reiteration to me of your statement to Parliament on 4 June"²²⁵ would be sufficient.²²⁶

²²⁴ Billington, 151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 297; Leutze, 111-112; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 29; L. Woodward, 367-368.

²²⁵ On 4 June 1940, Churchill had said: "We shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle . . ." Gilbert, War Papers, 247.

The War Cabinet met on 14 August to discuss Roosevelt's offer: the United States would furnish Britain with at least 50 destroyers, motor torpedo boats, and certain aircraft, provided that the British government take the following steps. The first was an assurance that, if at any time the waters around Britain became untenable for British ships of war, the latter would not be turned over to Germany or sunk, but would be sent to other parts of the Empire for the continued defense of the Empire, as Churchill had stated in his address of 4 June 1940. The second was an agreement that the British government would authorize the use of Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, certain West Indian Islands, and British Guiana as naval and air bases by the United States in the event of an attack on the American Hemisphere by any non-American nation. In the meantime, the United States should have the right to establish bases, the land for which should be acquired by purchase or through a lease. The American terms, Churchill noted, represented a significant step toward American belligerency; because the sale of the destroyers was a blatantly unneutral act, it would go a long way toward bringing the United States into the war. The War Cabinet added that the deal might be the first step toward constituting an "Anglo-Saxon bloc."

There was nevertheless substantial concern that Washington was driving an exceptionally "hard bargain," particularly the question of moving the British fleet to American waters. Churchill reiterated that his comments of 4 June had been made partly in order to reassure public opinion immediately following the collapse of France, and that nothing must be said now that might disturb morale or lead people to think that we would not "fight it out here." Therefore, the War Cabinet agreed that, while Britain should make a favorable response to Roosevelt, Churchill should also make it absolutely clear that it was London's firm resolve to fight it out, and that "even if, contrary to our belief, we should find ourselves being overwhelmed, we should retain, entirely unfettered, the right to decide when (if ever) we should send the Fleet away from these waters to defend our kith and kin overseas."²²⁷ Nevertheless, the

²²⁶ Butler, Lord Lothian, 298-299; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 732; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 758-759; Lash, 210-211; Leutze, 116; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 30; L. Woodward, 368.

²²⁷ Chadwin, 98-99; Churchill, 358; Colville, 223, entry for 15 August 1940; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 732-733; Gilbert, War Papers, 667; Leutze, 116-117; Meacham, 71; L. Woodward, 368-369.

War Cabinet understood that the time had come to make worthwhile concessions to the United States. Cadogan noted that “We must give a very easy quid for the quo, and I understand Winston now agrees.”²²⁸ In his letter to Roosevelt on 15 August 1940, Churchill stated that while London could “meet both the points you consider necessary to help you with Congress and with others concerned,” the president should understand that the British “willingness to do so must be conditional on our being assured that there will be no delay in letting us have the ships and flying boats.” He asserted, furthermore, that it was not in America’s interest to emphasize the possibility of British defeat. He wrote: “I am of course ready to reiterate to you what I told Parliament on June 4. We intend to fight this out here to the end and none of us would ever buy peace by surrendering or scuttling the Fleet.” Then with apparent resentment, he added:

But in any use you may make of this repeated assurance you will please bear in mind the disastrous effect from our point of view, and perhaps also from yours, of allowing any impression to grow that we regard the conquest of the British Islands and its naval bases as any other than an impossible contingency. The spirit of our people is splendid. Never have they been so determined. Their confidence in the issue has been enormously and legitimately strengthened by the severe air fighting in the past week.²²⁹

Churchill remained obstinate although the military situation was growing more dangerous. On 12-13 August, the Luftwaffe launched significantly more powerful and concentrated aerial assaults against British radar stations and coastal airfields, which marked the beginning of a new and more dangerous phase of the Battle of Britain. These assaults, which the Germans intended as the prelude to their invasion of Britain, caused considerable anxiety throughout Britain. In the context of national emergency, Churchill felt it absolutely vital to maintain unity and morale. It was bad enough having to accept such an appallingly lopsided deal in order to give Roosevelt political cover; but to give a public assurance about the fleet, which implied the possibility of defeat -- and which might thus undermine national morale -- was unacceptable. Thus, Churchill hesitated to commit fully to the American proposal.

²²⁸ Cadogan, 321, entry for 14 August 1940.

²²⁹ Churchill, 360; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 734; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 668; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 759-760; Lash, 211-212; Leutze, 116-117; Meacham, 71; L. Woodward, 369-370.

Nevertheless, the president considered Churchill's message of 15 August "entirely satisfactory" and discussed the matter at his press conference the next day, 16 August. Lothian was pleased and wired London, "I think the trick has been done. At least the President told me on the telephone this morning that he thought it was."²³⁰ The State Department quickly prepared letters to be exchanged between the British and American governments, which provided for a fleet guarantee, stipulated the nature of the leases, and made the connection between the bases and the destroyers explicit. Welles told Lothian on 19 August that the exchange of these letters would overcome all of the difficulties because it was at present impossible for the president to send the destroyers without legislation, except in exchange for a definite consideration, and unless the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Harold Stark, certified that they were not essential to the national defense of the United States.²³¹ Lothian, however, pointed out that Churchill could not make a statement about the British fleet in a letter intended for publication. He also objected to the description of the transaction "as a deal in which we made these far-reaching and tremendous concessions" in exchange for 50 old destroyers. From London's point of view, it was essential that its part of the transaction be represented as a contribution, to the security of North America, including Canada. Otherwise, British public opinion, and possibly opinion in the United States, would think that Washington "had driven an intolerably hard bargain at the moment of our greatest difficulty."²³²

²³⁰ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 297; Chadwin, 99; Hyde, 38-39; Leutze, 117; L. Woodward, 370. In his delivering the prime minister's reply to Roosevelt, Lothian noted, "I hope that Mr. Churchill's excellent reply of this morning will enable you to proceed on destroyers!!" Lash, 212.

²³¹ Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 762-763; Leutze, 119; L. Woodward, 370. Days earlier, on 16 August, Knox met with Admiral Stark, and asked him to prepare to transfer fifty "old destroyers to the British in return for certain 99-year leases. Stark pointed out, however, that, under Section 491 of Title 34 of the U.S. Code, such a transfer required a statement declaring the destroyers "obsolete and useless." Stark, somewhat more objective than the politicians, said he could make no such statement. For one thing, as the Navy Department's primary professional spokesman before Congress, he had just asked for appropriations that would increase naval expenditures by 92 percent. Stark had posited his case on two major premises: first, world tensions made increased American naval forces absolutely necessary if American interests were to be protected; and second, the United States should have a navy second to none. Besides, to declare the ships to be useless would be false; otherwise, "the British would not be so anxious to get the same destroyers." By 18 August, however, the Attorney General, Robert Jackson, convinced Stark and General Marshall that they could in good conscience certify that prospective bases would be of greater value to the national defense than the destroyers. Chadwin, 83-84, 104; Leutze, 117-118.

²³² L. Woodward, 370-371.

Before those letters could be exchanged, however, Churchill addressed the agreement in the House of Commons on 20 August 1940. He offered the bases to the United States as a gift separate from the destroyers, with no strings attached, and gloried in the promise of cooperation to come:

We have to think not only for ourselves but for the lasting security of the cause and principles for which we are fighting and of the long future of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Some months ago we came to the conclusion that the interests of the United States and of the British Empire both required that the United States should have facilities for the naval and air defence of the Western hemisphere against the attack of a Nazi power which might have acquired temporary but lengthy control of a large part of Western Europe and its formidable resources. We had therefore decided spontaneously, and without being asked or offered any inducement, to inform the Government of the United States that we would be glad to place such defence facilities at their disposal by leasing suitable sites in our Transatlantic possessions for their greater security against the unmeasured dangers of the future. . . .

Presently we learned that anxiety was also felt in the United States about the air and naval defence of their Atlantic seaboard, and President Roosevelt has recently made it clear that he would like to discuss with us, and with the Dominion of Canada and with Newfoundland, the development of American naval and air facilities in Newfoundland and in the West Indies. There is, of course, no question of any transference of sovereignty -- that has never been suggested -- or of any action being taken, without the consent or against the wishes of the various Colonies concerned, but for our part, His Majesty's Government are entirely willing to accord defence facilities to the United States on a 99 years' leasehold basis, and we feel sure that our interests no less than theirs, and the interests of the Colonies themselves and of Canada and Newfoundland will be served thereby. These are important steps. Undoubtedly this process means that these two great organizations of the English-speaking democracies, the British Empire and the United States, will have to be somewhat mixed up together in some of their affairs for mutual and general advantage. For my own part, looking out upon the future, I do not view the process with any misgivings. I could not stop it if I wished; no one can stop it. Like the Mississippi, it just keeps rolling along. Let it roll on full flood, inexorable, irresistible, benignant, to broader lands and better days.²³³

For all of the glorious rhetoric of this address,²³⁴ Churchill exacerbated the divide between Washington and London over the destroyers-for-bases question, which was now almost entirely driven by political calculations. From the perspective of the War Cabinet, which discussed the proposed exchange of letters on 21 August 1940, the bargain proposed by Washington was hardly a fair trade. Britain was offering base facilities *and* a fleet assurance that were worth far more than 50 obsolete destroyers. It

²³³ Chadwin, 104; Churchill, 362; Cull, 94; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 202-203; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 743; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 696-697; Lash, 214.

²³⁴ In his speech on 20 August 1940, Churchill included a formal tribute to the gallantry and heroism of the RAF: "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few." Gilbert, *War Papers*, 693.

might be asked why, therefore, London was not obtaining a more substantial consideration, such as the cancellation of its debt to the United States. Moreover, Britain had originally and freely offered the United States limited base facilities before Washington offered a *quid pro quo*. Beyond that, if Britain were to give the bases to the United States, then they could determine the extent and nature of the gift; if, however, the bases were part of a deal, the United States might assume some prerogative over what they received in return for their destroyers. Therefore, in his speech, Churchill described the offer of bases in more politically defensible terms, as a gift graciously given to the United States.²³⁵

While Churchill attempted to overcome these problems with rhetoric, his speech only served to sharpen the key political problem for Roosevelt; namely, that the United States could not accept the bases on those terms. The only way, legally and politically, for the Roosevelt administration to secure congressional and military support for the deal was to maintain an explicit connection between bases and destroyers, and to demonstrate, more to the point, that American security would be enhanced by the receipt of the bases. In its efforts to sway Congress, the administration had to argue that the United States was actually getting the better of the deal. On 22 August, for example, Roosevelt wrote Senator David Walsh, chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee, and an inveterate Anglophobe, that the deal was of “utmost importance to our national defense. After explaining what a great handicap America’s lack of off-shore bases was to national security, he suggested that the deficiency could be “largely cured” by trading the 50 destroyers, which were, the president stated, “on their last legs” for base rights in Newfoundland, the Bahamas, Bermuda, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and St. Lucia.²³⁶

That same day, 22 August 1940, Churchill wrote the president, through Lothian, and made his point equally explicit, that London wished to keep the two principal objects, the bases and the destroyers, separate. The British government, he wrote, would like to “give you the facilities mentioned without

²³⁵ Dimpleby-Reynolds, 127; Gilbert, War Papers, 702; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 764; Leutze, 119-120; L. Woodward, 372-373.

²³⁶ Butler, Lord Lothian, 297; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 760-761, 765; Leutze, 121; Meacham, 71; Moser, 133-134; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 29; L. Woodward, 373.

stipulating for any return,” and opposed the exchange of letters that Lothian and Welles had discussed, “or in admitting in any way that the munitions which you send us are a payment for the facilities.” He concluded that he trusted the Americans to be generous in their provision of war matériel and saw no need to bargain.²³⁷

That same afternoon, however, Sumner Welles told Lothian that the exchange of letters was the only course, given the existing legislation requiring the Chief of Staff and the General Board of the Navy to certify that the ships were not essential to American defense. Without such a certificate, Welles reiterated, the transfer could not be made legally except in return for a definite assurance from London that could be certified as adding to the security of the United States. He further implied that more delay might doom the whole project. Consequently, on 23 August, Lothian sent five telegrams to London, reporting that the Americans did not like Churchill’s proposal to separate the two objects and insisted that they stick to the exchange of letters idea. Lothian supported the American argument and described Welles’ view as representative of “realities.” From the American point of view, it was no longer politically possible to separate the questions of the bases and the destroyers; they were now inevitably and indelibly connected. Furthermore, Churchill’s speech now made public the fact that Britain had considered the question of giving naval and air bases to the United States. The exchange of letters, therefore, would be regarded more or less as a legal appendage. He further urged Churchill to agree, since otherwise, Britain might lose the destroyers. In the long run, Lothian stressed, Britain and the United States were now beginning to organize the joint defense of North America. Most significant, the United States was beginning to help in the defense of Britain by the transfer of the destroyers, although such a transfer was technically an act of war. Lothian pressed upon Cadogan that there was no alternative to Roosevelt’s proposed method of procedure: “this was the only possible course.”²³⁸

²³⁷ Colville, 228, entry for 22 August 1940; Gilbert, War Papers, 704-705; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 765; Lash, 215; Leutze, 121; L. Woodward, 373-374.

²³⁸ Cadogan, 322, entry for 23 August 1940; Davis, Into the Storm, 610; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 765-766; Lash, 215; Leutze, 121; L. Woodward, 375-376.

Churchill, however, remained adamantly opposed to an exchange of letters. He feared that if Britain agreed to provide the United States with ambiguous rights to British bases, the Americans might expect more than Britain was prepared to give. Churchill was sufficiently incensed that the Americans, who had made Britain a “definite gift, [were] haggling over the extent of ours,” he claimed that “if necessary he could do without the American destroyers.” After all, by the end of the year, with its accelerating naval construction, Britain would be in a perfectly safe position. “Dare say he is right,” Cadogan noted in his diary.²³⁹

The Foreign Office put these considerations to Lothian, with orders to make no reply until he had received a message that Churchill was drafting for the president. The prime minister, however, remained hesitant to draft his response. Lothian therefore pressed Churchill on the urgency of replying to the president, who was, at the same time, becoming increasingly annoyed by London’s inaction.²⁴⁰ On 24 August, Lothian wired Cadogan, “fussing for P.M.’s message.” Cadogan explained that there was a hitch and that Churchill in fact had decided not to send the message that night.²⁴¹ The next day, 25 August, after Lothian sent another telegram, “urging P.M. to send reply,” Churchill finally agreed to give way to the Americans on procedure; Cadogan telegraphed the prime minister’s response to Lothian that afternoon.²⁴² In his own telegram, however, Churchill continued to object to the contractual nature of the American proposal, and continued to insist on defining the British offer of bases as a “gift” lest he provide the United States with what he referred to as a “blank cheque on the whole of our Trans-Atlantic possessions.”²⁴³ The reality, however, as Lothian recognized and Churchill did not, was that by this point

²³⁹ Cadogan, 321-322, entry for 23 August 1940; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 709; Lash, 215; Leutze, 122; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 29; L. Woodward, 376.

²⁴⁰ When Cordell Hull, fresh from his vacation, called at the White House, he learned that negotiations had “bogged down.” The president, quite irritated, directed Hull to assume responsibility for the negotiations, although the secretary had never been particularly sympathetic toward the deal. Hull, 834; Leutze, 122.

²⁴¹ Cadogan, 323, entry for 24 August 1940.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 323, entry for 25 August 1940.

²⁴³ He proposed offering at once “certain fairly well-defined facilities.” At that point, American experts could “discuss these or any other variants of them with ours -- we remaining the final judge of what we can give. . . . If

Britain was no longer in a position to bargain. If Britain wanted the destroyers, it had to conclude a fundamentally lopsided agreement.

Lothian met with Hull and Roosevelt on the same day Churchill sent his wire and, reflecting the spirit of the prime minister's message, suggested that the matter be treated as a mutual gesture of friendship with gifts exchanged all around. Hull explained that the president could not accept gifts, and Roosevelt stated flatly that, in order to appease Congress and the Navy, the administration would need something more precise than a "bare declaration" that Britain intended to provide some bases to the United States. He also rather indelicately pointed out that there might be a "change of Government in Britain," which would presumably render the base declaration meaningless. After reiterating that there would have to be some connection made between the destroyers and the bases, the president turned the matter over to Hull. The next day, in fact, 26 August 1940, one of Hull's advisers in the State Department, Green H. Hackworth, proposed what would become the ultimate solution: split the deal and make some bases a gift and trade the rest for the destroyers. This would enable the Americans to claim that they were making a great hardheaded bargain, and the British to claim that they were being generous, while at the same time maintaining the fleet assurance, which was of primary importance to the United States government.²⁴⁴

On the evening of 27 August 1940, the same day that Attorney General Robert Jackson officially ruled that the president had the legal right to act by executive order, thereby removing the final potential legislative roadblock, Lothian met with Hull and Knox, and tried to revise the draft agreement. Hull wanted to conclude the deal with the least possible delay, before isolationists and congressional critics

your law or your Admiral requires that any help you choose to give us must be presented as a *quid pro quo*, I do not see why the British Government have to come into that at all. Could you not say that you did not feel able to accept this fine offer which we make, unless the United States matched in some way, and that therefore the Admiral would be able to link the one with the other?" Gilbert, Churchill and America, 203-204; Gilbert, War Papers, 722-723; Leutze, 122; L. Woodward, 376-377.

²⁴⁴ The American draft began with the statement: "If the waters surrounding the British Isles became untenable for British warships, the British Fleet would in no event be surrendered or sunk, but would be sent to other ports of the Empire. Hull knew Churchill had made a similar statement on 4 June, but he wanted a "formal repetition." Chadwin, 105; Davis, Into the Storm, 610; Hull, 193, 836-838; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 766-767; Lash, 216; Leutze, 122-123; L. Woodward, 378-379.

realized that Britain would have offered the bases without the destroyers. He told Lothian that Admiral Stark was disturbed “at the possibility of being summoned before Congress to explain why he had given his certificate that the destroyers were not necessary for the defence of the United States when he is transferring them at once as against a promise to deliver naval bases and facilities at some time in the future.” Although he suggested to Lothian that a storm of protest was brewing over its dubious legality, it took more than an hour of argument to convince the ambassador that the United States government could not accept gifts. Lothian finally agreed to urge London to accept the American draft.²⁴⁵

The War Cabinet discussed the new drafts at their meeting on 29 August 1940. Although Churchill continued to argue for describing all the bases as gifts, given “in friendship and good will,” Halifax ultimately prevailed upon the prime minister to see that the real benefits from the arrangement lay in the intangible demonstration of solidarity between the two nations. Consequently, Churchill finally accepted the drafts of letters that Lothian had prepared, and thus the American plan. The War Cabinet wrote to Lothian that, while they would have preferred a transaction on the “no deal” basis, they understood the difficulties on the American side and greatly appreciated the efforts made by the administration to meet the British point of view.²⁴⁶

With the receipt of the War Cabinet’s acceptance, Lothian, Hull, and Knox met on 29 August 1940 and quickly reached final agreement. Churchill formally offered 99-year leases for naval and air bases in Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, several West Indian islands, and British Guiana. Britain presented two bases as gifts, and the rest as *quid pro quo* for the destroyers. An exchange of *aide-mémoire* made public between 29 August and 2 September formalized the vital fleet assurance, in which Lothian pledged that Britain would never sink or surrender its fleet. Lothian and Hull signed the essential

²⁴⁵ Hull, 839-840; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 767-768; Lash, 217; Leutze, 123-124; L. Woodward, 378. In the meantime, Churchill dispatched a letter to Roosevelt, on the same day, accepting in general outline the requirements that the United States had listed, although he continued to object to the publication of British assurances regarding the fleet. Gilbert, War Papers, 733-734; Langer and Gleason, 768; L. Woodward, 378-379.

²⁴⁶ Cadogan, 323; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 768; Leutze, 124; L. Woodward, 379.

documents regarding the bases at seven o'clock on the evening of 2 September 1940, and Admiral Stark signed the release for the destroyers the next day.²⁴⁷ The ceremony having been completed, Lothian and Derick Hoyer Millar, the Head of Chancery at the British Embassy and who had been very closely involved in the negotiations, returned with some sense of satisfaction to the Embassy, where they received a delayed telegram from Churchill, directing that certain verbal changes be made in the text of the agreement. Wheeler-Bennett recalled that Lothian, "with what I conceive to be a certain relish, for he considered that the negotiations had already been dragged out too long," sent the prime minister a short response: "Sorry: too late."²⁴⁸

Significance: Lothian Helps to Bake the "Sugar Cake"

The successful conclusion of the destroyers-for-bases exchange inspired varying interpretations. Sir Frederick Whyte, the former head of the Ministry of Information's American Department, suggested that the deal justified the value of Britain's publicity policy. On the other extreme, Max Beaverbrook, the Minister of Aircraft production, asserted that the deal demonstrated London's capacity for hard bargaining in the face of an American talent for extortion.²⁴⁹ Many in Britain very likely shared Beaverbrook's cynicism, given that, even in this moment of Anglo-American accord, President Roosevelt maneuvered for political advantage. After some last-minute discussion about how to handle the public announcement of the fleet assurance, Lothian and Hull apparently agreed that they would not disclose the assurance until after the destroyer transfer was made public, lest any mishandling of the matter affect the presidential election. Lothian, therefore, strongly urged the prime minister not to say that he intended the transfer of bases to be a free gesture of goodwill because this statement might trigger partisan political attacks, on the grounds that Roosevelt had acted without obtaining the consent of Congress, and that the

²⁴⁷ Billington, 151; Butler, Lord Lothian, 297-298; Chadwin, 105; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 768-769; Leutze, 124; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 29; L. Woodward, 380.

²⁴⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 95.

²⁴⁹ PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/3, Whyte to Lothian, 4 September 1940; PRO CAB 65/8, WM 236 (40) 6, 29 August 1940; Cull, 88.

transfer of the destroyers was an act of war calculated to involve the United States in the European conflict.²⁵⁰ At approximately the same time, however, as Lothian and Hull were signing the documents in Washington, the president held a press conference, during which he made the connection explicit. Although London had hoped that the president would not emphasize that aspect of the deal, Roosevelt in fact pointedly called the fleet assurance to the reporters' attention. *The New York Times* dispelled any anticipation that the American media would soft-pedal the announcement by proclaiming in bold headlines: "ROOSEVELT TRADES DESTROYERS FOR SEA BASES / TELLS CONGRESS HE ACTED ON OWN AUTHORITY / BRITAIN PLEDGES NEVER TO YIELD OR SINK FLEET." The article further reported that the United States had received a "solemn pledge" from the British government "not to scuttle or surrender the British Fleet under any conditions."²⁵¹

Initially, neither side gained much from the agreement. It took months of argument to specify the sites for the American bases, and by the end of 1940, only nine of the 50 aged destroyers were fit for active service with the Royal Navy.²⁵² In the meantime, while Britain's needs remained dire, Lothian and Arthur Purvis of the British Purchasing Commission in Washington D.C. realized that there would be virtually no realistic hope of any further American aid that year.²⁵³

Nevertheless, the consummation of the destroyers-for-bases exchange fundamentally tied Britain and the United States closer together. In spite of the haggling over points of detail, and in spite of the

²⁵⁰ The Foreign Office instructed Lothian to remind Hull and Roosevelt that Churchill would doubtless have all possible regard for the president's political difficulties, but that Churchill had already made in Parliament the statement to which Mr. Hull had found objection, and that the Churchill government also had difficulties with sectors of British public opinion that thought "that we had the worst of the bargain." Lash, 217; L. Woodward, 380.

²⁵¹ *The New York Times*, 4 September 1940; Chadwin, 105-106; Goodhart, 180; Leutze, 124-125. Roosevelt also characterized the deal as "the most important action in the reinforcement of our national defense that has been taken since the Louisiana Purchase." Lash, 219.

²⁵² Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 86-87. When the destroyers finally arrived in Britain, they came with a moving display of American sympathy. Immense care had been taken in fitting them out. There were bars of soap and clean towels, cocktail cabinets were full stocked; toys were left for the children of the sailors who would take them over; and everywhere messages of encouragement were scrawled on the walls and bulkheads: "Sock 'em Hell" and "Kill the Bastards." Dimpleby-Reynolds, 127.

²⁵³ Cull, 94.

atmosphere of cooperation that the agreement ultimately fostered, perhaps the most important consequence of the transaction was the process of bargaining itself. After four months of negotiations, in which both London and Washington engaged in considerable maneuvering to gain advantage, both sides realized that they were not playing a zero-sum game; something gained by one side did not automatically detract from the other's security. For most Britons, the agreement represented a decidedly unneutral act by the United States; a fact of life that was perfectly understood by most. "It would be impossible," the *New York Times* reported from London, "to overstate the jubilation in official and unofficial circles caused today by President Roosevelt's announcement that fifty United States destroyers were coming to help Great Britain in her hour of peril." The process and the agreement, therefore, represented a significant step away from the formal, detached, and periodically adversarial nature of the Anglo-American relationship, and toward a closer, integrated wartime alliance.

At the same time, the Axis powers also understood the deal as an unexpected military turning point. Hitler, who had long discounted the participation of the United States, wrote Mussolini that they had to regard American intervention in the war "as a possibility to be faced any day now." The German navy was particularly concerned, and appreciated that the acquisition of British bases advanced the air and naval frontiers of the United States "along a wide arc into the Atlantic Ocean." Grand Admiral Rader therefore urged Hitler to launch pre-emptive moves into Gibraltar and the Canaries, fearing that the United States would soon enter the war and occupy the Spanish and Portuguese islands in the Atlantic, "in an attempt to influence and if necessary take over the French West African colonies."

Consequently, Churchill thought the deal could be presented as a British victory worth far more than its face value. As he told his colleagues, they had exchanged "a bunch of flowers for a sugar cake." He likely considered the destroyers-for-bases exchange as a down payment on further aid, as he presumably was not referring to the 50 decrepit destroyers, some of which barely made it across the Atlantic, when he spoke of a "sugar cake."²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Lash, 218; Leutze, 126.

Lothian also described the destroyers-for-bases agreement as an event of historic significance. In spite of the one-sided nature of the agreement, he wrote, it would nevertheless strengthen the defensive security both of the United States and the British Commonwealth: “The fifty destroyers will help the British Navy to prevent invasion and the blockade of Britain and to keep Hitler’s and Mussolini’s fleets out of the Atlantic. The transfer of bases provides a final line of defense for the Americas in the extremely improbable event of the British navy’s no longer being able to plug the exits from Europe into the Atlantic.”²⁵⁵ With the conclusion of the deal, Lothian asserted, the United States at last accepted the argument that the British Fleet represented America’s outer line of defense; in order to strengthen this line, Washington contributed destroyers. In a similar way, Britain at last recognized that the British transatlantic islands represented a significant line of America’s defense; in order to strengthen this line, London offered base facilities. Moreover, he maintained, the deal would make for excellent propaganda on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly after the Admiralty decided to name the destroyers after towns common to both countries.²⁵⁶

Lothian played a vital role in forging the agreement. Roosevelt and Churchill clearly preferred to work through Lothian rather than Joseph Kennedy, who was not only defeatist and pessimistic, but whose embassy had undergone a security breach in May 1940.²⁵⁷ Roosevelt indeed provided only a minimum of information during the negotiations to Kennedy, who did not learn the full details until after the conclusion of the deal. Kennedy was furious and complained to Roosevelt:

When I consider the amount of information that the British Government has made available to Lothian and the paucity of background information furnished on matters of vital importance to me, I can find no common sense explanation. If it were not for the fact that the Prime Minister has seen fit to send some cables . . . I would have no knowledge of the matter whatsoever.

²⁵⁵ NAS, GD40/17/403/248, 4 September 1940.

²⁵⁶ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 298; Cull, 94; Hyde, 39. Lothian wrote to Lady Astor that American public opinion was “moving so fast towards recognising that cooperation with England is essential to American defence that while there will be a row in Congress, I don’t think there will be serious trouble.” Nevertheless, he asked her to “tell people in England not to talk about an Anglo-American alliance. That always means entanglement in Europe to U.S.A. Strengthening the defence of both is a better line.” Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 298; Lash, 217.

²⁵⁷ The Tyler Kent affair. See pp. 261, note 100.

If the situation in Britain were not so desperate, Kennedy suggested, he would have resigned his post immediately and returned home.²⁵⁸

While Lothian tended to be at his best in helping to smooth out difficulties, as well as interpreting the motives and views of the two parties, he nevertheless assumed a central role in facilitating and expediting the negotiations. It was Lothian, after all, who took the initiative following the collapse of France, by revisiting his own 23 May 1940 proposal to offer the United States base facilities on British possessions in the Western Hemisphere. It was Lothian who worked, through his contacts with pro-interventionist and pro-British pressure groups in the United States, to shape a political atmosphere that made it easier and safer for the Roosevelt administration to take action -- especially his surreptitious providing of sensitive naval information to the Century Group, apparently without the knowledge or, presumably, the approval of Whitehall. The data provided by Lothian undoubtedly helped to focus attention on the real gravity of Britain's predicament. In the end, the information likely helped to create a far more favorable reception when the deal was announced on 3 September 1940. It was Lothian who relentlessly pushed Churchill to write the president, on 31 July, the "most moving statement of our needs and dangers." It was Lothian who hammered out the final details with Sumner Welles and Cordell Hull.

After all was settled, the War Cabinet complimented Lothian on his handling of the whole affair. Sir Frederick Whyte wrote a letter of congratulations "on your handling of the matter, and . . . everyone here is delighted at the result and the manner you have paved the way for it [sic]."²⁵⁹ In a personal minute to Halifax, on 5 September 1940, Churchill praised Lothian and asked, "Would it not be well to send a telegram to Lord Lothian expressing War Cabinet approval of the manner in which he handled the whole

²⁵⁸ De Bedts, 212; Swift, 270-272. In response, Roosevelt sought to soothe Kennedy's bruised feelings: "The destroyer and base matter was handled in part through you and in part through Lothian but the situation developed into a mapping proposition where the Army and Navy are in constant consultation with me here and the daily developments have had to be explained verbally to Lothian. There is no thought of embarrassing you and only a practical necessity for personal conversations makes it easier to handle details here. Beschloss, 211-212; Schwarz, 294-296.

²⁵⁹ PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/3, Whyte to Lothian, 4 September 1940.

destroyer question, and paying him a compliment?"²⁶⁰ Consequently, the next day, 6 September, Halifax wired the ambassador:

On behalf of the War Cabinet I desire to express to you the warm appreciation of His Majesty's Government at the successful outcome of the negotiations which terminated on the 2nd of September. The credit for this agreement, so important for the future of Anglo-American relations, is due in no small measure to the skill and patience which you have displayed throughout the negotiations, as also to the unique position which you have succeeded in establishing both as regards the United States Administration and public.²⁶¹

Lothian's activities, particularly those that were designed to sell the deal to the American public, demonstrated again his awareness of how American policy-making operated. While he intended his public addresses to initiate "ripples of discussion" among opinion-leaders, and while he sought to cultivate strong relations with the American media to unwittingly do London's publicity, by the summer of 1940, Lothian appreciated that Britain would not get American help simply through emotional appeals and warnings. Moreover, because many Americans remained suspicious of "perfidious Albion" and its inevitable propaganda, Lothian continued seeking to convince Americans by hard objective facts that assistance was really needed.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ PRO, FO 371/22460, A 4123/3742/45, Tel. 2185, Churchill to Halifax, 5 September 1940; Gilbert, War Papers, 780; L. Woodward, 381. Churchill furthermore recommended Lothian for appointment as a Knight of the Thistle, the most distinguished Scottish Order of Knighthood. Butler, Lord Lothian, 305.

²⁶¹ PRO, FO 371/22460, A 4123/3742/45, Tel. 2185, Halifax to Lothian, 6 September 1940; PRO, FO 371/22460, A 4123/3742/45, Tel. 1964, Lothian to Halifax, 10 September 1940.

²⁶² Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 38.

CHAPTER SIX: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR LEND-LEASE

The fall of 1940 brought a momentary lull to the Second World War. By early October, it became increasingly obvious that the Royal Air Force had repulsed Germany's attempt to establish air mastery over Britain. In one respect, German air losses continued to be prohibitive. Furthermore, instead of the anticipated disintegration of British morale, Londoners demonstrated that they could "take it." As a result, in the middle of September 1940, Hitler decided to abandon the Battle of Britain and postpone Operation Sea Lion indefinitely, although, as the Luftwaffe shifted to night bombing, German bombing of British cities continued on, also indefinitely. At the same time, the autumn likewise brought a lull to Anglo-American diplomacy. In the United States, as it appeared less and less likely that Hitler would order an invasion of Britain that year, Americans turned their attention back to domestic politics, namely, to the impending presidential election on 5 November 1940. It gradually became clear to the British, therefore, that unless Japan forced the issue, no decisive action or initiative could be expected from the United States until after the election.

Yet, Britain remained in great danger. Britain, alone, was still on the defensive, and its survival still in question, dependent upon its ability to repel what London believed to be an inevitable German advance into the Mediterranean and, more immediately, to counter the continuing U-boat assaults on British commerce. Indeed, in the fall of 1940, Nazi Germany began moving the war to the peripheries, the Atlantic Ocean in particular. This move, in the long run, posed an even greater threat to the survival and security of Britain. If Germany could deny Britain essential imports of food, raw materials, and munitions, it might defeat Britain without the need for a direct invasion. Over three days in October, for example, 33 ships, including twenty ships out of one convoy, were sunk by U-boats in their approaches to the British Islands. Irish neutrality, which denied the Royal Navy the use of ports and bases in southern Ireland, exacerbated this situation by forcing the British to route their convoys to the north of Ireland.¹

¹ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 855, 869-875, 926; Keegan, 101-105; Lash, 249, 255-256; Lyons, 101-102; Murray and Millett, 88-89; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 145.

In the fall of 1940, Britain had only one realistic hope of survival and of victory, and that lay with the United States. Because the United States had become Britain's major external source of material help, supply and finance became the critical issues in Anglo-American relations over the winter of 1940-1941. Like many other British leaders, Lothian grew increasingly concerned about Britain's impending inability to continue paying for the munitions and essential civil supplies that it had to purchase from the United States. Consequently, he initiated steps to address the supply and finance questions. In doing so, Lothian helped to push the Roosevelt administration toward the Lend-Lease program.

Selling the Drama, Continued

By the late fall 1940, American public opinion had become increasingly pro-British. The nation's hatred for Hitler had gradually become transformed into an increasingly overt sympathy for Britain, a transformation borne out by public opinion polls. In May 1940, when Gallup asked, "Do you think the United States should keep out of war or do everything possible to help England even at the risk of getting into war ourselves?" a majority favored continued isolation. In November, however, American opinion evenly divided on the question. By December, a full 60 percent were willing to risk war.² Therefore, on 21 October, Halifax informed the War Cabinet of "an almost miraculous change of opinion in the United States after it had become clear that the country was effectively resisting the German air attack." A month later, Lothian wrote Lady Astor that there was "an overwhelming sentiment for giving us all immediate assistance short of war."³

In part, this transformation was due to the efforts and the courageous bearing of the British leadership. When Harold Ickes and others listened to Churchill on 15 September, following a devastating German attack on London that day, he noted that there was no sign of weakness in Churchill's voice as he warned Britons that, although the worst was still to come, Britain would defend itself: "I am more and more impressed," Ickes wrote, "that Churchill is a really great leader." He attended a dinner at the British

² Cull, 109-110.

³ NAS, GD40/17/398, Lothian to Nancy Astor, 27 November 1940; PRO CAB 65/8, 274 (40) 3, 21 October 1940.

Embassy that same evening and was “tremendously impressed with the self-control of these Britishers. One would not have realized from their talk and actions that London was being subjected to the most terrible bombardment in its history and that England was fighting for its very life. . . . Lothian remarked that two of his houses had been destroyed by bombs that day or the day before and [another guest Lord Melchett, a British industrialist] took it as if reference had been made to the loss of a game of cricket.”⁴

More important, however, much of the credit for the “miraculous change of opinion” involved the power of popular culture. The medium of radio significantly helped to transform American opinion, particularly as Whitehall liberalized its broadcasting restrictions. The stirring broadcasts of American radio correspondents, including Edward R. Murrow and Eric Sevareid, who were ultimately allowed to provide live commentary during German air raids, presented the American people with the genuine sounds of war; as Sevareid later recalled, they “chilled the spine of America.”⁵ Radio news broadcasts alone, however, did not fuel greater American sympathy for Britain. Although many radio stations in the United States banned war songs, British patriotic music could be heard almost everywhere. In December 1940, Sir William Ridsdale, the deputy-director of the Foreign Office News Department, noted such a marked increase in pro-British feeling running through the United States, that “even strip-tease dancers discard their brassieres and what-have-yous to the tune of ‘There’ll always be an England.’”⁶ Likewise, a long published poem, “The White Cliffs,” by Alice Duer Miller, achieved phenomenal success. It described an American’s love for Britain, its villages, people, and history -- and of her willingness to send her only son to die to preserve it.⁷ The dramatic news from the war coincided with a wave of pro-British, interventionist movies. The most powerful and influential was *Foreign Correspondent*, co-produced by Walter Wanger and Alfred Hitchcock, which opened the same week that Murrow gave one of his most

⁴ Ickes, 3: 317-319, entry for 15 September 1940.

⁵ Mark Bernstein and Alex Lubertozzi, World War II on the Air: Edward R. Murrow and the Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2003), 89-102; Cull, 102-109; Sperber, 163-174.

⁶ PRO FO 371/24232, A5217/26/46, Ridsdale to Balfour, 14 December 1940; Cull, 110.

⁷ Cull, 110-111.

dramatic live broadcasts from Trafalgar Square, and reached most theaters in early September, the very week that the Germans began the Blitz on London. As a result, these films provided a fertile cultural environment for the news reports from Britain. American audiences frequently watched such movies with the latest newsreel from London fresh in their minds, and returned home to hear the same war live on their 9:00 radio news.⁸

This evident upsurge of American popular support for Britain, however, did not translate into significant material assistance. In spite of growing donations and contributions made by private American citizens and relief organizations, such as “Bundles for Britain” and the American Red Cross, the United States government sent no further aid. Even after the Battle of Britain, there persisted serious doubts in Washington as to Britain’s ability to survive. While Roosevelt’s leading cabinet advisers became convinced that the time had come more aggressively to provide Britain with material aid, they nevertheless hesitated to take firm action because of lingering doubts about Britain’s survival. Administration doubts, moreover, reflected doubts expressed elsewhere. From London, Joseph Kennedy remained outspoken in his belief that the British could not withstand the German attack and predicted that even if they did, they would be so weakened, that they would be unable to help the United States against the Axis. He further asserted that Britain had neither the leadership nor the productive capacity to withstand the punishment continually meted out by the Germans. Breckinridge Long, an Assistant Secretary of State, wrote in his diary that he expected Britain to give in to Germany. Former president Herbert Hoover and Republican Senator Robert Taft proposed that the United States provide enough aid to enable Britain to negotiate a better peace with the Germans.⁹

From the perspective of London, American remoteness was not simply frustrating; it was also difficult to understand. In part, the British blamed the Roosevelt administration’s reticence on the

⁸ Cull, 113-114. In addition, blatantly pro-British and anti-Nazi messages appeared in *The Long Voyage Home* by John Ford, *I Married a Nazi* and *Four Sons* by Darryl F. Zanuck, *Escape* and *The Mortal Storm* by MGM, and Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*. Cull, 110-112.

⁹ Beschloss, 212; Kimball, 74-75; William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War, 1940-1941* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 56; Swift, 280-281.

impending election. Some, however, pointed to a sense of complacency that began to spread as it became clear that the Germans were not going to invade Britain. Many more, however, attributed Washington's continuing detachment to the limits of the American public's understanding of the war. While some admitted that part of the blame rested with the British government, which had never clearly specified its own war aims, others argued that the American press had either ignored or forgotten the broader issues of the war. Lothian in particular believed this to be a side effect of the new and much looser reporting restrictions. The American media's license to cover the Blitz, he argued, as well as the experience of being caught up in it, had ensured that Americans were fixated on nothing but the bombing of London: "As a matter of fact we are suffering a little from the greater freedom they have been given at the moment because most of them have become so obsessed with the bombing of London . . . that they cable about nothing else." He concluded that "It gives a wonderful reputation for courage but tends to put the war out of perspective."¹⁰

Consequently, during the fall of 1940, amid American inactivity, British officials began to take steps to launch a more full-scale publicity and propaganda campaign in the United States. Specifically, London began to establish the institutional machinery necessary to expand such publicity efforts. Although official efforts initially bogged down in the continuing interdepartmental rivalry, Lothian played a central role in the creation of the two most important institutions: the Inter-Allied Information Committee [IAIC] and the British Press Service [BPS].

Lothian had tried to launch the IAIC in the spring of 1940 -- when he sought to fund and direct the propaganda efforts within the United States of the smaller Allied nations. In late September 1940, Lothian resurrected this idea. He sought to make use of fresh voices, those of Britain's allies, such as the Czechs and the Poles, which could promote the Allied cause within the United States without offending American sensibilities. In Lothian's view, the IAIC would enable London to counteract the danger posed by anti-British propaganda currently emanating from France. Lothian had noted the establishment of a

¹⁰ PRO FO 800/398, PP/40/4, Lothian to Whyte, 24 September 1940; Cull, 114-115.

French section within the German consulate in New York, and he suspected that Britain's former ally would soon be "reading from a German script." In order to offset that possibility, he proposed that Britain direct the Free French news and propaganda through the IAIC:

Essential that we should maintain an Allied publicity front as the Germans are losing no time in exploiting Anglo-French differences and certain Americans are taking every opportunity for their own political reasons of decrying British ability to speak for the other Allies.

Lothian added that any loss of contact between Allied groups in the United States would therefore place Britain at a grave disadvantage."¹¹

Lothian's initiatives, however, drew a mixed reception in London. Duff Cooper, who still felt that he should control all publicity activity, argued that it would "a mistake" to set up such a bureau. While he worried, for one thing, that the expense for the bureau would fall on the Ministry of Information, Cooper was more concerned that he would not be in control: "Such assistance we may obtain from such allies as remain might prove more embarrassing than helpful. . . . If it were to be really inter-Allied, it would, I suppose, necessitate consultation with the governments of Poland, Norway, Holland and Belgium -- an obvious waste of time." In the meantime, while Halifax found the notion of cooperating with the Free French rather appalling, he nevertheless did not want to rule out close collaboration with the Dutch, Poles, and Czechs, who, he pointed out to Cooper, would not necessarily "require previous consultation with their Governments."¹²

The Foreign Office, however, approved,¹³ and the Inter-Allied Information Committee began operations on 24 September 1940 under Michael Huxley, formerly the British Embassy press attaché. Lothian had originally hoped to use the Allied representatives to address their own national minorities

¹¹ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Empax Tel. 14, Lothian to Foreign Office, 28 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Empax Tel. 17, Lothian to Foreign Office, 4 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 1283, Lothian to Foreign Office, 9 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 7 October 1940; Cull, 117.

¹² PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Cooper to Halifax, 2 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Cooper to Halifax, 3 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Halifax to Cooper, 5 July 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 1407, Foreign Office to Lothian, 6 July 1940.

¹³ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Foreign Office to Lothian (draft), 4 July 1940; Cull, 118.

within the United States, quietly turning the Polish-Americans of Pittsburgh, for example, into a fifth column for the British cause. Huxley nevertheless proceeded to transform the IAIC into a steady public news office and center for its member states to address their common concerns for the future of Europe. In such a way, the IAIC helped to defuse the image of Britain fighting alone and exclusively for its Empire. By 1941, it provided an ever-widening stream of information on the resistance movements in Europe and began working directly with the interventionist groups, helping the White Committee, for example, to launch its own news service devoted to Allied issues.¹⁴

In addition to the IAIC, Lothian played an equally central role in the establishment of the British Press Service, which also effectively promoted Britain and its cause within the United States. On 6 September 1940, at approximately the same time that the Blitz was beginning, the Ministry of Information held meetings in London in order to discuss a proposal for a new propaganda bureau in New York City, which presumably would enable Cooper to maintain control over British propaganda activities in the United States. Duff Cooper presided and Wheeler-Bennett flew in from New York to represent Lothian's position. The proposal had been developed in August by Stephen Lawford Childs, Cooper's original choice to oversee the founding of a Ministry of Information office in New York.¹⁵ Lothian, as it turned out, exercised much influence on the formulation of Child's proposal. First, while the Foreign Office had appointed Childs to oversee the bureau, theoretically under the direction of the Ministry of Information, in fact, his functions came under the control of the British Embassy. Second, although appointed by Cooper, Childs had quickly embraced the ambassador's vision of a British Embassy press agency in New York City; he quickly took charge of the embassy's dealings with the Ministry of Information in London, as well as with the American press corps in Washington D.C. The outstanding

¹⁴ Cull, 117-118, 130. The governments-in-exile of Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, and Norway, as well as observers from Belgium and Luxembourg, all participated, while Robert Valeur, formerly of the French Information Bureau in New York, represented the "France Forever" committee. By the second meeting, émigré Poles had joined, and the committee was preparing to draw representatives of the remaining Allies into the fold. As a result, during the spring of 1941, the IAIC also included representatives of Denmark, Australia, and China. Cull, 118.

¹⁵ PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 1254, Foreign Office to Lothian, 25 June 1940; PRO FO 371/24229, A3197/26/45, Tel. 1161, Lothian to Foreign Office, 28 June 1940.

feature of his proposal was the establishment of an office in New York City, as an annex to the British Embassy in Washington, under Child's direction, which would oversee British publicity organization and activity in the United States.¹⁶

The result was the birth, in October 1940, of the British Press Service. Lothian envisioned the BPS as the nerve center of British publicity in the United States. It would cultivate connections and relationships with American newspaper and radio commentators, issue "hot news" and features, refute enemy propaganda, and build links with religious organizations and organized labor. He took particular care that even the title of the new organization fit these objectives. For example, he consciously avoided the word "relations," which, he argued, had "fallen into some disrepute when used in connection with these sorts of activities," and principally because the word reminded Americans of their own government's "rash of public relations departments." He chose, instead, "service," explaining that "the word 'service' produces a benevolent reaction in America. We do not wish to be accused of making overt plans to 'influence' the press; although of course it is quite understood that the organisation will specialise in 'relations' rather than acting as a spot news agency."¹⁷ Furthermore, Lothian intended that the BPS would avoid secret "whispering campaigns" in order to introduce subversive rumors into the population at large, which had been a practice long favored by British agents, mingling in bars and thoroughfares. Instead, the BPS would primarily be responsible for surveying the American press. In order to do so, Lothian used the former BLINY Survey Section as the core of the BPS, whose staff he recruited wholesale. Because it was made up of personnel who already knew and were familiar to the New York press establishment, and because it opened an office on the forty-fourth floor of the RCA Building, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, near the offices of NBC, CBS, numerous New York City newspapers, and wire

¹⁶ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, agenda and minutes of Ministry of Information meeting, 6 September 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2110, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 26 September 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Balfour minute, 7 October 1940; Cull, 118.

¹⁷ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Empax Tel. 2, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 19 September 1940; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 91-92.

services, the British Press Service very quickly became a popular institution for the conduct of British public relations in the United States.¹⁸

In deference to the impending presidential election, work began cautiously. From the beginning, the BPS sought to provide reference material for editors, correspondents, and radio commentators. It prepared information bulletins based on Ministry of Information material and arranged transport to Britain for Americans seeking to cover the war. Equally significant, the office came to serve as the primary point of contact between the British government and the American pro-interventionist movement. Aubrey Morgan and Wheeler-Bennett maintained close contact with their opposite numbers in the Century Group at least once a week by telephone, providing them with a steady stream of BPS news releases, as well as confidential briefings on the latest material from London.¹⁹

In the meantime, the BPS confronted bureaucratic delays and interdepartmental rivalries. For example, the Foreign Office reacted unfavorably and the Treasury inevitably raised obstacles. The most important difficulties, however, came from the Ministry of Information. Neither Duff Cooper nor Angus Fletcher, the director of the BLINY, was entirely happy with the BPS. Fletcher did not appreciate being outflanked by Lothian and refused to help the new office. Cooper in the meantime still wanted to bring the entire publicity and propaganda operation under his control from London and, if necessary, impose his views on “local representatives,” prompting T. North Whitehead of the Foreign Office to quip that George III made the same mistake.²⁰ On 18 September 1940, therefore, even before Lothian had set up the BPS, Cooper announced his intentions to establish a Public Relations Officer and a Press Relations Office, both in New York City, and ensure “that these officers . . . should have a large measure of independence.” In response, Lothian testily cabled the Ministry of Information that, while he certainly appreciated Cooper’s concern for quick action between London and New York, he nevertheless insisted

¹⁸ PRO FO 371/24231, A3772/26/45, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 15 August 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Empax Tel. 2, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 19 September 1940; Cull, 119-120.

¹⁹ Chadwin, 138-139; Cull, 120.

²⁰ Cull, 120-121.

that it “be understood that in all questions of policy or in matters of political importance the New York organisation must be under my general guidance and control.”²¹ On 24 September, however, Lothian received a copy of telegram sent to Childs by Douglas Williams, the new director of the Ministry’s American Division, announcing that the Ministry intended to send certain journalists to New York City to serve as “our direct press contact.” Consequently, on 26 September, Lothian acerbically reiterated that “no person, journalist or otherwise, be sent with such mission without my approval,” stressing that Cooper’s designs threatened to create confusion, through overlapping and divided responsibilities:

It is most important at this juncture to avoid misunderstanding, confusion and criticism, which will inevitably ensue if during the election period persons are sent out to this country whose activities do not form part of properly co-ordinated controlled and agreed scheme.²²

The Ministry assured the ambassador on 30 September that “nothing will be done without fully consulting your views,” and that, in fact, they intended to send only one journalist to New York.²³ Specifically, Cooper appointed René MacColl as “Chief British Press Relations Officer in the United States.”²⁴ Lothian responded with another furious telegram. He complained to Cooper on 4 October that “I had asked that at this stage and during the electoral period, every effort should be made to avoid publicity about the new organizations to be set up here in fulfilment [*sic*] of the plans agreed to between us. I had also asked that the use of the word ‘relations’ in any description for public consumption of New York organization should be avoided. Furthermore, it had always been agreed that no appointments

²¹ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Empax Tel. 2, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 19 September 1940.

²² PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2110, Lothian to the Ministry of Information, 26 September 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Empax 193, Douglas Williams to Stephen Childs, 24 September 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2129, Lothian to the Ministry of Information, 26 September 1940; PRO FO 371/24232, A4665/26/45, memorandum, “Ministry of Information Activities in the United States,” 25 October 1940.

²³ Due to an error in the transmission of telegrams *en clair*, instead of in code, William’s 24 September telegram to Childs read “journalists” instead of “journalist.” PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2415, Ministry of Information to Lothian, 30 September 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Charles Peake to John Balfour, 28 September 1940.

²⁴ Cooper’s appointment of MacColl reflected his effort to professionalize the Ministry of Information, as well as his disdain for the men who had hitherto borne the burden of British publicity; Morgan and Wheeler-Bennett were stung to discover that Cooper considered them no more than “monied amateurs.” PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Balfour minute 10 October 1940; Cull, 121.

should be made without my being consulted.” And now, that same day, 4 October, Lothian wrote that he had received a telegram from Douglas Williams, requesting that the ambassador approach William Allen White in order to establish a telephone link between his committee and the Ministry of Information. Lothian angrily asserted that, “It would be most disastrous to the William Allen White Committee were it ever to be established that it was communicating and collaborating with any branch of His Majesty’s Government.” This was a charge currently being made by German propagandists and isolationists: “The enemy is already organizing the ‘America First’ committee to counter [the] William Allen White movement.” Lothian indicated that this recent volley of telegrams had ever more alerted him to prevent London from taking any measure that would cause “further damage” to British publicity. He asked the Ministry to postpone MacColl’s arrival until after the election and to instruct him to accept duties under the acting director, Alan Dudley.²⁵

Perhaps taken aback by the aggressiveness of Lothian’s response, Cooper apologized for the misunderstanding caused by the telegraph transmission problems and the timing of announcements. More important, he conceded the ambassador’s principal points; primarily, he reappointed MacColl to serve as “assistant director” of the BPS, with responsibility for the supply of news to the American press and broadcast networks -- although not without at first receiving a nudge from Halifax.²⁶

In this growing bureaucratic turf war between the ambassador and the Minister of Information, the Foreign Office clearly came down on the side of Lothian. According to John Balfour, the head of the Foreign Office’s American Department, the underlying objective of the Ministry of Information was presumably to acquire as much and as complete control of publicity in the United States as they could, and for this purpose, dissociate Childs from Washington and the BLINY from the Foreign Office. “This

²⁵ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2022, Lothian to Cooper, 4 October 1940. John Balfour of the Foreign Office completely concurred in Lothian’s assessment, minuting on 7 October that Williams’s request reflected a “lamentable misconception of how to handle publicity in the United States.”

²⁶ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Halifax to Cooper, 6 October 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Cooper to Halifax, 10 October 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2620, Cooper to Lothian, 12 October 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, Tel. 2621, Cooper to Lothian, 13 October 1940; Cull, 122.

tinkering about with the machinery whilst the blitzkrieg is in full progress makes one despair of the Ministry, who would be much better advised to fall in with Lord Lothian's plans." Six weeks later, Balfour noted that the whole episode "savors of an amateurish intrigue" on the part of the Ministry of Information and Duff Cooper to "set up a rival channel of communication" to Lothian and Childs: "I fear that Mr. Duff Cooper has all along wished to establish such an independent channel of communication with the Ministry and wishes, in spite of professions in the Ministry's telegrams to the contrary, to ignore the views on this subject of the man on the spot." It is obvious, as Lothian had pointed out, that "the presence in the United States of persons engaged in British publicity whose activities are not subject to centralised control" can only lead to misunderstanding and confusion, overlapping and divided responsibility.²⁷ On 9 October, Balfour met with Williams who spoke somewhat bitterly about the whole incident, pleading that he had only tried "to get a move on as a journalist in arranging that a qualified journalist should be appointed in New York, which Lord Lothian himself recommended months ago."

Balfour, in no uncertain terms, scorched Mr. Williams:

I said that, whilst fully appreciating his zeal, I had formed the conclusion from combing through the past correspondence that he had handled matters with a lack of precision and in a way which certainly justified Lord Lothian's vigorous reaction . . . I pointed out that he had proceeded in a way which gave the impression that the Ministry were attempting to set up an independent channel of communication regardless of the wishes of the man on the spot and without consulting him, and that the announcement of Mr. MacColl's appointment on the 18th September, which he attempted later to explain away . . . was a particularly inept performance. I also left him in no doubt that he had been extremely amateurish in even suggesting to Lord Lothian that the Ministry should be allowed to establish a direct channel of communication with the Allen White Committee.²⁸

In a further minute to Halifax, David Scott asserted that the Foreign Office should back Lothian:

In the hope of getting their own way, [the Ministry of Information] eventually sent out Mr. Childs; but he is regarded by them as having gone over to the enemy because he has decided to have his headquarters in Washington instead of New York. They therefore now wish to send out another man, Mr. McColl [*sic*], whom they want to put at the head of the whole of Mr. Childs' organization in New York. Lord Lothian is unwilling to agree to this, because it would not fit in with Mr. Child's carefully planned scheme,

²⁷ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, minute by Balfour, 29 August 1940; PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, minute by Balfour, 7 October 1940.

²⁸ PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, minute by Balfour, 10 October 1940.

would create difficulties with the people already working in New York, and would be misrepresented in the United States as the first step in the creation of a new propaganda organization. We should support Lord Lothian strongly against the Ministry of Information on this question.²⁹

By this point, indeed, Lothian was in a very strong position. He had used Ministry funds to set up the IAIC. He commanded the loyalty of Childs and Wheeler-Bennett, as well as an expansionist faction within the BLINY, which wanted to streamline its organizational structure, expand its staff, and thus provide for rapid and efficient replies to enquiries from American newspapers and radio.³⁰

In the meantime, MacColl arrived in the United States on 19 November 1940, believing himself empowered to take charge of the BPS. He discovered very quickly, however, that the staff at the BPS did not acknowledge Duff Cooper's authority to have appointed him; Lothian himself also saw MacColl, momentarily at least, as a threat to the BPS. As a result, the situation became "increasingly delicate on account of phraseology in MacColl's letter of introduction." MacColl endured about two weeks of frustration during which his new colleagues withheld telegrams addressed to him as the "Director of the BPS." Consequently, on 30 November, Lothian wired Cooper and suggested that the Minister back off:

I now feel very strongly that press and publicity questions are at this juncture so important that it would be unwise to do anything to disturb the smooth working of the BPS and its satisfactory development. It would not, I feel, be part of wisdom to confide its direction to a new arrival, however brilliant his journalistic gifts, who has not had time to familiarise himself with the very complicated local situation involved, and who, moreover, has had not in my view had the administrative experience to enable him to take full charge of this organisation.

He asked Cooper to accept this arrangement as being in the "best interests of our cause."³¹ As it turned out, MacColl warmed to his responsibilities with style and dispatch. He established cordial relations not only with the New York press world, but within the BPS as well. His humor, commitment to the BPS,

²⁹ PRO FO 371/24232, A4665/26/45, minute by David Scott, 13 November 1940. John Balfour minuted on 7 October, and Cadogan concurred on 8 October, that the American Department "is strongly of opinion that we should support Lord Lothian" and that efforts must be made to persuade Cooper to accept this position. PRO FO 371/24231, A4025/26/45, minutes by Balfour and Cadogan.

³⁰ Cull, 118-119.

³¹ PRO FO 371/24232, A5183/26/45, Lothian to Ministry of Information, 30 November 1940; Cull, 122.

and disregard for Foreign Office procedure quickly won over his office mates. As a result, British relations with the New York press began to prosper as never before. By early 1941, the BPS was stable and a popular organization for the conduct of British public relations in the United States, functioning effectively as a news agency, providing reliable, free, and generally British stories and photographs, and working to create, as Lothian had envisioned, an ever-growing demand for its services.³²

The ultimate reason for the success of the BPS, however, was Lothian. According to Wheeler-Bennett, not only did Lothian take the initial step to establishing “this compact and smoothly functioning machine,” which effectively “served the interests of Britain in America . . . for the remainder of the war,” he also rescued it from the bureaucratic quagmire:

On his own initiative and authority, and disregarding the objections of London, he gave instructions to rent new office premises and engage staff, cutting the Gordian knot of finance by drawing upon official funds at his own immediate disposal. Faced with a fait accompli, Whitehall capitulated unconditionally.

At a moment when it appeared that the BPS might disintegrate before it was fully functional, Lothian took the type of action, which “made him such an inspiring chief to work for.”³³

London Awaits the Fifth of November

From London’s perspective, arguably the most significant consideration that explained the temporary lull in Anglo-American diplomacy during the fall of 1940 was the impending presidential election on 5 November. As a result of the campaign, the Roosevelt administration’s attention to questions of American assistance to Britain became increasingly sidelined during the fall of 1940. Although Churchill wrote the president several letters over the course of September and October, appealing for further American aircraft, shipping, and munitions,³⁴ and although Lothian appealed

³² Cull, 122-123; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 92-93. Over the course of 1941, the BPS, led by Dudley, Morgan, MacColl, and Wheeler-Bennett, built a vast network of contacts, including interventionists, academics, German refugees, and members of the American press, on both the senior level, editors and publishers, and lower levels, reporters and columnists. It scored its first major propaganda scoop in February 1941, when they produced a series of photographs, smuggled out of occupied Poland, which showed graphic scenes of Nazi butchery, and provided them to the liberal newspaper *PM*. Cull, 128-129. See BPS reports in PRO FO 371/24245, A4694/131/45.

³³ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 92-93.

³⁴ Gilbert, War Papers, 854 [22 September 1940], 902 [3 October 1940], 1003-1004 [27 October 1940].

repeatedly for the initiation of staff talks, many aspects of the British war effort slid into a position of suspended animation -- not just the major problems of supply and finance, but also plans to improve British publicity and propaganda in the United States -- primarily because of the election.

For Lothian, therefore, the time seemed opportune to return to Britain for a brief working vacation. He left Washington on 15 October 1940, arrived in London on 20 October, and remained in Britain until 11 November. Although the United States army attaché in London, General Raymond Lee, suspected that the ambassador had deliberately and cleverly arranged to be out of Washington during the delicate election period,³⁵ Lothian was simply taking his annual leave, which had been delayed by the successive crises and tough negotiations of the previous months.³⁶ Whitehall in fact would have preferred him to have remained in Washington during the election. The Foreign Office wrote that the “present situation in [the] Far East is so fluid and perhaps so critical that your absence from Washington at this moment might be seriously embarrassing.” Sir Walter Layton, who had been in the United States since September on the business of the Ministry of Supply, said that in the weeks before his return Lothian was “at the very height of his powers. Everyone commented on the great job he was doing for England --even those who in normal times would have been his political critics.” Even Victor Perowne had by this point come to recognize Lothian’s value: “His direct advice will be most valuable to H.M.G. of course, but his value to us in the U.S. is I venture to think even greater.” Commenting on the hazards of contemporary air travel, Perowne suggested that Lothian take his vacation in America, on the grounds that it would be “disastrous if anything were to befall” the ambassador on his journey, because he had become “our greatest asset in our dealings with the one and only friend who can be of real use to us.”³⁷

³⁵ Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 225; Lee, 120; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 39.

³⁶ Lothian asked in April to take leave in July, but this had proved impossible because of the collapse of France, the beginning of the Battle of Britain, and the destroyers-for-bases negotiations. His return to Britain was further delayed by the signing of the Tripartite Pact and the British announcement on 8 October that they would reopen the Burma Road on 18 October. See FO 371/24246, A4354/301/45 for the multitude of telegrams, memos, and letters involved in procuring Lothian a vacation. Butler, Lord Lothian, 303-304; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 39.

³⁷ PRO FO 371/24246, A4354/301/45, Tel. 2525, Foreign Office to Lothian, 2 October 1940; PRO FO 371/24246, A4354/301/45, minute by Perowne, , 26 September, 30 September; minute by Scott, 26 September, 4 October.

Nevertheless, Lothian badly needed a vacation, having had only six days of real holiday since taking up his post. In addition, Lothian also wanted to tend to his business affairs; he thus managed to pay short visits to his estates at Blickling and Monteviot, as well as a weekend visit at Cliveden.³⁸ The principal reason for his visit, however, was to confer with the prime minister and to brief the Foreign Office on American policy. He hoped to acquaint himself with the situation and mood in Britain, as well as the current state of official policy. Consequently, he met not only with Churchill and Halifax, but with the Chiefs of Staff, the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and the North American Supply Committee.³⁹

The ambassador's visit generally proved a great success. Although some in Whitehall continued to maintain a relatively low opinion of him, skeptics were now in a distinct minority. Lothian was welcomed home as a hero and a master of diplomacy at the highest level. The War Cabinet honored him personally and Churchill recommended his name to King George VI for appointment as a Knight of the Thistle, Scotland's proudest order.⁴⁰ To be sure, while many were struck by a profound change in his character and outlook, Churchill in particular took notice:

I had known Philip Kerr, who had now succeeded as Marquess of Lothian, from the old days of Lloyd George in 1919 and before, and we had differed much and often from Versailles to Munich and later. As the tension of events mounted, not only did Lothian develop a broad comprehension of the scene, but his eye penetrated deeply.⁴¹

It seemed to the prime minister that the events of the summer and fall of 1940 had matured Lothian. For example, Churchill observed that, upon his return to London, the ambassador was deeply moved by the bomb damage and by the courage of the British people. In his hotel room, indeed, he felt first-hand experience of the Blitz, when a bomb blast blew the furniture across the floor of his bedroom. As a result, Churchill later wrote, "Lord Lothian seemed to me a changed man":

³⁸ NAS, GD40/17/514/20, Lothian to Percival Witherby, 13 October 1940; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 39; Sykes, 424.

³⁹ PRO FO 371/24246, A4534/301/45, Tel. 2215, Lothian to Foreign Office, 6 October 1940; Butler, Lord Lothian, 305; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 39; L. Woodward, 385-388.

⁴⁰ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 111.

⁴¹ Billington, 152-153; Butler, Lord Lothian, 305; Churchill, 399.

In all the years I had known him, he had given me the impression of high intellectual and aristocratic detachment from vulgar affairs. Airy, viewy, aloof, dignified, censorious, yet in a light and gay manner, he had always been good company. Now, under the same hammer that beat upon us all, I found an earnest, deeply stirred man. He was primed with every aspect and detail of the American attitude. He had won nothing but goodwill and confidence in Washington by his handling of the Destroyers-cum-Bases negotiations. He was fresh from intimate contact with the President, with whom he had established a warm personal friendship.⁴²

Lothian in turn expressed a deeper respect and admiration for the prime minister: “Your speeches have been magnificent,” he wrote in July 1940.⁴³ Undeniably, the events of the summer and fall of 1940 reconciled Lothian and Churchill.

During their meetings, Lothian and Churchill spoke at length over a wide range of transatlantic matters, from Ireland to the Far East, from propaganda to Latin American trade. In one respect, Lothian was strongly in favor of doing everything possible to encourage the United States to enter the war. He did not believe, as others did that an American entry into the war would necessarily diminish the supply of American munitions to Britain, owing to Washington’s military requirements. Lothian maintained that, as long as the United States remained neutral, American industrial output would remain limited; American entry into the war, however, would certainly generate a dramatic explosion of American industrial output, which implied a corresponding increase of Britain’s share of American supplies. Therefore, he argued, the only way to be absolutely certain that the United States would provide Britain “all the help in her power” was to always influence Washington “towards the more vigorous course.”⁴⁴ In addition, Lothian was also highly interested in pursuing the idea of a standing council in Washington D.C., comprising the United States, the American republics, and the British Empire, which would seek to maintain political and economic cooperation in war and peace.⁴⁵

⁴² Billington, 153; Butler, Lord Lothian, 305-306; Churchill, 554-555; Sykes, 424.

⁴³ NAS, GD40/17/399/614, Lothian to Churchill, 1 July 1940; Billington, 153.

⁴⁴ PRO FO 371/24243, A4666/131/45, Foreign Office minutes, 29 October 1940, 13 November; Lash, 256-257; L. Woodward, 384-388.

⁴⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 306; Hugh Dalton, The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1940-1945, ed., Ben Pimlott (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 93, entry for 24 October 1940; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 40; Roberts, 125.

Primarily, Lothian and Churchill focused upon the most fundamental and interconnected problems of supply, shipping, and finance. First and most obviously, Britain continued to need a large and guaranteed share of American raw materials and manufactured goods. In the second place, there remained the question of how supplies could be safely transported to Britain. Over the summer of 1940, Britain suffered a disastrous increase in merchant shipping losses, particularly as the Royal Navy became responsible for patrolling the whole Mediterranean and the western approaches to the British Isles, as well as the defense of home waters. Therefore, it was increasingly unable to provide anti-submarine escorts for Atlantic convoys, except at the very beginning and the very end of voyages.⁴⁶

In the third place, without question, Britain's most supreme problem was finance. It had long been understood, in official quarters on both sides of the Atlantic, that the time would ultimately come when the British government would no longer have sufficient gold or dollars to pay for the munitions that they were ordering under "cash and carry." While Britain was not yet facing imminent or wholesale bankruptcy,⁴⁷ it was rapidly approaching a point where it would be unable to continue financing purchases from the United States. From the outbreak of hostilities, through the Phoney War, Britain financed its very limited American purchases by using its gold reserves. Following the German invasion of the West, however, Britain had little choice but to abandon such caution and begin using up gold and dollars in order to procure the utmost supply of arms from the United States. "We shall go on paying dollars for as long as we can," Churchill wrote Roosevelt on 15 May 1940, "but I should like to feel reasonably sure that when we can pay no more you will give us the stuff all the same."⁴⁸

Over the summer of 1940, British payments of gold and dollars to the United States steadily increased. For Whitehall, this became doubly troublesome, since an excessive drain on its gold and

⁴⁶ Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 145-147.

⁴⁷ Wheeler-Bennett, 111-112. Britain in the fall of 1940 still had between £3,500 and £4,000 million in overseas assets around the world, and had been able to fund much of its war spending abroad by persuading creditor countries to run up large sterling balances in London. Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 146.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 185; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 46; Hall, 243; Meacham, 49.

dollars threatened to eliminate the convertibility of sterling and, at the same time, badly disrupt British supply lines within the Empire and to the neutrals. Therefore, on 3 July 1940, Lothian presented a formal note about supply to the State Department. The note stated that Britain would pay as long as it could, but that the British government felt that they should “in all frankness inform the United States government that it will be utterly impossible for them to continue to do this for any indefinite period in view of the scale on which they will need to obtain such resources from the United States.” In mid-July, however, he reported to London that he had been given assurances in Washington that there was no need “to worry too much” about dollars.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Sir Frederick Phillips, a senior Treasury official, visited Washington in July 1940 to provide evidence of Britain’s tenuous financial situation. Over the course of four days in mid-July, in meetings with Roosevelt and Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury, Phillips explained that probably within six months, Britain would need significant help in realizing cash on its securities, and, certainly not later than mid-1941, “massive assistance” in the form of American credits.⁵⁰ Morgenthau, who handled the bulk of the negotiations for the United States, never challenged Britain’s basic conclusions and statistics. He did, however, ask Phillips to provide a balance sheet that precisely outlined Britain’s financial relations with the rest of the world,⁵¹ and suggested that London should sell direct British investments in America, such as Shell Oil, Brown and Williamson Tobacco, American Viscose, Lever Brothers, and Dunlop Tire. He noted that this would not only bring in badly needed dollars, but would also convince the American public of Britain’s good intentions. Phillips, however, proved reluctant to provide such material, especially fixed foreign assets that could only be sold in the United

⁴⁹ Blum, 163-164; Hall, 243; Kimball, 61-65, 72-73; Langer and Gleason, Challenge to Isolation, 709.

⁵⁰ In mid-July 1940, Britain’s adverse balance of payments with the United States and other countries, taking into consideration loans, credits, and reserves, totaled over \$1.6 billion. The forced sales of securities, confiscation of gold ornaments and art, as well as other similar extreme measures, advocated by many in Washington, including the president, would hardly dent the deficit. Hall, 246-248; Kimball, 63-64.

⁵¹ Morgenthau, who had invited Phillips to Washington, asked for a comprehensive estimate of British purchasing needs for the next twelve months, as well as the latest figures on British production of aircraft frames and engines. His position, throughout the summer and fall of 1940, was that full disclosure by London would be necessary in order to convince skeptics in the United States that Britain merited significant aid. Blum, 169-170, Kimball, 62-63.

States. Morgenthau, whose position was entirely supported by Roosevelt, noted that he had a responsibility to American business, which had grown concerned about the ability of Britain to meet its contracts. When Phillips complained that such forced sales of British-owned American investments would severely damage Britain's post-war economy, Morgenthau responded that it was no time to worry about such matters.⁵² Although London endeavored to restrict spending in the United States only to absolutely vital needs until the Roosevelt administration's position was clear, Churchill and his supply ministers agreed that Britain had no choice but to gamble that American aid would be more open and forthcoming, and that Washington would help when British dollar resources were finally exhausted. By late summer, large British orders for aircraft and tanks further depleted the reserves, and by mid-October, the Treasury calculated that Britain would not be able to pay for its purchases after December 1940,⁵³ a position that Lothian reiterated in conversations with Stimson and Morgenthau in late September.⁵⁴

By the fall of 1940, then, many in London began to conclude that that time had come to appeal to the United States, for all-out assistance, once and for all. This group included Lothian, who subsequently endeavored to take up the matter with Churchill while he was in Britain.⁵⁵ In doing so, furthermore, Lothian endeavored to push the prime minister to take action *right now*, in early November, in the midst of the prevailing and seemingly interminable American inertia caused by its presidential election. During the previous months, it had become patently clear that no significant political action would, or could, be undertaken by the United States with respect to Britain's supply needs, until after the election. After all, both parties chose to play down evidence of close Anglo-American cooperation due to the election campaign. Although Wendell Willkie was personally in favor of aid to Britain, any attempt to propose more assistance than the Roosevelt administration was already giving would have undermined the

⁵² Blum, 170-171; Hall, 248-249; Kimball, 64-65.

⁵³ Kimball, 61-65; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 146-147.

⁵⁴ Hall, 252-253; Kimball, 73.

⁵⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 306; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 40.

tenuous unity of the Republican Party. This Republican opposition to more widespread aid virtually guaranteed Roosevelt the support of the interventionists without having to promise bigger and better programs of assistance to Britain. Furthermore, Morgenthau insisted that the Roosevelt campaign play down Anglo-American cooperation for fear that the American public might learn the actual extent of Britain's money problems. Consequently, the president could -- and characteristically did -- assume a safe, but conspicuously ambiguous position on aid, which enabled him to avoid alienating those who preferred him to go slow.⁵⁶

Within the British government, this American silence became a source of aggravation with the United States, particularly after the frustrating negotiations over destroyers that summer. As a result of the continuing detachment in Washington, the British responded in part with pin-pricks. For example, London chose to curtail their sharing of secret, technical information, a process that had been initiated only in the late summer. Accordingly, Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Aircraft Production,⁵⁷ told the Defence Committee on 29 October that Churchill was "inclined towards a stiffer attitude" with respect to passing sensitive technical information or intelligence to the United States, on the grounds that "It will almost certainly get back to Germany through indiscretion or some lurking enemy."⁵⁸ In a similar way, Churchill told the War Cabinet on 21 November that the British government should proceed cautiously with respect to the disclosure of secret information to Washington, as long as the United States remains neutral. When Halifax said that it would be disastrous if the United States "got it into their heads that London was treating them with a lack of confidence," and suggested that Lothian discuss the position quite frankly, Churchill responded by pointing out that "We should say that we did trust them," but that they must come to appreciate that "we were fighting for our lives, and that it followed that there was

⁵⁶ Burns, *The Lion and the Fox*, 445-446, 448-450; Chadwin, 129-130; Kimball, 78; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 203-209; Lash, 230-238.

⁵⁷ Sir William Maxwell "Max" Aitken, 1st Baronet, 1st Baron Beaverbrook. He built a newspaper empire in London, which included the *London Evening Standard* and the *Daily Express*. During the war, his friend Winston Churchill appointed him as Minister of Aircraft Production and later Minister of Supply.

⁵⁸ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 877; Gilbert *War Papers*, 1008.

certain secret information which we could not possibly divulge.”⁵⁹ Therefore, the British government began to restrict the circulation of intelligence collected from the Enigma machine. Colville later recalled that “The Free French, who were notoriously liable to leak, were not told the secret; nor, until shortly before they came into the war, were the Americans who were thought to be only marginally better at keeping secrets.”⁶⁰

While many vented their frustration with the United States by favoring pin-pricks, many others simply did not understand the American political process, which they found antiquated and confusing. In the Foreign Office, for example, Alexander Cadogan sarcastically noted that “The Constitution is a disaster,” while David Scott pointed out, almost incredulously, that “for the better part of a year the functioning of the [American] political machine is hampered by election activities and no action can be taken in the political field without very full consideration of its effect on the election.”⁶¹ Churchill referred to it as America’s “quadrennial madness.”⁶² Even Lothian, who shared this irritation, described it as “the most unreal election the world has ever seen.” Nevertheless, he conceded, London had no choice but to await its conclusion.⁶³ Therefore, on the significant question of finance, the British restrained themselves from publicly requesting credits. For example, in a speech to the Associated Industries of Massachusetts, in Boston on 17 October 1940, Sir Walter Layton⁶⁴ made no references to money.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ During recent months, the government had provided the U.S. Air Attaché, Captain G. Bryan Conrad, with a copy of the Air Ministry War Room Daily Summary, which gave particulars of British operations, and contained an Appendix “giving details of the places in this country where enemy bombs had dropped and of the damage done.” Churchill thought it undesirable to furnish such a detailed daily report of operations and explained that arrangements were being made to discontinue the supply of this Appendix to Conrad. Gilbert, War Papers, 1115-1116.

⁶⁰ Colville, 294-295.

⁶¹ Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 147.

⁶² Kimball, 87.

⁶³ PRO FO 371/24239, A3202/131/45, No. 386, Lothian to Foreign Office, 29 April 1940; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 147-148.

⁶⁴ Layton was the chairman of the *News Chronicle*, and the Director-General of Programmes for the British Ministry of Supply. London sent Layton to Washington in early October in order to update the Roosevelt administration on British production and analysis of future requirements. Lothian wrote the speech, but turned it over to his old friend Layton while the ambassador was in Britain. Hall, 184; Kimball, 81.

Privately, however, Lothian told Morgenthau that Phillips would like to return to Washington in order to “raise the red light signal in connection with our finances.” Roosevelt and Morgenthau were willing and ready to talk, but suggested that Phillips wait until after the election.⁶⁶

As a result, in psychological terms at the very least, 5 November 1940 became a magic date for British policymakers. Many convinced themselves that, as soon as the election was over, American assistance would be forthcoming, almost automatically. This would be true, many believed, whichever candidate won; after all, Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt’s Republican opponent, had made clear his support for the Allied cause. The overwhelming majority of Britons, however, anxiously hoped that Roosevelt would prevail. “It will be a disaster, I think, for us if he does not,” Halifax noted tensely in his diary late in October. Many preferred Roosevelt on the grounds that, since the inauguration was not until 20 January 1941, it would take at least six months before a newly-elected Republican administration began to find its feet. Furthermore, and far more important, many British policymakers believed that Roosevelt was in fact ready to take the ultimate step and enter the war. As early as June, this was most certainly Churchill’s position, as well as many in the Foreign Office.⁶⁷ In a letter to Jan Christian Smuts on 9 June 1940, Churchill expressed confidence that the United States would enter the war once Roosevelt won reelection: “I see only one sure way through now, to wit, that Hitler should attack this country and in so doing break his Air weapon. If this happens he will be left to face the winter with Europe writhing under his heel and probably with the United States against him after the Presidential election is over.”⁶⁸ On 14 June, Colville wrote in his diary, “If we can hold on until November we shall have won the war. But holding on is going to be a grim business.” Harold Nicolson added a few days later, “I think it practically

⁶⁵ Layton and Lothian, in a short note to the Chairman of the Associated Industries of Massachusetts, emphasized that Britain needed the United States to accelerate its production of armaments as fast as possible: “The one certain way of keeping the bombs from your own cities and towns is so to equip the peoples of the British Commonwealth.” Lothian, “Speech by Sir Walter Layton to the Associated Industries of Massachusetts, 17 October 1940,” in *Speeches*, 122-131.

⁶⁶ Blum, 199; Hall, 254; Kimball, 86-87; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 188.

⁶⁷ Lash, 256; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 148.

⁶⁸ Gilbert, *War Papers*, 271.

certain that the Americans will enter the war in November, and if we can last till then, all is well.”⁶⁹ On 20 June, speaking to the House of Commons, Churchill stated that if Britain could hold out until after the American elections that November, “I cannot doubt the whole English-speaking world will be in line together.” Hitler would then have against him “the Oceans and the Air” and all the continents except for Europe.⁷⁰ By early November, he remained convinced that Roosevelt would win the election by a far greater majority than was supposed, and that, therefore, America would come into the war.⁷¹ Roosevelt himself contributed to this growing British confidence in the inevitability of American belligerency. On 30 October 1940, only a few days before the election, he delivered a speech in Boston, in which he announced a new administration plan designed to assist Britain on a scale hitherto unimagined -- the provision of 12,000 more aircraft and an unspecified amount of ordnance [artillery, tanks, rifles, machine guns, ammunition, and other equipment] -- on the grounds that it would stimulate both American industrial production and rearmament.⁷² Thus, even habitually cautious officials in the Foreign Office believed that, within two weeks of Roosevelt’s reelection, American policy would begin moving toward belligerency, while Treasury officials anticipated a decision on credits within the same time span.⁷³

On 5 November 1940, Roosevelt was reelected to a third term as president of the United States, by 449 electoral votes to 82, with a margin of victory in the popular vote of almost five million. The

⁶⁹ Colville, 156-157, entry for 14 June 1940; Nicolson, Diaries and Letters, 96-97.

⁷⁰ Gilbert, Churchill and America, 196; Gilbert, War Papers, 385.

⁷¹ Colville, 283, entry for 1 November 1940; Gilbert, War Papers, 1021; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 149.

⁷² The president’s decision emerged out of the British requests presented by Sir Walter Layton during his visit to Washington in October and November. In discussions with Henry Morgenthau, Layton presented on 25 October 1940 a formal request for an initial order of approximately 12,000 aircraft to be produced in American factories, and sufficient matériel to equip fully ten projected British divisions. While this order would cost approximately \$2 billion dollars, Layton also requested capital investment in the amount of \$699 million dollars, in order to create “New Productive Capacity.” Morgenthau and Stimson resolved to make strenuous efforts to meet the demand, and thus called on the president to speak openly about British purchases and requests. Roosevelt agreed to do so in this speech, an address to the “Boston Irish.” Blum, 191-194; Kenneth S. Davis, FDR: The War President, 1940-1943. A History (New York: Random House, 2000), 47; Hall, 184, 210-211, 259; Kimball, 81, 84-85; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 184-185, 187-190.

⁷³ “All the underground signs suggest that if Mr. Roosevelt is returned to power tomorrow he will bring in the USA as soon as this proves possible.” PRO FO 371/24243, A4712/131/45, minute by Whitehead, 4 November 1940; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 149.

president's victory triggered great jubilation in Whitehall, Westminster, Fleet Street, and throughout the country at large. Nicolson wrote that although he had originally believed that it did not really matter who won, "my heart leapt like a young salmon when I heard that Roosevelt had won so triumphantly, which showed me that underneath I had been hoping for his victory. . . . It is the best thing that has happened to us since the outbreak of the war. I thank God!" King George VI wrote to Roosevelt that "I feel I must take advantage of Lord Lothian's return to Washington to send you a personal message saying how glad the Queen and I are to think that you are to be the President of the United States of America for a third term. . . . In these grave and anxious days it is a great relief to feel that your wise and helpful policy will continue without interruption."⁷⁴ Oliver Harvey, formerly the private secretary to Eden and Halifax, went so far as to call 5 November:

Perhaps the most important date in the war . . . It will ring a bell throughout Europe. Our enemies will know that henceforward, even if they could succeed in wearing us down in a long war, there is a man across the Atlantic who would certainly bring America to our rescue, and would carry on the fight if we failed. A whole new continent ready to fight Hitler. I believe it will prove in the end to have broken the German morale.⁷⁵

Not surprisingly, after the election, British leaders expected that the floodgates of materiel aid would now open. Such expectations, however, about the certainty of American policy were inevitably exaggerated. While the election did in fact provide Roosevelt with greater freedom for political maneuver, the British quite clearly overestimated his readiness to enter the war. In part, this was due to the president's own prior actions. Since before the Munich crisis, Roosevelt often assumed a bellicose position -- at least to the point of encouraging the British to stand firm against German threats and bullying, often holding out the possibility of American help.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 210; Lash, 245; Nicolson, 125-126; John W. Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI: His Life and Reign (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958), 516-517.

⁷⁵ Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 148-149.

⁷⁶ Burns, The Lion and the Fox, 385-391; MacDonald, 84-87, 180. Many historians of Roosevelt's foreign policy have argued that it was not until well into 1941 that the president came to the conclusion that the United States would have to enter the war. Burns, The Soldier of Freedom, 105; Robert Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 285, 530; Robert A. Divine, Roosevelt and World War II (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 48; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 1940-1941, pp. 458, 735.

In addition, the British did not understand the significance of Roosevelt's reelection principally because they did not truly understand the American political system and its traditions. More to the point, they tended to interpret American politics through a British perspective. They assumed, for example, that the president's overwhelming electoral victory represented a clear cut "mandate" and a legislative majority with which to execute it, in the same way that a British prime minister took office with a working majority in the House of Commons. They were used to a centralized political system with firm party divisions and tight discipline, and thus found it difficult to grasp the concepts of separation of powers, loose party authority, and modest White House control over the Federal bureaucracy. Nominally, the election provided the president with Democratic majorities of 268 to 167 in the House of Representatives, and 66 to 30 in the Senate. Such figures, however, had little meaning for the Roosevelt administration, which still faced significant political opposition, particularly among conservative southern Democrats. Roosevelt remained fearful that congressional opposition might still obstruct policy and subsequently undermine national unity as it had done to Woodrow Wilson's efforts in 1919-1920. The president, therefore, had to sustain the slow and difficult effort of creating a foreign-policy consensus among key groups in Congress, the bureaucracy, and opinion-leaders.⁷⁷

Far more than most British policymakers, Lothian understood these facts and developed a diplomatic strategy to address them. He did not entertain the same exaggerated hopes about Roosevelt as most British leaders. If anything, he was perhaps too dismissive about the election results. In the weeks before the election, for example, he tended to play down the urgency of a Roosevelt victory. He felt that over the long run, it would not matter much to Britain who won the election, because Willkie, like the president, supported Britain's war effort. Consequently, the only significant advantage of a Roosevelt victory, he argued, was simply that it would avoid the "lame-duck" status that would inevitably precede a Republican administration.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 149-150; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 102-103.

⁷⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 290; Dalton, 93, entry for 24 October 1940; Lash, 196; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 150.

Unlike many of his countrymen, then, Lothian had no expectation of an imminent American entry into the war. In mid-June 1940, Lothian had expressed confidence that, due to the “staggering” change in American opinion over the previous few weeks, it “would take very little to carry them in now -- any kind of challenge by Hitler or Mussolini to their own vital interests would do it.”⁷⁹ At the end of August, however, he told Churchill that “unless there is a manifest attack upon American soil or its most vital interests are [*sic*] such that the United States is likely to find herself fighting under cover in different parts of the world long before formal belligerency is recognized.”⁸⁰ In mid-October, Lothian again asserted that the United States would remain formally neutral until there had been two further developments in the war. One was a direct attack on vital American interests. Only such an attack could make possible the internal unity necessary to secure a declaration of war; after all, Roosevelt and Hull had assured the ambassador on several occasions that the only possible way to ensure a declaration of war was to secure unanimity within the Congress and public opinion. The other was the development of American rearmament to a point where the United States had effective weaponry. This, he believed, would not take place before 1942.⁸¹

Lothian thus did not see the election as a sort of magic date. He argued that, eventually, the United States would provide the necessary assistance, but that it would require far more proactive British pressure on the Roosevelt administration and the American public. For the time being, the election permitted Britain to renew its efforts to “educate” American opinion. Britain could not, in other words, sit back and wait. He made clear his proposal for a more energetic policy in a telegram of 21 September 1940, in which he told the Foreign Office he wished to come home,

to discuss with you the formidable question we shall probably have to submit to United States Government immediately after Presidential election, and to obtain other information to enable me to present British case in speeches I shall have to make this Autumn and Winter. Public opinion here has not yet grasped that it will have to make far

⁷⁹ NAS, GD40/17/470/13, Lothian to Lady Minna Butler Thwing, June 1940.

⁸⁰ PRO FO 800/398, US/40/22, Lothian to Churchill, 29 August 1940.

⁸¹ Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 150.

reaching decisions to finance and supply us and possibly still graver ones next Spring or Summer unless it is to take the responsibility of forcing us to make a compromised peace. Yet owing to size of country and its constitution it is usually impossible to get important decisions taken without at least six months preparation.⁸²

Precisely because of his observation that it takes six months for the American government to translate decisions into action, Lothian urged Churchill that Britain must take the initiative immediately. Indeed, after the election, as Lothian suggested, while London waited expectantly for the United States to act, it did so in vain. On 6 November 1940, the day after the election, Churchill wrote to congratulate the president on his victory. He did not mention Britain's continuing need for American aid, but hoped that Roosevelt might reply with a new initiative:

I did not think it right for me as a Foreigner to express any opinion upon American politics while the election was on, but now I feel you will not mind my saying that I prayed for your success and that I am truly thankful for it. This does not mean that I seek or wish for anything more than the full, fair and free play of your mind upon the world issues now at stake in which our two nations have to discharge their respective duties. We are entering upon a sombre phase of what must evidently be a protracted and broadening war, and I look forward to being able to interchange my thoughts with you in all that confidence and goodwill which has grown up between us since I went to the Admiralty at the outbreak. Things are afoot which will be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe, and in expressing the comfort I feel that the people of the United States have once again cast these great burdens upon you, I must avow my sure faith that the lights by which we steer will bring us all safely to anchor.

It was a brilliant, generous, and eloquent note, but to the prime minister's surprise, and ultimate consternation, the president did not reply.⁸³ As a result, ten days later, at the conclusion of another telegram thanking Roosevelt for his support with the French,⁸⁴ Churchill wrote, "I hope you got my

⁸² PRO FO 371/24246, A4534/301/45, Tel. 2063, Lothian to Foreign Office, 21 September 1940; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 43; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 103-104.

⁸³ Churchill, 489; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 206; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 889; Gilbert, War Papers, 1053-1054; Lash, 245-246; Meacham, 76-77; L. Woodward, 384.

⁸⁴ The War Cabinet, in early November 1940, grew concerned over the presence of two French battleships, the *Jean Bart* and the *Richelieu*, currently in the Atlantic. The British feared that once they had passed into the Mediterranean, the Germans or Italians might be tempted to seize those ships. For that reason, on 10 November 1940, Churchill asked Roosevelt to make American intentions explicitly clear to the French. In response, the president informed the French that any effort to move the ships into the Mediterranean would seriously prejudice Franco-American relations. As a result of Roosevelt's message, Marshall Henri Pétain, Chief of State of Vichy France, gave London an assurance "that the French Fleet, including these two ships, shall never fall into the hands of Germany." Churchill, 456-458; Gilbert, War Papers, 1064, 1099.

personal telegram of congratulation.” Again, the president did not reply. And again, in a telegraph to Lothian, two and a half weeks later, Churchill asked, “Would you kindly find out for me most discreetly whether President received my personal telegram congratulating him on re-election. It may have been swept up in electioneering congratulations. If not I wonder whether there was anything in it which could have caused offence or been embarrassing for him to receive. Should welcome your advice.”⁸⁵

From London’s vantage point, it appeared that the Roosevelt administration was taking no action of any kind to address Britain’s dollar crisis, let alone consider intervention in the war. The only action appeared to be the alacrity with which several administration leaders departed the capital for much needed vacations. Behind the scenes, however, the president’s key advisers in fact began to address the dilemma of how to relieve Britain’s dollar problem. During the election campaign, they had deliberately avoided important decisions about the scope and pace of needed American aid to Britain, but in the weeks immediately following the election, as the Battle of the Atlantic began to intensify, the president’s advisers became increasingly resolved to take action, in order to get war matériel to Britain. The president himself, however, continued to move slowly.⁸⁶ On 7 November, for example, Morgenthau proposed a plan to provide Britain with the new Liberator B-24 bombers. It was possible, he believed, to make a case that would permit Chief of Staff General George Marshall to certify that the planes were not essential to the national defense. The plan won the support of his cabinet colleagues Stimson and Knox.

Even more importantly, however, Roosevelt’s advisers agreed that the time was approaching when all such problems would have to be resolved by going through Congress; specifically, by requesting Congress repeal the Walsh Amendment.⁸⁷ Roosevelt, however, was not yet ready to take that step,

⁸⁵ Gilbert, War Papers, 1147.

⁸⁶ Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 214-215; Robert E. Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 221-222.

⁸⁷ David I. Walsh, of Massachusetts, chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, was a confirmed isolationist and Anglophobe [he was an Irish-American], and thus not deeply moved by Britain’s need. Under his guidance, the Senate on 28 June 1940 passed an amendment to the Navy Expansion Bill, which forbade the disposal of any Army or Navy matériel unless the Chief of Staff or the Chief of Navy Operations, as the case might be, should certify them as “not essential to the defense of the United States. Langer and Gleason, Challenge to Isolation, 521-522.

believing that the continued strength of isolationists in Congress made such a step prohibitive. Instead, he continued to delegate the task of discovering ways and means of surmounting the legal and other political obstacles. During the meeting on 8 November 1940, when the cabinet discussed Britain's increasing peril on the oceans, the president stated that he favored a fifty-fifty division of war materials between Britain and the United States: "In other words, we take half; they take half." In doing so, he reverted to an idea that had been raised after the Munich crisis about selling or lending planes to Hitler's enemies. According to Ickes, Roosevelt observed "that the time would surely come when Great Britain would need loans or credits":

. . . one way to meet the situation would be for us to supply whatever we could under leasing arrangements with England. For instance, he thought that we could lease ships or any other property that was loanable, returnable, and insurable.⁸⁸

When his advisers quickly noted the difficulties presented by the Neutrality Act, Roosevelt dismissed most of those points as mere details, suggesting that the Attorney General might somehow solve these problems, or that General Marshall might hit upon some scheme that would enable him to certify that B-17 bombers so desperately needed by the British were not so essential to American security. Similar obstacles overtook nearly every other attempt made by the president's advisers, both civilian and military to find the ways and means, within the law, to help Britain resist the mounting German pressure. More to the point, they were now convinced that the time had come to stop relying upon stopgap devices, half measures, and evasions for implementing administration policies without recourse to Congress. Yet, Roosevelt showed little disposition to do so, and publicly disavowed any intention even to revise the Johnson and Neutrality Acts, much less ask Congress to get rid of them altogether.⁸⁹

There were other vital areas in which the president's reluctance to take immediate advantage of his reelection caused anxiety and consternation to his advisers. They believed that the time had come for the American economy to begin a transition to a war footing, in order to step up American production to

⁸⁸ Davis, *The War President*, 48-49; Ickes, 3: 367, entry for 9 November 1940; Kimball, 93; Lash, 259-260; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 53; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 105.

⁸⁹ Davis, *The War President*, 46-47, 48-50, 65; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 215-220.

the point where it would prove adequate for both its own and Britain's needs. The president, however, remained devoted to the old assumption that rearmament could somehow be achieved without significant sacrifices by labor, management, or the public.⁹⁰ In a similar way, the president's advisers also wanted to initiate staff conversations with the British on a more formal basis; Lothian had been agitating for such talks for months. The president had been officially unresponsive to such a request prior to the election, and remained equally resistant to a new proposal by Admiral Stark on 12 November, in spite of the approval by the Secretaries of War and Navy.⁹¹

Throughout November, therefore, so far as the American public and the British government were concerned, it was hard to detect any acceleration in either American rearmament or aid to Britain, both of which had been so widely anticipated after Roosevelt's reelection. The government of the United States appeared to be asleep: there was no hint that daring measures or major innovations were afoot to meet the developing crisis in the Battle of the Atlantic, and there seemed no likelihood that the president would make a dramatic appeal to Congress or the people. Instead, the public learned that Roosevelt was about to take a cruise.⁹² As a result, the administration's doubts, hesitations, and confusion, with respect to providing aid to Britain, appeared to become more pronounced rather than diminished.

By late November 1940, this silence from Washington increasingly worried British leaders and compounded London's uncertainty. Britain could not wait much longer. The country's dollar reserves were all but exhausted, and the Treasury began to take preparations to liquidate all British assets in the United States. Furthermore, in the middle of November, the British noted a sudden loss of American confidence in their shipping reports. Sections of the American press alleged that the British were

⁹⁰ Davis, The War President, 54-55; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 220-221.

⁹¹ On 12 November, Admiral Stark forwarded to the president a memorandum that advanced the "Plan Dog" concept, which concluded that America's best hope for the successful defense of the Western Hemisphere lay in the survival of Britain. Hence, military planning should proceed on the assumption that all measures, including if necessary military measures, would be taken to avert Britain's defeat. Stark, therefore, recommended to the president that he authorize secret and formal staff conversations with the British, for which Lothian had thus far been pressing in vain. Davis, The War President, 55-57; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 221-223.

⁹² Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 225.

concealing the scale of U-boat successes, which offered an obvious index with which to monitor Britain's chances of survival. As Germany lost no time in exploiting this controversy, the Battle of the Atlantic, like the Battle of Britain before it, therefore became a battle for American headlines.⁹³

It was Lord Lothian who filled this vacuum in British policy. With no expectations of automatic American aid or belligerency after 5 November 1940, he pressed his superiors in London to take action. In the wake of the president's reelection, he maintained, it was urgent to outline Britain's requirements comprehensively, "and present them, whether or not we expected them to be met at once and *in toto*. . . . We should strike while the iron was hot." Specifically, Lothian proposed two parallel foreign policy initiatives, which essentially provided the catalyst that forced the Roosevelt administration into action. First, he encouraged Churchill to write Roosevelt a long letter in which he would put Britain's entire position -- strategic, economic, and logistic -- to the president. It was clear to the ambassador that Henry Morgenthau's suggestion that Britain sell its foreign investments demonstrated the British failure to convey the urgency of its financial situation.⁹⁴ Lothian therefore believed that the time had come for Churchill to "lay it all on the line" for Roosevelt -- this took the form of the celebrated letter of 8 December 1940, which Churchill later described as "one of the most important I ever wrote."⁹⁵ Second, Lothian sought to provoke widespread popular discussion, and thus force the Roosevelt administration's hand, by making calculated and more public reference to Britain's problems, especially its financial plight. The forum at which he chose to initiate this public discussion would be an impromptu press conference upon his return to the United States on 23 November 1940. Taken together, Lothian's two initiatives, which represent the two final actions and thus the culmination of his diplomatic career, laid the foundations for the Lend-Lease program.⁹⁶

⁹³ PRO CAB 65/10, WM 299 (40) 4, 2 December 1940; Cull, 115; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 150.

⁹⁴ Hall, 250; Kimball, 65; Lash, 257.

⁹⁵ Churchill, 501; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 132; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 104.

⁹⁶ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 43.

Meet the Press

Over the course of November, Britain's mounting financial crisis strained Anglo-American relations. In light of the rapid diminution of Britain's ability to pay in dollars for American aid, the Roosevelt administration remained frustrated by London's reluctance to provide full and precise financial data that they demanded as a basis for American action, while the War Cabinet remained frustrated by Washington's reluctance to believe that Britain's financial situation was as dire as it claimed. Furthermore, for political reasons, the Roosevelt administration proved reluctant to pursue actively any specific course of action, lest they provoke isolationists, such as Senator Gerald P. Nye of South Dakota, who was threatening to call for a congressional investigation to determine how much property in the United States, real and otherwise, was owned by Britain and the British Empire. As a result, London announced that it was sending Sir Frederick Phillips of the British Treasury to Washington in December, in order to discuss Britain's financial situation. Because presumably Phillips would be armed with the full and precise information that Washington demanded, the administration chose to postpone any action until after his arrival. The president explained his position in a letter to the King on 22 November 1940. Had he gone to Congress with a proposal to give those obsolete American destroyers to Britain the previous summer, as "legalists" demanded he do, the proposal "would still be in the tender care of the Committees of the Congress." Consequently, Roosevelt remained hesitant to go to the Congress until it became politically safe and until he had in hand some means that was virtually certain of being congressionally approved.⁹⁷

Lothian, however, audaciously forced the president's hand. During his return visit to Britain, the ambassador took the opportunity to urge Churchill to broach the question of American aid with Roosevelt, in a letter that outlined the true depth of Britain's need, fully and comprehensively. The prime minister agreed and resolved to write the president in the strongest possible terms. Consequently, Lothian and Churchill began to draft the letter over the weekend of 9-10 November 1940, while Lothian was

⁹⁷ Davis, The War President, 62-63.

visiting with the prime minister at Dytchley Park. It took the better part of the next four weeks to complete and dispatch the letter to the president. Throughout the entire process, while Lothian, who was supported by the Foreign Office, repeatedly pressed the prime minister to take forceful action, Churchill, who retained his faith in Roosevelt as Britain's "best friend" and the inevitability of American belligerency, obstinately dragged his heels. He did not want to rush the president; he preferred instead to wait for the right moment to send his request to Roosevelt.⁹⁸

Lothian, however, had other ideas. The ambassador departed from London on 11 November and, following a delay of approximately ten days in Lisbon, flew back to the United States, on a Pan American Airways "Clipper," landing at LaGuardia Airport in New York City on Saturday, 23 November 1940. A group of assembled reporters were present and Lothian read from a brief, but unauthorized statement. Because his comments to the American press immediately provoked a firestorm of controversy, and ultimately action, there emerged considerable uncertainty and misunderstanding as to what the ambassador actually said on this occasion. According to some accounts, Lothian allegedly told the reporters, "Well, boys, Britain's broke, it's your money we want." It is clear, however, from press reports and from the account that Lothian sent to the Foreign Office that he said far more than this. It is, in fact, questionable whether he ever used those notorious words at all.⁹⁹ On arrival at La Guardia Lothian made this brief statement:

⁹⁸ Churchill, 490, 493; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 900; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 151-152; Sykes, 424-425.

⁹⁹ The initial source of the confusion was the recollections of Sir John Wheeler-Bennett. In his official biography of King George VI, he wrote that Lothian said, "Well, boys, Britain's broke, it's your money we want." The result, Wheeler-Bennett asserted, was a chain of events in America that culminated some four months later in the enactment of the Lend-Lease legislation (Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI*, 521). In his own war memoirs, Wheeler-Bennett's amplified this anecdote, saying that he and Aubrey Morgan of the British Press Service in New York met Lothian at La Guardia, where they told him the press was clamoring for a statement and that, after a moment's thought, Lothian simply and deliberately uttered the famous words and passed through to the waiting car (Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 112). In a letter to David Reynolds, 11 July 1979, Morgan recalled that, although Lothian probably used the phrase "Britain is bust" in his press conference, he made no mention of needing American money. His own recollection was that Wheeler-Bennett was not present at La Guardia. Therefore, Reynolds concluded that Wheeler-Bennett's account of the episode likely derived from a subsequent conversation with Morgan and that, by the time he came to write his memoirs, the story had become considerably distorted in his memory (Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 48). Nevertheless, other historians followed Wheeler-Bennett's lead, including Lothian's principal biographer, J. R. M. Butler, as well as Warren Kimball and Joseph Lash, who all cite Wheeler-Bennett's account (Butler, 307; Kimball, 96; Lash, 260-261; Lee, 147 [note], Sykes, 427).

The first half of 1940 was Hitler's year. The second half, we think, is ours. He failed in his plans to smash our fleet and perhaps invade England. There is no doubt of its being a hard war. Two hundred lives are lost daily in the bombing raids and 300 are injured. Next year, too, we know will be long and hard. England will be grateful for any help. England needs planes, munitions, ships and perhaps a little financial help.¹⁰⁰

As Lothian completed his statement, unexpected but spontaneous applause broke out through a group of about 40 airport visitors standing on a second-floor sightseers' gallery. He later expanded on this statement and answered further questions in the airport building. Among other things, Lothian told journalists that, although the British people "were not stupidly optimistic and everybody realized that the year 1941 would be hard and difficult," there was no doubt there that Great Britain was going to win the war. He also assured reporters that Britain definitely did not need or want men, and refused to be drawn into the question of how the United States should respond to Britain's plight. When asked how Britain would obtain the needed money, and whether the Johnson and the Neutrality Acts would have to be repealed or modified, Lothian would not or could not say. He simply asserted that this was for Americans to decide, and announced that Sir Frederick Phillips from the British Treasury was coming to Washington to discuss such financial matters. At the same time, however, reporters quoted him as saying that the matter was "becoming urgent," and that "Available gold and securities had been virtually used up and that this factor figured in the calculations for 1941." In his report to the Foreign Office, Lothian wrote that 1941 would be a difficult year, and "obviously your American assistance would be of the greatest possible importance." He stressed, however, that he "mentioned no figures of any kind but indicated that the question of how to pay for munitions would be one of the problems which would come up certainly in the next 6 months, as our resources including gold and securities, were running low."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *The New York Times*, 24 November 1940, 1,4; Cull, 116; Kimball, 96, note 16; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 48. Lothian later reiterated the main points of his remarks at La Guardia for Washington correspondents when he arrived at Union Station in Washington D.C. *The Washington Post*, 24 November 1940, 1, 5.

¹⁰¹ PRO FO 371/24243, A4898/131/45, Tel. 2793, Lothian to Foreign Office, 24 November 1940; telegram also found in PRO FO 371/24249, A4891/131/45; *The New York Times*, 24 November 1940, 1,4. See Lothian papers, National Archives of Scotland for the recollections of Sir Godfrey Haggas, British Consul General in New York [NAS, GD40/17/514/37] and Aubrey Morgan [NAS, GD40/17/514/37]; Churchill, 491-493; Davis, The War President, 63; Gilbert, War Papers, 1147, note 1; Kimball, 96; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 151-152.

It appears that Lothian made these remarks on his own initiative, without the permission of his government. Lothian admitted as much to Morgenthau when, on 2 December, following a dressing down by the secretary, the ambassador stated that he had spoken on his own authority.¹⁰² Moreover, it is also certain that this was a premeditated act. According to his biographer, J. R. M. Butler, Lothian decided to drop this “calculated indiscretion” on the American press while he was delayed in Lisbon for a week, en route to the United States.¹⁰³ Furthermore, according to Wheeler-Bennett, Lothian knew that Churchill was about to write the president on the topic of finance. Understanding the character of the president, the ambassador also knew that Roosevelt would need some demonstration of popular support before he took any politically risky action, and that this could only be achieved by “shock tactics.” Therefore, as Wheeler-Bennett asserted, just as in the case of the destroyers deal, Lothian “took it upon himself to condition the mind of the American people.”¹⁰⁴ Balfour minuted on 28 November:

Lord Lothian pointed out to us during his visit that it takes the American public, on whom the Executive depend for getting their policies approved, at least six months to demand action on an idea from the time it is mooted. I am convinced that he had this consideration in mind when he made the remarks for which he is now reproved.¹⁰⁵

Sir Walter Layton, who had spoken with the ambassador in early December, later wrote that Lothian deliberately intended to stir up a bit of “excitement”:

That statement was deliberate. He knew it would create excitement but during his stay at Lisbon [where Lothian had to wait a week for the plane to New York] he made up his mind that the American public must get used to the idea that Great Britain needed

¹⁰² Blum, 199-200; Hall, 258; Kimball, 97.

¹⁰³ Butler, Lord Lothian, 307. Warren Kimball suggests that the calculation behind Lothian’s “indiscretion” may have been made by Churchill. He makes a weak case, however, citing in the first place, the timing of the indiscretion; the ambassador made his remarks following his month in Britain, during which he had consulted with the prime minister. He also mentions that, while the Chancellor of the Exchequer rebuked Lothian, Churchill did not reprimand the ambassador -- an assertion that is flatly incorrect. Kimball, 96-97. Kenneth S. Davis reaches an alternative conclusion. Davis cites Churchill’s reprimand of 27 November 1940 as “conclusive evidence that Lothian’s ‘calculated indiscretion’ was wholly his and was as surprising to London as to Washington.” Davis, The War President, 64.

¹⁰⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 112.

¹⁰⁵ PRO FO 371/24243, A4891/131/45, minute by Balfour, 28 November 1940; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 152-153.

financial help. He meant to bring the matter to a head for he felt it would not be honest to go on pretending that we could pay.¹⁰⁶

In any event, upon arriving back at the Embassy, Lothian told his staff, “Oh yes, I know that I shall get my head washed for it both in London and in Washington, but it is the truth none the less.”¹⁰⁷

It is also clear that Lothian did not intend for his statement to serve as a direct appeal for immediate credits. He believed, instead, that “the public initiative in asking for a discussion” should come from the British in an informal way. Two days after his return, he reminded Morgenthau of his warning, just before his departure to Britain that “the red light had gone up about finance.” Consequently, he made the airport statement in order to prepare the American public for the imminent arrival of Sir Frederick Phillips in early December. It appears, therefore, that Lothian primarily wanted to set the public debate into motion, particularly the financial question, so that the necessary measures would be taken in time, given the slowness of the American political policy making process.¹⁰⁸ Arthur Krock of *The New York Times* even recognized as much:

The probability is that Lord Lothian expected these things to happen and is well content to have put the subject on view for public and official comment, inquiry and reflection. In some quarters in Great Britain he was criticized for saying anything the Axis might use to persuade wavering neutrals that conditions in England are very bad. In some quarters here he was criticized for making his statement to the press instead of waiting to impart it to the President and the State Department. But the consensus seemed to be that if the Ambassador had been indiscreet, his was a “planned indiscretion,” a bit of diplomatic strategy well considered in advance.¹⁰⁹

There is absolutely no doubt that he succeeded in this objective. Lothian’s remarks generated front-page headlines in newspapers all across the country, which generally shocked the American public that Britain’s economic circumstances were so dire. For the next several days, press coverage became consumed with Britain’s financial plight and the Roosevelt administration’s intentions, or proposals, to

¹⁰⁶ Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Gardiner Casey, *Lord Casey, Personal Experience, 1939-1946* (New York: David McKay, Co., 1962), 43; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 112.

¹⁰⁸ Kimball, 97; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 185; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 153.

¹⁰⁹ *The New York Times*, 26 November 1940.

address it. On 25 November, *The New York Times* noted that Lothian's statement had come only twenty-four hours after Roosevelt had told reporters in Hyde Park that the United States was not considering any specific aid programs for Britain. "Informed quarters," it further reported, suggested that "it would be difficult, if not impossible, to extend needed financial aid to Britain without modifying or repealing existing restrictive legislation." The following day, 26 November, Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky told the press that the question of credits for Britain would not come up in the current session of Congress. Senator Hiram Johnson of California announced that he would "fight to the last ditch" any effort to repeal or modify "the act bearing his name." Senator Gerald P. Nye introduced his long-threatened resolution in the Senate calling for a formal congressional investigation to determine how much property in the United States was owned by Britain and the British Empire. Secretary of State Hull refused to comment on Lothian's remarks when reporters tried to pin him down as to which department would handle negotiations for credits. He likewise refused to express an opinion on whether the Johnson and Neutrality Acts would have to be revised, or whether the problem might be resolved by a transfer of Britain's West Indian possessions to the United States. That same day, Roosevelt also played down the money question during a press conference when reporters asked him whether the British ambassador had presented any specific requests for "additional help." The president responded that there had been no discussion in the government about providing Britain with credits.¹¹⁰ Morgenthau was equally evasive. At his press conference on 28 November, when a reporter attempted to bring up the subject of loans or other financial aid to Britain, the secretary bluntly stated that he was not prepared to air his views at that time and changed the subject.

The next day, however, the Treasury Department issued a press release, which gave credence to Lothian's warning. It summarized the dollar balances in the United States of foreign nations and noted that, although most nations were building up balances, Britain had actually withdrawn \$320,924,000 between 30 August 1939 and 4 September 1940. In addition, the press release called attention to the fact

¹¹⁰ *The New York Times*, 26 November 1940, 1,4; *The Washington Post*, 26 November 1940, 1,6; *The New York Times*, 27 November 1940, 1,4.

that Britain had made heavy sales of gold in order to pay for purchases of war materials. When Phillips did arrive on 4 December, therefore, reporters anticipated some type of big news, which compelled Hull to deny again any knowledge of a plan to extend credits to Britain based on a guarantee against future gold production.¹¹¹

At the same time, pro-interventionist groups became active once again. On 26 November, the same day Roosevelt denied knowledge of any specific proposals, the White Committee put out press releases that urged the president to take stronger measures to provide aid to Britain. They insisted that the life line between Britain and the Western Hemisphere must “under no circumstances” be severed, and that the United States “must be prepared to maintain it.” It also called for a massive increase in American defense production, particularly in terms of shipbuilding, with the ships that were constructed to be either rented or leased to Britain. In doing so, it also insisted that the time had come for Congress to assume a larger share of responsibility for the formulation of policies and methods of assisting the Allies.¹¹²

There is no explicit evidence connecting Lothian to the White Committee’s current campaign, but one may reasonably speculate that the Committee consulted with the ambassador. It is certain that Lothian maintained close contact with Henry Van Dusen of the Century Group.¹¹³ It was, furthermore, possible that Lothian was feeding sensitive information to contacts within the White Committee. A *Special Security Report*, issued by the Admiralty, dated 14 November 1940, noted that John Balderston, a Hollywood script writer working for the White Committee, claimed to have been instrumental in securing the relaxation of British censorship in relation to the American press. He further claimed that Lothian had shown him secret operational telegrams: “I got Lord Lothian to show me the detailed stuff that is sent him daily, marked, ‘for the President’” and hinted that he had seen hundreds of such messages that arrived daily, after which “it was only necessary to mention a few unpublished details.” While there was

¹¹¹ Davis, *The War President*, 63; Hall, 258; Kimball, 98-99, 109.

¹¹² Johnson, 170-173; Kimball, 99; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 223-224.

¹¹³ Chadwin, 137-139.

some sentiment that Balderston was probably exaggerating, the Foreign Office and the Admiralty expressed concern that clearly he did know the existence of telegrams sent to the president.¹¹⁴

In any event, as he anticipated, Lothian's comments irritated many officials on both sides of the Atlantic. From London's perspective, the problem was that, once again, he had not been sufficiently careful in handling a delicate issue, and the result was an immediate public relations problem. Lothian failed to make it clear that, with reference to Britain's financial problems, he was referring *only* to its ability to purchase from the United States with its *dollar resources*, and not Britain's overall financial position. The *Sunday Dispatch* of London described Lothian's comments as an "extraordinary diplomatic blunder." In a double-column front page display, it "deplored Lord Lothian's choice of words 'to launch on the world.'" As a result of such negative press commentary, the Ministry of Information issued a statement pointing out that the "financial resources," which Lothian said were running out, were "available gold and securities."¹¹⁵ Furthermore, according to the Associated Press, Lothian stated that Britain "was beginning to come to the end of her financial resources." The Reuters account, widely circulated abroad, used the same phrase. Because most newspapers outside of New York City used these wire services as the basis of their reports, London's concern was warranted.¹¹⁶ Almost immediately, Anglophobe and isolationist papers seized on the ambassador's comments. For days, the *Chicago Tribune's* headlines thundered, "ENVOY LOTHIAN CLAIMS BRITAIN IS GOING BROKE" [24 November 1940], "BRITISH ENVOY'S U.S. TALK STIRS UPROAR AT HOME" [25 November

¹¹⁴ The Foreign Office telegraphed Lothian on 27 November that "This information has been brought to the notice of the Service Departments who desire to emphasise that these operational telegrams for communication to the President should be treated as secret and not communicated to other individuals." In response, Lothian assured the Foreign Office that he had "certainly never shown" operational telegrams to Balderston or any other unauthorized person, although "I have occasionally read appropriate excerpts from them to Senators and others which I thought would remove false impressions." He explained, however, that these telegrams are seen not just by the president, but by several others, from the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, the Director of Intelligence at the War Department, and the Secretary of the Navy. PRO FO 371/24232, A4929/26/45, "Extract from Special Security Report, No. 19," 14 November 1940; PRO FO 371/24232, A4929/26/45, Tel. 2976, Lothian to Foreign Office, 8 December 1940; PRO FO 371/24232, A4929/26/45, Tel. 3256, Foreign Office to Lothian, 27 November 1940.

¹¹⁵ *The New York Times*, 25 November 1940, 2.

¹¹⁶ Kimball, 101; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 152.

1940], and “STORM BREWING OVER U.S. FISCAL HELP TO BRITAIN” [26 November 1940].¹¹⁷

British representatives and agents around the world reported that Lothian’s statements had caused “a bad impression” that Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy, all of which was providing German propagandists with excellent material.¹¹⁸

Lothian’s action infuriated the British Treasury, which thought the ambassador’s comments to be reckless and unnecessary, particularly right before Phillips’ imminent visit. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Kingsley Wood, took particular umbrage because he had not been properly consulted. The Treasury did not send an indignant telegram only when Churchill agreed to chastize Lothian himself. The prime minister cabled on 27 November: “We are so closely united in thought and friendship,” the prime minister began, “that I feel you will not mind my making a few comments on your recent remarks.” In part, he criticized Lothian’s careless language and failure to consult the Treasury. But he also questioned Lothian’s whole approach. “I do not think it was wise to touch on very serious matters to reporters on the landing stage. It is safer to utter a few heartening generalities and leave the graver matters to be raised formally with the President or his chief lieutenants.” The controversy over Lothian’s remarks illustrated, once again, a key difference in tactics between the ambassador and Churchill. Similar to their different approaches with respect to publicity, Lothian believed that the appropriate approach was to force the issue, go public with Britain’s position, and thus place pressure on the president, whereas the prime minister chose not to push Roosevelt, but to wait instead for the force of events.¹¹⁹

From Washington’s perspective, Lothian’s comments indeed put the Roosevelt administration in a very difficult political position. Although unperturbed on the public level, officials privately expressed both annoyance and disbelief at the ambassador’s remarks. The president, who typically resented and

¹¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, 24 November 1940, 1; 25 November 1940, 5; 26 November 1940, 1.

¹¹⁸ FO 371/24243, A4891/131/45, Victor Mallet (British Minister to Sweden) to Ministry of Information, Empax Tel. 242, 28 November 1940; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 152.

¹¹⁹ FO 371/24249, A4935/434/45, Tel. 3233, Churchill to Lothian, 27 November 1940; Burns, *The Lion and the Fox*, 307; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1147; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 112-113.

always resisted perceived efforts to force his hand, was furious with the ambassador. He thus received Lothian coldly when the two conferred at length on 25 November, stating that the request for financial aid was “premature” and would remain so until the American public was thoroughly convinced that the British had liquidated their liquefiable assets in the Western Hemisphere, which Roosevelt estimated to total over \$9 billion dollars. Not surprisingly, *The Washington Post*, on 26 November, quoted a “high authority” as saying that Lothian’s request for assistance was “premature.”¹²⁰ Hull was not only annoyed, he was also skeptical as to whether the British financial picture was as bleak as Lothian portrayed it.¹²¹

Morgenthau, too, was incensed. In a letter to Hull, he complained that Lothian had shown poor judgment, particularly since the ambassador did not consult with him or the president prior to disclosing Britain’s fiscal plight. He also worried about the effect Lothian’s warning might have on British negotiations with American business leaders, who would now be even more suspicious of Britain’s ability to pay. He noted in his diary, “It is not difficult to understand why the impression had gotten around in Washington that things are going badly with England after one listens to Lothian.” He complained to Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King that Lothian’s comments had upset the delicate situation and “did not help one damn bit!” Perhaps most important, both the president and Morgenthau worried that Lothian’s bluntness might alienate the Congress and give isolationists further ammunition that might significantly harm the aid program. As Morgenthau pointed out, during a conversation with Lothian and Phillips on 2 December 1940, some isolationist senator could now call him up to the Hill and say, “Well, on such and such a date Ambassador Lothian said the English were running short of money. By what authority did you let them place additional orders in this country?” This, Morgenthau noted, “seemed a new idea” to Lothian.¹²²

¹²⁰ *The Washington Post*, 26 November 1940, 1,6; Blum, 199; Davis, *The War President*, 63-64; Hall, 258; Kimball, 99-101; Lash, 261.

¹²¹ Blum, 199; Hull, 872; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 225.

¹²² Blum, 199-200; Davis, *The War President*, 64; Hall, 258; Kimball, 100-101; Lash, 261; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 55; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 112.

In his reaction to the controversy he had aroused, Lothian proved to be just as audacious as in his decision to push the administration in the first place. Butler argues that Lothian felt some regret for sparking off such a furious controversy. That does not appear to be the case. At best, Lothian was *somewhat* at pains to play down the significance of his remarks. After meeting with Roosevelt on 25 November, for example, he immediately spoke to waiting reporters: “The President and I never mentioned finances,” he said. *The New York Times* reported that Lothian had “rushed over to newspaper correspondents to make this statement even before he took his hat down from the rack in the White House waiting room.” He emphasized that his report to the president had focused on the war and the latest developments; in the main, he asserted, his report was hopeful and optimistic.¹²³ In view of his government’s disapproval, Lothian deemed it necessary to express some degree of repentance: “I am extremely sorry that I should have raised the question of dollar finance without obtaining the prior approval of the Chancellor of the Exchequer,” he telegraphed on 28 November. “I should like to apologize to him. I will see this mistake is not repeated.”¹²⁴

In spite of this apology, however, Lothian went on to defend his conduct with a vigor that showed he firmly and unquestionably believed that he had done the right thing. Too many Americans, he maintained, even the president, seemed convinced that Britain possessed vast resources that had not been disclosed and was therefore more than capable of paying for American purchases. In his telegram of 26 November 1940, following his meetings with Roosevelt and Hull, and *The Washington Post* story that British requests for aid were “premature,” Lothian stated that “this comment appears to confirm what I said in London that the Administration still entertains the idea that we must be forced to ‘scrape the bottom of the barrel’ i.e. strip ourselves of all our assets of value before the United States could be expected to give financial assistance. I trust the idea will be contested in the Prime Minister’s

¹²³ When asked to comment on a statement attributed to Joseph Kennedy, that democracy was dying in Britain and was in danger of being replaced by some form of state socialism, Lothian responded: “I never saw a more democratic country than England is today, I saw no signs of a decline of democracy in England. I saw quite the contrary.” *The New York Times*, 26 November 1940, 1, 4; *The Washington Post*, 26 November 1940, 1, 6.

¹²⁴ Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 152.

memorandum and that Phillips will be equipped with all information necessary to refute it.”¹²⁵ As Layton later told Churchill, Lothian “remained confident, in spite of some public and private criticism in America, that he had made no mistake in broaching the financial question on his arrival in New York. He was certain that the President would come over handsomely when the situation was put before him, but he felt that some preparation of public opinion was necessary if quick action was to be taken. He was quite satisfied with the reaction of public opinion.”¹²⁶

Lothian was absolutely correct. Many American leaders, especially the president, did not think Britain’s dollar situation in the autumn of 1940 was urgent. According to Ickes, Roosevelt stated during the cabinet meeting of 8 November “that England still has sufficient credits and property in this country to finance additional war supplies.” The president readily admitted that loans or credits would have to be arranged eventually, but stated that the British have about \$2.5 billion in credit and property in the United States that could be liquidated. “He believes that this money ought to be spent first, although the British do not want to liquidate their American securities.” Moreover, the day before, 7 November, Roosevelt had spoken in a similar way to Arthur Purvis, who reported to Churchill that, although the president raised the question of Britain’s dollar resources, it was clear that Roosevelt thought the problem was still six months away.¹²⁷ As late as 1 December, just before leaving on his cruise, the president talked over the situation with Morgenthau and, after a cursory glance at a Treasury estimate of Britain’s dollar resources, he threw it on the desk and said, “Well, they aren’t bust -- there’s lots of money there.”¹²⁸

Therefore, in his telegram of 28 November 1940, Lothian explained that, in spite of the criticism and perturbation in the United States, his effort to “raise the issue now in an informal way was the right thing to do,” in part because the controversy would “find its way into the press”:

¹²⁵ PRO FO 371/24232, A4929/26/45, Tel. 2813, Lothian to Foreign Office, 26 November 1940; PRO FO 371/24243, A4891/131/45, Tel. 2813, Lothian to Foreign Office, 26 November 1940.

¹²⁶ PRO PREM 4/25/8, Layton to Churchill, 3 January 1941.

¹²⁷ Ickes, 3: 367, entry for 9 November 1940; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 907-908; Hall, 256-257; Kimball, 92-93; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 217; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 153.

¹²⁸ Kimball, 103; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 227; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 153-154.

In this as in every other question the ultimate determinant is public opinion. That opinion is saturated with illusions to the effect that we have vast resources available which have not been disclosed, that it is possible for us to mobilise all the American assets and all the assets of our Dominions and our allies as well as our properties in the Empire and in foreign countries and make them available in dollars for paying for munitions and that we ought to empty this vast hypothetical barrel before we ask for assistance.

He added that “the President said in private today to Thomas Lamont [of Morgan and Company] that he believed that we could go on paying to July 1942 and that it was therefore premature to raise the issue now.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, Lothian emphasized that this was only one facet of the fundamental debate now waging in the United States, whether to help Britain but only within the limits of neutrality, and “acquiesce in the defeat” of Britain, “if these half measures do not suffice,” or whether to keep Britain going even at risk of possible American entry into the war. Churchill’s impending letter to Roosevelt, he subsequently maintained, could only continue to stimulate the debate and keep the issue in the forefront of American public discourse.¹³⁰

Lothian was convinced that by stirring up a heated discussion, he could convince Americans of the desperation of the British situation. As Wheeler-Bennett noted, the ambassador decided to “throw his firecracker where it would cause the loudest reverberations, namely into the ranks of the press”:

His terse, succinct statement had been no casual ‘throw-away line’ but a premeditated simplification of the position of affairs. Nor had he . . . failed to foresee the effect which his statement would have in high places nor the obloquy which would descend upon him in consequence. Never was an indiscretion more calculated. It was Philip Lothian at his best, appreciating instinctively the reaction of the American people, knowing very clearly what he did.¹³¹

In spite of the public concerns raised in London, many in fact agreed that Lothian was correct, particularly in the Foreign Office, which believed that the long-term effect of his remarks on American opinion would be beneficial. T. North Whitehead described the ambassador’s comments as “an excellent statement . . . it can do nothing but good.” David Scott agreed, “Yes, I think that the long term effect will

¹²⁹ PRO FO 371/24243, A4909/131/45, Tel. 2843 (draft), Lothian to Halifax (for Churchill), 28 November 1940; Davis, *The War President*, 64; Kimball, 97-98; Lash, 261; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 152.

¹³⁰ Casey, 43; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 152; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 113.

¹³¹ Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 113.

be beneficial.”¹³² In the Treasury, Sir Frederick Phillips admitted privately that the “main difficulty is that our financial weakness has been so successfully concealed that outside Administration circles no one in the United States has the least notion of its gravity.”¹³³ In Washington, Richard Gardiner Casey, Lord Casey, the Australian ambassador to the United States, noted in his diary that, although Lothian was reproved for having spoken publicly about Britain’s financial needs on arrival in New York, “it may be that it will prove a good thing to have done,” as there was a very noticeable reluctance in the United States to face up to it:

The President has been given to believe that Britain has adequate funds for a year or more -- which is far from being the case. I suspect that Morgenthau hasn’t wanted to tell him the facts. However, the forward contracts that Britain is now ready to place will oblige Morgenthau in the light of Lothian’s statement to get Presidential approval -- which really means backing Britain’s bill -- and I expect it will be rather a shock to the President to realize that within a very few months, he will have to get legislation through Congress approving credits to Britain -- when he thought that such a formidable task was a considerable way off. Morgenthau in turn is likely to get a reproof from the President for having in effect kept him in the dark.

Casey concluded then that Lothian’s “gaffe” may well be a “blessing in disguise.”¹³⁴

In New York City, Lothian’s comments generated an exceptionally large volume of commentary in newspapers of every size all over the country, as a full-scale report by the BPS on 4 December 1940 clearly demonstrated. The report also indicated that, contrary to the concerns raised by some quarters of the British press, many American editors and commentators quite well understood that Lothian was talking only about Britain’s dollar problem. Consequently, the report concluded, “The interview precipitated realistic discussion of the purpose and implications of the whole so-called ‘Aid-to-Britain’ policy, a question hitherto generally discussed in a vague if well-meaning manner.” That was certainly what Lothian had intended. His initiative helped to place the dire British financial situation, not just in the analytical columns on the back editorial pages, but more critically, on the more visible front pages,

¹³² FO 371/24243, A4891/131/45, Foreign Office minutes, Whitehead [25 November]; Scott [28 November]; Cadogan [28 November].

¹³³ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 308; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 52, 54.

¹³⁴ NAS, GD40/17/514/1, 30 November 1940; Casey, 43.

which served to stir up and keep the debate in the public eye until Phillips's arrival on 4 December 1940.¹³⁵ Lothian's candor, as he clearly anticipated, effectively punctured American complacency.

Lothian's press conference of 23 November also had the result of effectively jump-starting renewed efforts to launch a more full-scale publicity and propaganda campaign in the United States. Specifically, London began to build upon efforts initiated earlier in the summer, which had been driven in a fundamental way by Lothian, to establish the institutional machinery necessary to expand British publicity efforts in the United States. The Foreign Office News Department, for example, called for the War Department to set clear propaganda objectives in the United States. In a 27 November letter to Duff Cooper, Charles Peake bluntly stated that "We know very well how delicate is the ground upon which we tread. But so long as we are not told how far we can go, what risks we may take, and above all what the Prime Minister expects and wants, we can only nibble at American propaganda and the time is too urgent for nibbling." T. North Whitehead predicted a vigorous American debate over intervention and argued that Britain's chances of victory would depend on the outcome of his discussion. Therefore, he asserted, "It is of the utmost importance that we should do what we can to influence [American public] opinion in our favour." Cooper heartily endorsed this assessment and begged Churchill to issue a "directive on which to base our propaganda effort." Churchill appeared sympathetic and asked only that any new British campaign be delayed until he could ascertain how his impending appeal letter to Roosevelt was received in Washington.¹³⁶

In the end, the ultimate question remains whether Lothian's comments, regardless of their impact on public opinion, had any significant effect on the Roosevelt administration. At first glance, it appears that the ambassador's comments may not have been so crucial because the administration was leaning toward some sort of action in any event. It has already been established that a month before the arrival of

¹³⁵ FO 371/24243, A4891/131/45, "New York Survey," 24 November 1940, 26 November 1940. See also files of *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune San Francisco Chronicle* for November and December 1940; Kimball, 96; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 51-52.

¹³⁶ Cull, 116; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1163.

Churchill's letter, and two weeks before Lothian returned to the United States, Roosevelt and his key advisers began addressing the dilemma of how to relieve Britain's dollar problem.¹³⁷ It appeared that there were only two viable possible courses of action. Both, however, required congressional action and were therefore fraught with political hazard. On the one hand, the United States might make a money loan to the British, as it did during the First World War. Such a step, however, would require the repeal of the Johnson Act, which specifically forbade American loans to nations that had defaulted on their World War One debts. On the other hand, the United States might make an outright gift of matériel, a choice Morgenthau believed to be infinitely preferable to massive credit extensions. Because this could not be done, however, within existing neutrality legislation, it would require a specific grant of authority to the president by Congress; and a direct effort to change those laws would likely mean a confrontation with the isolationists in Congress over issues that had hurt interventionists in recent years -- war debts, suspicion of Britain, and foreign entanglements.¹³⁸

It is, in fact, possible to argue that the concept of Lend-Lease was in the president's mind as early as November 1938. At a White House meeting on 14 November 1938, Roosevelt outlined his policy on rearmament and support for Britain and France. He said: "Had we had this summer 5,000 planes and the capacity immediately to produce 10,000 per year, even though I might have had to ask Congress for authority to sell or lend them to the countries in Europe, Hitler would not have dared to take the stand he did."¹³⁹ Moreover, on 2 August 1940, when Harold Ickes wrote Roosevelt a personal letter in support of

¹³⁷ Two days after the election, on 7 November 1940, Roosevelt had lunch in the Oval Office with Morgenthau and Arthur Purvis of the British Purchasing Commission. Purvis gave the president a report on the British and Allied merchant shipping losses in the Atlantic. He stated that if the current rate of sinkings continued, the British could not maintain the present inadequate shipping tonnage, much less increase that tonnage to what was necessary for long-term British survival. Ships were currently being sunk faster than they could be replaced. The implication was that it might become necessary, in order to ensure the delivery of material aid to Britain, for the United States to join in armed convoys across the Atlantic. Purvis also informed the president that Britain was approaching the limit of its ability to pay for that material aid, having liquidated nearly all that they could liquidate of their American holdings. Britain was running out of dollars. Davis, *The War President*, 46-48; Langer and Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, 521-522; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 216-217; Lash, 260.

¹³⁸ Davis, *The War President*, 48; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 217; Lash 260.

¹³⁹ Kimball, 123; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 53.

the destroyers-for-bases proposal, he made use of a metaphor that the president would later adopt and employ with great effect. “It seems to me,” Ickes wrote, “that we Americans are like the householder who refuses to lend or sell his fire extinguisher to help put out the fire in the house that is next door, although that house is all ablaze and the wind is blowing from that direction.” Consequently, Roosevelt wondered, as recently as the cabinet meeting of 8 November, might it not be possible for the United States to build cargo vessels and lease them to Britain?¹⁴⁰

It is clear, however, that, regardless of any earlier formulation of the Lend-Lease concept, many American leaders, and especially Roosevelt, did not think Britain’s dollar situation in the autumn of 1940 was urgent as of yet. The president’s principal anxiety in October and November was Britain’s merchant shipping position. He suggested that the United States should build 300 ships and then “rent them” to Britain, which would also pay for the insurance; and that this system might be extended to cover other supplies.¹⁴¹ What particularly worried Roosevelt was that London could no longer provide the capital investment needed to accelerate United States rearmament. Thus, he believed that the United States should make a large investment in plant and new orders, and should make Britain loans, at the very least, in order to provide Britain with merchant shipping. The capital investment for new plants and the new orders for munitions and ships could all be financed from Reconstruction Finance Corporation funds, which, he believed, did not require congressional approval. In discussions among his advisers, however, before and during the president’s departure from Washington, there existed a general feeling that they had reached the acceptable limits of executive action and that the administration must go to Congress for authority. After all, following the Battle of Britain, the head of the RFC, Jesse Jones, declared that “Britain was a good risk for a loan.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Butler, Lord Lothian, 293-294; Chadwin, 87-89; Davis, Into the Storm, 607-608; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 201; Ickes, 3: 291-294, entry for 4 August 1940; Kimball, 77; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 746, 749-752; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 217; Lash 260; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 84.

¹⁴¹ Gilbert, Finest Hour, 907-908; Hall, 256-257; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 53.

¹⁴² Blum, 206-207; Butler, Lord Lothian, 308; Kimball, 108, 113-114; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 233-235; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 52, 54.

Hence the significance of Lothian's comments of 23 November 1940. The ambassador's impromptu airport press conference did what he intended: it pushed into action a White House that was, at that moment, extremely reluctant to act.¹⁴³ To be sure, even in late November, Roosevelt continued to believe that Britain's financial crisis lay at least six months away, and that its problems could be met by an extension of existing executive policies, with the addition of some kind of loan arrangement; therefore, Lothian's comments did not have a direct or immediate effect upon the president's thinking. As Hull wrote, "the ambassador had stated nothing we did not know already." Nevertheless, Lothian's remarks pushed Henry Morgenthau to disabuse Roosevelt of the inflated notion that the British could raise anywhere remotely near \$9 billion on its Western Hemisphere properties. He forwarded a Treasury Department memo to the president clearly authenticating that the *overall global total* of British and British Empire assets at approximately \$9.5 billion, and that Britain's dollar deficit between 1 November 1940 and 30 June 1941 would total approximately over \$2.1 billion.¹⁴⁴ Morgenthau himself admitted that Lothian's initiative "had forced the President and himself to deal with the cash problem immediately."¹⁴⁵

Principally, while the key members of the administration had concluded, by early November, that the time had come to find a broad solution to Britain's problems, which would require congressional endorsement, the president still resisted going to Congress. Knox, Hull, Stimson, and Morgenthau all concluded that to continue assisting Britain in a makeshift way, which had characterized American aid efforts thus far, was essentially to do nothing.¹⁴⁶ By early December, however, Roosevelt suddenly encouraged the British to go full speed ahead with matériel orders for which they had proclaimed they

¹⁴³ Davis, *The War President*, 64; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 228.

¹⁴⁴ The memo estimated that even if Britain managed to liquidate the total of its dollar resources, it would be about \$70 million in arrears by the end of the fiscal year. Furthermore, much of the wealth of the British Empire, although its value could be [and was] estimated in dollars, could not be converted into ready cash. These possessions, Morgenthau pointed out, were immediately useful as collateral for cash loans; however, even then, as collateral, their dollar utility was severely limited. Blum, 199; Davis, *The War President*, 64-65; Kimball, 101, 103-104.

¹⁴⁵ Hall, 258; Kimball, 100; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 55.

¹⁴⁶ Blum, 201; Davis, *The War President*, 65-66; Hall, 212, 259; Hull, 872-873; Kimball, 103-104; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 226-228.

could never pay. On 1 December, he approved the orders from London for ships, aircraft, and munitions totaling \$2.1 billion, which would require government financing and more elaborate planning.¹⁴⁷

This shift can be attributed at least in part to Lothian's initiative. As Morgenthau told a meeting of key administration personnel on 3 December, they were under instructions from the president to come up with a workable solution because "Lothian had publicly put us on notice that [Britain] didn't have enough money." Lothian knew it as well. On 4 December, he wrote the Foreign Office that "The effect of recent events is that the President and the Secretary will have to explain our dollar position to Congress in the near future and obtain authority from it as to how it should be dealt with."¹⁴⁸

The Letter

One of Lothian's most significant achievements as ambassador was convincing Churchill to write the letter of 8 December 1940 to President Roosevelt, which not only outlined the true extent of Britain's need, openly and thoroughly, but ultimately compelled the president to finally address Britain's financial problems once and for all. The letter, in other words, was a critical step, perhaps *the* critical step, to the creation of the Lend-Lease program. While he later praised the ambassador in his war memoirs, noting that it was Lothian "who urged me to write a full statement of our position to the President,"¹⁴⁹ the prime minister was in fact initially quite reluctant to write and dispatch the letter. Lothian had to aggressively and relentlessly lobby Churchill to do so. Even when he agreed to send it, Churchill differed considerably with Lothian as to its contents. Lady Astor told her brother-in-law in January 1941 that

Philip . . . had a very difficult time making the P.M. see what he wanted to do in America. He felt that it was imperative that a strong note should go to the President

¹⁴⁷ In order to fill those orders, it would require some \$700 million of an American plant expansion that could not possibly, in the prevailing circumstances, be privately financed. He and Morgenthau furthermore devised a plan by which the United States government would place the orders for what Britain needed, the RFC could finance the plant expansion required to fill the orders, and the British would pay upon delivery the cost of manufacture plus, as a surcharge, a proportionate share of the cost of plant expansion. Davis, The War President, 65; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 227.

¹⁴⁸ Hall, 258; Kimball, 96, 100, 106-107; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 55.

¹⁴⁹ Churchill, 493.

telling him of our dire situation, particularly financially. It took him two weekends, one at Chequers and one at Dytchley but he finally got it done.¹⁵⁰

During his visit to Britain, Lothian convinced Churchill to raise once and for all the question of American aid with Roosevelt and to outline the true depth of Britain's need. Lothian and Churchill began to draft the letter during the weekend of 9-10 November 1940, when Lothian was visiting with the prime minister at Dytchley Park. They drew up a draft, which each man subsequently revised. In his diary, on 12 November 1940, Colville wrote that Lothian's draft was excellent:

Lord Lothian has drafted a telegram for the PM to send to Roosevelt. It stresses very frankly our need for American support in obtaining the Irish naval bases, in guarding Singapore, in getting more ships and above all in buying munitions and aircraft on credit. It is intended to make R feel that if we go down, the responsibility will be America's. Brendan tells me that the PM thinks it so admirably written that he could not improve a word of it; but it will go before the Cabinet for consideration.¹⁵¹

In the meantime, parts of the original draft went out for comment to responsible departments, but primarily to the Treasury, the Admiralty, and the Foreign Office, as well as the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet. Each made suggestions; the Treasury in particular felt that the sections on finance were not satisfactory. On the basis of these comments, Churchill did some redrafting on 18 November, by which time Lothian had returned to Washington.¹⁵²

Lothian's fundamental intention was that this letter respond to American criticisms that Britain asked for more than was necessary, primarily by presenting the hard facts. He believed that Churchill needed to lay Britain's cards on the table, just as he had done in late July 1940, when Lothian encouraged the prime minister to write Roosevelt a "most moving statement of our needs and dangers in respect of destroyers and flying boats," and, more boldly, when he provided detailed and comprehensive naval information to pro-British interventionist pressure groups without the approval, or even the knowledge, of the War Cabinet. After all, he wrote Churchill on 12 November, "there was an opinion in Washington

¹⁵⁰ Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 150-151.

¹⁵¹ Colville, 291-292, entry for 12 November 1940; Gilbert, War Papers, 1080.

¹⁵² Cull, 116; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 900; Kimball, 111; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 44.

that we were inclined to ask for more than was necessary. The only answer to this is a ruthless exposé of the strategic dangers.” The Foreign Office agreed. The previous day, Cadogan noted in his diary that Lothian “had produced a very good message from P.M. for President putting all our cards on the table (which I think is right).”¹⁵³

Several days later, therefore, on 16 November, Churchill wrote Roosevelt, “I am writing you a very long letter on the outlook for 1941 which Lord Lothian will give you in a few days.” Nevertheless, the prime minister remained hesitant to push Roosevelt. It is likely that his confidence in the force of events, combined with his expectations about the election and his habitual preference for secrecy, account for Churchill’s reluctance to send the letter in late November. While Lothian, supported by the Foreign Office, vigorously urged him to action, Churchill dragged his feet, preferring to wait for the right moment to send his request to Roosevelt. In spite of the ambassador’s repeated urgings that the letter be sent as soon as possible, there was a hiatus for over than a week. “I am still struggling with my letter to the president,” Churchill cabled Lothian on 26 November, “but hope to cable it to you in a few days.”¹⁵⁴

Lothian continued to impress upon Churchill the need to directly and honestly approach Roosevelt. In late November, he cited the president’s fatigue, as well as the overall inertia in Washington in the aftermath of the presidential election, as the perfect reason and, more to the point, the perfect time, to make Britain’s case. On 26 November, Lothian cabled an account of his meeting with Roosevelt the previous day, the first since he had left the United States in mid-October. He told the president that Churchill was about to “lay before him the problems of 1941 as they appeared to the British government” and that it would ask for assistance from the United States “on a larger scale than had yet been considered.” He found the president, however, in a fatigued and depressed state of mind, unresponsive to any new ideas for action. Moreover, he wrote that, although there remains great support for Britain,

¹⁵³ PRO PREM 3/486/1, Lothian to Churchill, 12 November 1940; Cadogan, 335, entry for 11 November 1940; Lash, 257; Reynolds, *Anglo-American Alliance*, 150.

¹⁵⁴ Churchill, 558; Cull, 116; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 926; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1147; Kimball, 111; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 45.

public opinion is “still inclined to live in complacency,” the result of Germany’s failure to launch an invasion. Therefore, “after talking to the President and a number of people here,” Lothian asserted, “I am more convinced than ever of the importance of the Prime Minister’s memorandum.”

The Foreign Office and the Admiralty, which for some time had been badgering the United States Navy to release more destroyers, fully concurred. On 27 November 1940, Whitehead noted that while most Americans obviously agreed that their security depended upon Britain’s survival, they were largely engaging “in wishful thinking and have not yet faced the realities of their position. The time has come to put the whole situation squarely before them.”¹⁵⁵ Moreover, after Nevile Butler at the British Embassy reported on 22 November that Secretary of the Navy Knox had replied that the prospect of receiving more American destroyers “must be ruled out of the realm of what was possible,” David Scott minuted:

This kind of thing shows how important it is that the President should be given the full picture of our position and desiderata as set out in the draft message from the Prime Minister to Mr. Roosevelt drafted by Lord Lothian. I understand from No. 10 that the P.M. is still mulling it over. The sooner he can get something off the better.

Cadogan and Halifax agreed, and the foreign secretary put Scott’s argument personally to the prime minister on 27 November 1940.¹⁵⁶ Under repeated pressure from Halifax, Churchill promised to get the letter ready in the next day or two. He asked Arthur Purvis, the head of the British Purchasing Commission in the United States, who was then in London, to prepare a preliminary redraft. Purvis, who also agreed with Lothian and Scott, suggested that Churchill add a “confidential balance sheet” to dramatize Britain’s needs by setting out, on one side, the forces and equipment probably needed to win the war, and on the other side, those currently available in the Empire or currently expected from the United States; the difference between “credit” and “debit” columns would represent Britain’s outstanding needs from the United States. Purvis explained that “In the past we have suffered by having fed our requirements to the United States ‘piece-meal’”:

¹⁵⁵ PRO FO 371/24243, A4909/131/45, Tel. 2802, Lothian to Foreign Office, 26 November 1940; minutes by Whitehead, Balfour, and Perowne, 27 November 1940.

¹⁵⁶ PRO FO 371/24243, A4790/131/45, Tel. 2754A, Nevile Butler to Foreign Office, 22 November 1940; minutes by Scott [25 November 1940], Cadogan [25 November 1940], and Halifax [25 November].

If the suggestion now made be adopted, the President would be personally presented with a comprehensive picture, a course which I understood from my last conversation with him and with Secretary Morgenthau he would welcome. It is only through placing such a picture in the President's hands that the U.S. Administration can be brought to visualize the necessary sacrifices in finance, suspension of labour regulations, restrictions on industry, etc.¹⁵⁷

As a result, Churchill dictated the entire letter at Chequers, on 29 November 1940, after which the process of departmental consultation began anew.¹⁵⁸ Still, he remained hesitant about pushing the issue. Furthermore, although the prime minister took up the letter again, the disagreements were not over. Lothian wanted the prime minister to focus on the financial crisis; Churchill, however, decided to focus on shipping and supply. After dictating his revised version on 29 November, he cabled Lothian: "I am reluctant to make any additions as I wish to focus on shipping."¹⁵⁹

Finally, on 30 November, Churchill completed the final version of the letter, with assistance from Purvis, and presented it on 2 December 1940 to the War Cabinet, which approved the text. The danger, Churchill warned, was that if Britain painted the picture too darkly, "elements in the United States would say that it was useless to help us, for such help would be wasted and thrown away." At the same time, if Britain painted too bright a picture, there might be an opposite tendency to withhold assistance. London could not be certain of Roosevelt's reaction, given the non-response to Churchill's congratulatory message of 6 November. Indeed, Churchill told the War Cabinet that he had been "rather chilled" by Roosevelt's silence and the attitude of the United States since the election. He assumed that Roosevelt must be waiting for the post-election atmosphere to disperse.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Gilbert, Finest Hour, 926-927; Kimball, 96-97; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 44-46; L. Woodward, 388.

¹⁵⁸ Gilbert, Finest Hour, 926-927; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 44.

¹⁵⁹ PRO FO 371/24243, A4790/131/45, Tel. 3290, Churchill to Lothian, 30 November 1940; PRO PREM 3/486/1, 218. John Colville noted in his diary that it was an ordeal to push Churchill to finally complete and circulate the letter: "I was put to great exertions having the letter printed for the Cabinet, having it telegraphed to Washington and besieging the Treasury, Foreign Office and Admiralty with demands for comments." Colville, 302, entry for 30 November 1940; Gilbert, War Papers, 1162.

¹⁶⁰ PRO FO 371/24243, A4790/131/45, Tel. 3288, Churchill to Lothian, 30 November 1940; also Tel. 3289 [30 November 1940], Tel. 3290 [30 November 1940], Tel. 3291 [30 November 1940], Tel. 3312 [1 December 1940], and Tel. 3313 [1 December 1940], all Churchill to Lothian; PRO CAB 65/10, WM 299 (40) 4, 2 December 1940; Cull, 115; Gilbert, Finest Hour, 928; Gilbert, War Papers, 1168-1169; Kimball, 97; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 43.

Lothian cabled very considerable amendments on the night of 4-5 December. He rewrote most of the last quarter of the letter, partly to focus more fully on the financial problem, but above all “to keep the perspective right without deducting from the shipping case.”¹⁶¹ Churchill flatly rejected most of the ambassador’s changes. Colville noted that the prime minister “did not care for many of Lothian’s alterations,” and described the whole thing as a “bloody business.”¹⁶² Moreover, the general feeling in the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet was that Lothian’s version was far too lengthy and detailed. Specific information could be sent later, perhaps to the appropriate United States department heads rather than to Roosevelt.¹⁶³ Scott, however, explained and supported Lothian’s approach in a minute of 6 December:

The Prime Minister was, I believe, mainly concerned to concentrate on the shipping, but Lord Lothian obviously still thinks that it would be better to give the President a full picture *now*, and I think he is right. His idea was that this letter should be continuously in the President’s mind and that its existence and the knowledge that some day it might be published would act as a continual spur in meeting our requirements for fear lest it should be said in years to come “he knew, he was warned and he didn’t take the necessary steps.”

Halifax replied that Churchill “did not like much of Lothian’s stuff which he thought verbose and suffering from an over-attempt at being comprehensive!” He believed that the prime minister alone should give the letter its final shape, as the product of his own mind rather than a composite effort, and that this consideration must take priority over logical completeness or particular points of emphasis.¹⁶⁴

In the end, Churchill focused on the shipping problem. More than half of the text, which ran to over 4,000 words, was devoted to shipping, in addition to a detailed statistical appendix setting out the shipping losses for 1940. After stating London’s assumptions about the “solid identity of interest” between the two countries, Churchill summarized the developments of 1940 and set out the prospects for

¹⁶¹ PRO FO 371/24243, A4909/131/45, Tel. 2915, Lothian to Churchill, 4 December 1940; also Tel. 2916, Tel. 2917, Tel. 2934, all Lothian to Churchill, 5 December 1940; PRO PREM 3/486/1, 190; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 46.

¹⁶² PRO FO 371/24243, A4790/131/45, Tel. 3357, Churchill to Lothian, 4 December 1940; also Tel. 3393 [6 December 1940], Tel. 3394 [6 December 1940], Tel. 3395 [7 December 1940], Tel. 3396 [7 December 1940], Tel. 3397 [7 December 1940], Tel. 3411 [8 December 1940], and Tel. 3412 [8 December 1940], all Churchill to Lothian; Colville, 302, entry for 6 December 1940; Gilbert, War Papers, 1182.

¹⁶³ PRO CAB 65/10, WM 301 (40) 7, 2 December 1940.

¹⁶⁴ PRO FO 371/24243, A4790/131/45, minutes by Scott [6 December 1940] and Halifax [7 December 1940]; PRO PREM 3/486/1, 181-183; Lash, 257; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 47.

1941. The previous five months had witnessed “a strong and perhaps unexpected recovery” by Great Britain fighting alone, although “with the invaluable aid in munitions and destroyers placed at our disposal by the great Republic of which you are for the third time the chosen Chief.” He discussed the three great interrelated problems of shipping, munitions, and finance, drawing attention to Britain’s requirements from the United States in each case.

With respect to the shipping problem, Churchill noted that, although the danger of defeat by “a swift, overwhelming blow” had for the moment greatly receded, a less sudden “but equally deadly” danger was the “steady and increasing diminution of sea tonnage.” He warned the president:

The decision for 1941 lies upon the seas. Unless we can establish our ability to feed this Island, to import the munitions of all kinds which we need, unless we can move our armies to the various theatres where Hitler and his confederate Mussolini must be met, and maintain them there, and do all this with the assurance of being able to carry it on till the spirit of the Continental Dictators is broken, we may fall by the way, and the time needed by the United States to complete her defensive preparations may not be forthcoming.

Churchill set out in detail Britain’s shipping losses, naval building programme, and the continuing danger that the naval forces of Vichy France would join the Axis, taking control of West Africa, “with the gravest consequences” to Britain’s sea communications between the north and south Atlantic. He then set out his requests: “the reassertion by the United States of the doctrine of the freedom of the seas from illegal and barbarous warfare,” supported by American destroyer protection for all lawful trade on the high seas and the use by the United States, for convoy protection purposes, of bases in Ireland for the duration of the war. Failing this, Churchill wanted Roosevelt to agree to “the gift, loan, or supply of a large number of American vessels of war,” particularly destroyers, to enable Britain to maintain the Atlantic route. In order to help secure the convoy routes, Churchill asked that American ships extend U.S. naval control on the western side of the Atlantic, “so as to prevent molestation by enemy vessels of the approaches” to the new American bases being established in the British West Indies.

Finance, by contrast, took up only about 400 words, toward the end of the letter. Churchill essentially reiterated what Lothian had already made clear, that “The moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies.” He noted that the total of orders already

placed, orders currently under negotiation, and plant expansion costs, already added up to more than the total of exchange resources that were available:

While we will do our utmost, and shrink from no proper sacrifice to make payments across the Exchange, I believe you will agree that it would be wrong in principle and mutually disadvantageous in effect if at the height of this struggle Great Britain were to be divested of all saleable assets, so that after victory was won with our blood, civilisation saved, and the time gained for the United States to be fully armed against all eventualities, we should stand stripped to the bone. Such a course would not be in the moral or economic interests of either of our countries. We here would be unable, after the war, to purchase the large balance of imports from the United States over and above the volume of our exports, which is agreeable to your tariffs and domestic economy. Not only should we in Great Britain suffer cruel privations, but widespread unemployment in the United States and follow the curtailment of American exporting power.

Consequently, without making any specific proposal, Churchill put the British Empire at the mercy of the United States: without American escorts, extended patrolling, and the use “of every ton of merchant shipping” that it possessed, the Royal Navy could not keep open the supply routes to Britain and to its battlefronts around the world; without American munitions, especially aircraft, Britain could not arm itself or its allies; without financial aid, Britain would not be able to acquire the shipping and munitions it needed. This, Churchill concluded, was not “an appeal for aid,” but rather “a statement of the minimum action necessary to the achievement of our common purpose.”¹⁶⁵

While the prime minister completed and polished the final draft of his letter, in the United States, Roosevelt was about to embark upon a post-election Caribbean cruise. Lothian wrote to Churchill that the president was “jammed with appointments” and it would thus be “a mistake to try and give him your letter at the last moment when he cannot give any serious consideration to it before he goes.” For that reason, Lothian suggested that the letter would have much greater effect if delivered while the president was relaxing and reflecting, rather than in the last-minute bustle before he left Washington.¹⁶⁶ As he

¹⁶⁵ Davis, *The War President*, 68-70; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 936-938; Hall, 255; Kimball, 112; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 231-233; Lash, 257-259; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 47. For the full text of the letter, see PRO FO 371/24243, A5048/131/45, Churchill to Roosevelt, 8 December 1940; Churchill, 494-501; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1189-1197; L. Woodward, 388-395.

¹⁶⁶ PRO FO 371/24243, A4909/131/45, Tel. 2866, Lothian to Foreign Office (for Churchill), 30 November 1940; PRO CAB 65/10, WM 299 (40) 4, 2 December 1940; PRO PREM 3/486/1, 195-196; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1168-1169; Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 44.

wrote Halifax, the president's holiday had by this point become "his customary prelude to evolving some stroke of policy."¹⁶⁷

Consequently, the War Cabinet cabled the letter to the British Embassy in Washington, and Lothian forwarded the text to the State Department on the morning of 8 December 1940.¹⁶⁸ In his cover letter to Cordell Hull, Lothian asked if the letter "could be sent on to the President at the earliest possible moment. I hope it may be possible to send it by seaplane, because the Prime Minister is most anxious that the President should have time to read it carefully while on his cruise and before he gets back to the bustle of Washington."¹⁶⁹

The president left Washington on 2 December 1940 for his Caribbean cruise aboard the *U.S.S. Tuscaloosa*, bringing along only his immediate staff. The White House announced that the main purpose of the cruise would be to inspect some of the new base sites recently acquired in the West Indies; in fact, the principal business for each day was fishing, basking in the sun, and relaxing with friends. At stated points along the route, U.S. Navy seaplanes landed alongside the ship in order to deliver White House mail, including quantities of state papers for Roosevelt's signature.¹⁷⁰

The Caribbean cruise provided an opportunity for the president not only to relax but also to reflect. Not only Lothian, but close associates of the president, such as Sumner Welles and William Bullitt, observed that Roosevelt had been unusually tired and depressed in the weeks following the election. Felix Frankfurter, the Supreme Court justice, noted that Roosevelt faced his third term not with elation, but "in a deep Lincolnesque mood," conscious of the magnitude of the task ahead. The vacation,

¹⁶⁷ PRO FO 414/277, A4627/39/45, Tel. 2927, Lothian to Halifax, 5 December 1940.

¹⁶⁸ PRO FO 371/24244, A5048/131/45. Tel. 2975, Lothian to Foreign Office, 8 December 1940.

¹⁶⁹ Letter, Lothian to Hull, 8 December 1940, President's Secretary's File (PSF), The British Diplomatic Files, Diplomatic Correspondence: October-December 1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Digital Archives.

¹⁷⁰ Davis, *The War President*, 68; Sherwood, 222-223. There is some confusion, as to when exactly the president received the letter. It is sometimes asserted that Roosevelt received it on the afternoon of 9 December, but, in fact, it may not have arrived until the morning of the 11 December. Sherwood argues that the letter arrived on the morning of 9 December with one of the prearranged deliveries by Navy seaplane of mail from Washington. On Lothian's cover letter to Hull of 8 December there were the annotations: "Forwarded to Navy 2:30 PM. Plane departed between 4 and 5 P.M. due in President's hands afternoon of 9th." Sherwood, 223; Kimball, 111-112.

sun, fishing, and conversation, however, gave the president time not only to rest, but to draw together various half-formed ideas.

Churchill's letter had a considerable effect, chastening and stimulating, which was probably due less to its comments on finance or shipping than to its comprehensive character and the way it brought together the interconnected relationship of Britain's varied problems. According to Harry Hopkins, one of the few contemporary sources of information about Roosevelt's immediate reaction to that letter, the message from the prime minister had a profound effect. As Hopkins told Churchill later, the president read and reread the letter, brooding in his deck chair, and for about two days seemed unsure of what to do. Then, on 11 December, Hopkins later told Churchill, the president came up with the Lend-Lease idea.¹⁷¹

Hence, once again, the significance of Lothian's comments of 23 November 1940. Both before and after his cruise, Roosevelt still believed Britain's *financial* crisis to be six months away. In spite of Lothian's airport comments and Churchill's letter, the president informed the press on his return that the British had plenty of exchange to pay for existing orders. Moreover, he later told Morgenthau "that he always had in mind that they would have enough money to last until the first of May."¹⁷² Roosevelt was concerned, however, about Britain's shortage of merchant *shipping*. Furthermore, he was also worried that Britain could no longer provide the capital investment that had helped to stimulate American industry. In the fall of 1940, Roosevelt had been clearly leaning toward finding some way to assist Britain more substantially. On 8 November, he told the cabinet and then the press that he favored a fifty-fifty division of war materials with Britain. He also began to develop an idea that had been in his mind as

¹⁷¹ Churchill, 501-502; Davis, The War President, 66-68, 70-71; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 131; Kimball, 119-120; Lash, 262-263; Meacham, 78; Reynolds, Anglo-American Alliance, 153-154; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 104-105; Sherwood, 224. Kenneth Davis writes that, inspired by the solitude, the calming effect of the sun and wind, and the impact of Churchill's letter, the president began to piece together in his mind the component details that would become the foundation of Lend-Lease. He thought about his own notion of building cargo ships in American shipyards and leasing them to Britain, an action for which legal basis already existed. Roosevelt considered, furthermore, that such a concept could be extended to all munitions and all war matériel. He asked if the leasing device were combined with the lending device -- the lending of things, not money -- might not the combination be an overall solution to the problem? Therefore, "gradually, the blur of impressions, memories, and ideas in his mind achieved a focus, assumed a logical form." Davis, The War President, 71; Churchill, 501-503; Kimball, 119-120.

¹⁷² Butler, Lord Lothian, Kimball, 105; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 225; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 54-55.

early as November 1938 -- leasing ships or any other property that was “loanable, returnable, or insurable.” Lothian’s airport comments thus had generated a sufficient amount of debate and anxiety, in the press and in Congress, which forced the administration to clarify its position. When Roosevelt left for his two-week cruise, he instructed his cabinet to “use your imaginations” in order to come up with a plan to address Britain’s financial problems. By the time Roosevelt returned from his cruise, however, having received, read, and absorbed Churchill’s letter, he had pulled together his ideas into a comprehensive program for all of Britain’s supply needs, based on the Lend-Lease concept. Lothian’s parallel initiatives had made clear to Roosevelt, therefore, the need for a comprehensive solution to Britain’s needs.

“Good Night, Philip”

Throughout the fall of 1940, Lothian began to show signs of physical deterioration, the result of immensely hard work. By the latter part of June, he complained that his golf was shocking, most likely because “I’m working about twice as hard as I ever have in my life before.” The work, moreover, became extraordinarily taxing, particularly in July and August, when he was consumed by the destroyers negotiations. It was not unusual to be roused out of bed in New York City in the small hours and told to return to Washington by a 2:35 a.m. train in order to deal with some urgent telegrams.¹⁷³ Already by late August, Lothian was exhausted. On 1 September, he wrote Lady Astor from Boston:

I came up here to the Bells for this weekend. I felt almost dead beat after all the work about the naval bases and the destroyers, which has kept me up late of nights. Besides I’ve only had 4 days real holiday in a year.¹⁷⁴

The most outward sign of his intensifying weariness was an increasing tendency to fall asleep, sometimes when dictating, sometimes on public occasions, or even sometimes while speaking.¹⁷⁵ When Wheeler-Bennett returned from a brief visit to London in September, he was shocked by the extraordinary change in Lothian’s appearance in only a few weeks:

¹⁷³ Butler, Lord Lothian, 290.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 298.

¹⁷⁵ David Hubback, No Ordinary Press Baron: A Life of Walter Layton (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 182; Casey, 44; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 111.

He looked greatly fatigued and to my dismay dropped off to sleep for a brief spell in the middle of one of his sentences. That he had been working desperately hard ever since June I was well aware, but this seemed unnatural and I was the more anxious when I found that this falling asleep was a recent development and that it had occurred on public occasions, between courses at luncheon -- or dinner parties and even when he was dictating. It was disturbing not only for itself but because it was causing comment in Washington. . . . To me . . . he looked a sick man.¹⁷⁶

It was not, however, exclusively from fatigue and drowsiness alone that Lothian began to fall asleep. For some time, he had been suffering from a troublesome disease of the kidneys, known as uremia, which causes lethargy and somnolence,¹⁷⁷ although he would usually recover rapidly from its attacks. In July, for example, he wrote of feeling “dreadfully tired” before starting a brief vacation in Connecticut but, coming back to Washington, described himself as feeling extraordinarily fit, “like a two-year old.”¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, what Lothian needed was rest, a complete holiday for at least a month. What he did, however, was to take a short leave in Britain, most of which he spent working in London, at that moment enduring the most intensive phase of German bombing. During this visit to Britain, several people noticed his signs of extreme fatigue. At times, he looked vigorous and healthy, and at other times, he looked “dreadfully ill.” He was reported to have fallen off to sleep even at the prime minister’s table. At Oxford, however, on his last day in Britain, he was apparently serene and untired.¹⁷⁹

When Lothian returned to Washington, Wheeler-Bennett noted that he did not look rested and did not seem well. The periods of somnolence became more frequent and more commented upon. Lothian nevertheless pushed on. He returned to a great mass of work, official and semi-official, taking on as much as he could. He continued to lunch and dine out as much as before. He even instituted a new “custom” of “working breakfasts” and occasionally snatched the time for a round of golf.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 111.

¹⁷⁷ Uremia is a term used to loosely describe the illness accompanying kidney failure, also called renal failure. Early symptoms include anorexia and lethargy, and late symptoms can include decreased mental acuity and coma.

¹⁷⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 303-304; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 111.

¹⁷⁹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 307; Sykes, 424.

¹⁸⁰ Sykes, 427; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 114.

Even as he grew sicker, Lothian continued to make the case for Britain. On the evening of 11 December 1940, Nevile Butler, the Counsellor of the British Embassy, delivered an address, prepared by Lothian, to the American Farm Bureau Federation in Baltimore. It was to have been Lothian's first full-length public speech in five months. Given the urgency of Britain's need for American assistance, Lothian considered this to be his most important speech, and had worked on it since the end of November. In the days before 11 December, however, he took ill, seriously enough that he himself could not deliver the speech. In the ambassador's place, therefore, Butler spoke instead.

In general terms, Butler reiterated Lothian's well-known themes. For example, in one significant respect, he described the war as an ideological and revolutionary struggle between Hitler's totalitarian military machine and democracy. The core of Nazism, he argued, was moral rotteness, the application of militarism to the entire nation, "in order to subjugate others so that their resources can be organized on totalitarian lines for the benefit of the German military state." Hitlerism, Lothian asserted, "cannot stop and become peaceful. Nazi Germany is organized for war and totalitarian economics and for nothing else." The core of the Allied creed, however, for all of their mistakes, was liberty, justice, and truth: "The Sermon on the Mount is in the long run much stronger than all Hitler's propaganda or Goering's guns and bombs." More to the point, however, Lothian continued to reiterate, even to the end, that the survival of Britain was essential to the security of the United States. He recalled the gloomy speculation of early June 1940, that if Hitler conquered Britain, "the British Fleet would be sunk or surrendered or scattered among the British nations overseas." Yet, Lothian asked, "wasn't it clear that American security required two fleets -- the British Fleet based on Britain blocking the entry of hostile European fleets into the Eastern Atlantic, and the United States Fleet predominant in the Pacific?" He further recounted the gloomy days of June and July 1940, from Dunkirk, the fall of France, and through the Battle of Britain. That grim picture, he maintained, had "been dispelled, at any rate for the present, by the action of the people of a small island in the North Sea, nobly and valiantly aided by the young nations of the British family across the seas." Nevertheless, 1941, he predicted, would be the critical year. Even though the Germans failed to bomb Britain into surrender, and even though the Germans had failed to launch their

inevitable invasion, Hitler would certainly try again over the next year, “with all his might this winter and spring.” Lothian predicted that in his next attack, Hitler would concentrate on the sea. He would use his new submarines, long-distance planes, and his great new battleships, the *Bismarck* and the *Tirpitz*, in order to deliver a knockout blow, “so as to prevent us getting the food, raw materials, and aeroplanes necessary to enable us to continue the war at full strength.” The danger, he argued, was the result of Britain fighting alone, while its navy was “strung out terribly thin”:

We think this is a situation which concerns you almost as much as it concerns us. It has long been clear that your security no less than ours depends upon our holding the Atlantic impregnable and you the Pacific. . . . Therefore the more secure our control of the Atlantic the less likely is the outbreak of a two-ocean war.

The essential step towards Britain’s ability to secure the Atlantic was, the “uninterrupted flow of American munitions to the British Isles.” If Britain could now withstand Hitler’s fast developing onslaught by sea and air against its life lines, and assure the uninterrupted flow of American supplies, Hitler’s defeat was certain; Britain would be victorious. But with his final words, which generated much attention and comment, Lothian placed the burden of the future firmly on the American people:

It is for you to decide whether you share our hopes and what support you will give in realizing them. We are, I believe, doing all we can. Since May there is no challenge we have evaded, no challenge we have refused. If you back us you won’t be backing a quitter. The issue now depends largely on what you decide to do. Nobody can share the responsibility with you. It is the great strength of democracy that it brings responsibility down squarely on every citizen and every nation. And before the judgement [*sic*] seat of God each must answer for his own actions.¹⁸¹

Lothian’s speech won raves and praise. *Time Magazine* described it as “a powerful statement, ending with an expression of faith in a final democratic victory, and a projection of the stable democratic world that could come after the war. It was in some respects Lord Lothian’s best speech.” Morgenthau described it as the perfect response to what he termed “this blue fog here in Washington, that Britain is licked.”¹⁸² Wheeler-Bennett, who helped the ambassador revise it, described the speech as Lothian’s

¹⁸¹ *The New York Times*, 12 December 1940, 1, 6; *The Washington Post*, 12 December 1940, 1, 7; Lothian, “Speech to the American Farm Bureau Federation at Baltimore, 11 December 1940,” in *Speeches*, 132-144; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 308-311; Kimball, 115; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 213; Sykes, 428.

¹⁸² *Time Magazine*, 23 December 1940, 10-11; Kimball, 115.

“valedictory to America and to Britain and to the World.” It was a “superb quintessence of all that he had believed in and striven for and for which he was about to die.”¹⁸³

The following morning, 12 December 1940, the press sought further comment from the ambassador. Alistair Cooke, the special correspondent of the *Times*, called at the British Embassy to interview Lothian. The butler responded to the visitor, however, with solemn composure: “I’m terribly sorry, Sir, that will be quite impossible. The Ambassador died early this morning.”¹⁸⁴

The ambassador had been quite clearly fatigued over the previous months, the result of overwork. In recent days, moreover, the pattern of strong days followed by weak days persisted. For example, Lothian played nine holes of golf on Saturday, 7 December, showing no signs of weakness; in fact, he had seemed fresh and vigorous. That evening, he and Wheeler-Bennett finalized the draft of his speech. When they had finished, however, Wheeler-Bennett recalled, “I looked up and saw that he was ill:”

I begged him to go to bed. “I can’t,” he said, “I have Norman Davis [the veteran American statesman and Head of the American Red Cross] coming to dine.” “You know him well enough to give a tray in your room,” I said. “Do go to bed.” But he would not -- at least not then -- and summoning up a smile he said: “Good night, Jack, and thank you.” I had always preserved strict protocol in dealing with him as my chief, calling him “sir”, but now somehow I felt as if I were off-duty. “Good night, Philip,” I said. I never saw him again.¹⁸⁵

Lothian dined out that evening, and on the following evening, Sunday, 8 December, he was again at work, drafting a telegram for the Foreign Office, when he suddenly took ill. His pain was significant enough that, at his request, his staff contacted an old friend in Boston, Mr. Cudworth, a Christian Science practitioner, who arrived early the next morning. Another of the ambassador’s long-time friends, Sir Walter Layton, who was currently preparing to depart for Britain, asked whether a real doctor should be summoned and if he should stay; Lothian urged him to go, and take personal messages to London. The ambassador remained drowsy and weak, but on Monday and Tuesday, 9 and 10 December, he seemed to

¹⁸³ Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 114.

¹⁸⁴ Cull, 123.

¹⁸⁵ Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 115.

rally.¹⁸⁶ On Wednesday afternoon, 11 December, he felt sufficiently energetic to have a few words with Richard Casey, the Australian ambassador, another long-time friend. Casey asked Lothian's Christian Science practitioner, Mr. Cudworth, whether "in due course . . . there was not a time element involved -- i.e., did not a moment arrive when he was convinced that his treatment was not effective and, when that time arrived, did he not agree that orthodox medical science should be called in. He reassured me on this by saying that he was broadminded on these matters and that when he was so convinced, it was his habit to ask the individual and/or his relatives or associates if they wanted other advice." Casey, however, was not convinced. In his own memoirs, he later wrote that Cudworth "was clearly not interested in any diagnosis of Lothian's trouble."¹⁸⁷

That evening, however, Lothian's condition took a turn for the worst. He was attended throughout by his secretary, Mrs. Fowler, and his valet-chauffeur, Mr. Winter, as well as by Cudworth and a Christian Science male nurse.¹⁸⁸ Lothian died at approximately 2:00 a.m., 12 December 1940. Nevile Butler informed the Foreign Office of the ambassador's death in a telephone message:

I deeply regret to report that Lord Lothian died at 2 a.m. this morning. He was taken ill on Sunday night and since then had been receiving the treatment that he wished. Shall be grateful if you will inform his sisters and ascertain their wishes.¹⁸⁹

His illness had been sudden and its gravity known only to a few. The ambassador's Christian Science beliefs, moreover, had complicated matters. The Embassy's head of Chancery, Derek Hoyer-Millar, together with Wheeler-Bennett and the senior diplomatic staff, in addition to other friends such as Layton and Casey, tried urgently to convince Lothian to see a conventional practitioner, but they found their efforts obstructed. Lothian's personal staff -- Mrs. Fowler, Mr. Winter, Nevile Butler -- were also Christian Scientists, who had reinforced his resolve to refuse conventional medical attention. They

¹⁸⁶ Butler, Lord Lothian, 312; Hubback, 182; Sykes, 428; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 115.

¹⁸⁷ NAS, GD40/17/514/1, Casey's recollections, 12 December 1940; Casey, 44-45.

¹⁸⁸ Butler, Lord Lothian, 312; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 115.

¹⁸⁹ PRO FO 371/24246, A5071/301/45, telephone message from Butler to Foreign Office, 1:30 p.m., London time, 12 December 1940.

insisted that he was responding to Christian Science treatment.¹⁹⁰ Consequently, the Foreign Office telegraphed Butler that, “In view of rumours that his death was not accidental please telegraph at once full report of occasion for and treatment of Lord Lothian’s fatal illness.”¹⁹¹ Butler responded that Lothian seemed perfectly normal over the weekend, when he played golf on Saturday and had a long conversation with Cordell Hull on Sunday morning. On Sunday afternoon, however, he fainted. Although he was able to do business in his bedroom, he was “in a very weak condition with internal pains.” He specifically requested Christian Science treatment from a Boston practitioner, Mr. Cudworth, whom he had known for many years. Mr. Cudworth received hourly reports by telephone through Sunday evening and reached Washington at noon on Monday.

On Sunday and Monday an apparent stoppage of the bladder action was causing distress, weakness and difficulty of breathing. His condition improved in the course of the day and voiding took place on Tuesday on which day his condition seemed generally better. On Wednesday night Lord Lothian . . . [had some restful hours] but between 1 and 1:30 a.m. suffered a sudden seizure of shortness of breath and from this he never recovered. Fresh symptoms and earlier ones, e.g. a tendency to fall asleep which has been evident all this year, suggested that death was due to toxic poisoning affecting the hear, and this seemed [to be the] view of medical practitioner who was called in after [death] and who arranged for death certificate. This was given to-day by the Coroner.¹⁹²

With respect to the suggestion that Lothian’s death was not accidental, Butler wrote that “We know nothing whatever to support any suggestion of foul play, and Coroner gave his certificate after talking to Dr. Weems.” Nevertheless, Butler undoubtedly felt compelled to defend himself:

It will no doubt be questioned why I did not insist on calling in a medical practitioner. As regards this, it was Lord Lothian’s clear wish to have the form of treatment he chose . . . to have forced a change on him would in my view have been dangerous. I had contemplated calling in today (12 December) an orthodox practitioner in order to give you his opinion as to the length of time Lord Lothian was likely to be out of action.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Cull, 123. Walter Layton, who had taken a train to Montreal, received the news upon arrival. He always reproached himself for not insisting on a conventional physician being called. Hubback, 182-183.

¹⁹¹ PRO FO 371/24246, A5071/301/45, Tel. 3482, Foreign Office to Butler, 12 December 1940.

¹⁹² PRO FO 371/24246, A5071/301/45, Tel. 3056, Butler to Foreign Office, 12 December 1940.

¹⁹³ PRO FO 371/24246, A5128/301/45, Tel. 3057, Butler to Foreign Office, 12 December 1940; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 115. Lothian’s principal biographer, J. R. M. Butler did not address these divisions of opinion in the British Embassy. Coincidentally, the biographer was the brother of Neville Butler, the official who, in his own words, “did not insist on calling in a medical practitioner.” Cull, 227, note 100.

Lothian's death stunned the British government. Cadogan described Lothian's death as a "great blow." Colville noted that Lothian's death represented "a tragic blow to our relations with the United States where his ability was so marked and his drive so fruitful." Nicolson wrote that it was "a blow over the heart."¹⁹⁴ Halifax sarcastically observed, however, "another victim for Christian Science." Churchill agreed. "What a monstrous thing," the prime minister stated to Professor Lindemann, "that Lothian should not have allowed a doctor to be called." He further reflected that, "I had at last come to like Philip, after years of prejudice."¹⁹⁵ Robert Post, the London correspondent of *The New York Times*, reported that the news of Lothian's death stunned London and overshadowed recent British successes in western Egypt. One "anonymous commentator" on the radio, he wrote, stated that it was if Britain had lost a battleship, while another commentator in "official circles" asserted that "It is a worse loss to us than two army corps would have been," a reflection of not only Lothian's success in Washington, but also an indication of the extent to which the British felt the United States was the key to British survival.¹⁹⁶ Duff Cooper expressed sorrow as well. This did not prevent him, however, from tactlessly initiating a thorough reorganization of the British Press Service, immediately after the ambassador's death.¹⁹⁷

In London, his memory was honored by a service in Westminster Abbey on 20 December 1940, and formal tributes were paid to him in both houses of Parliament. Churchill, who described Lothian's passing as "a loss to the nation and to the Cause," immediately telegraphed to Roosevelt: "Am deeply grieved at loss of Lothian, who was our greatest Ambassador to the United States and who had

¹⁹⁴ Cadogan, 339, entry for 12 December 1940; Colville, 309, entry for 12 December 1940; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1220-1221; Nicolson, 130, entry for 12 December 1940.

¹⁹⁵ Colville, 312, entry for 13 December 1940; Cull, 123; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 942.

¹⁹⁶ *The New York Times*, 13 December 1940; Nicolson, 130, entry for 12 December 1940.

¹⁹⁷ Cooper made a number of suggestions for reorganizing publicity services in the United States, "some of which," T. North Whitehead wrote, "would not be acceptable to us or to the late Ambassador." He sharply added that, "It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Minister of Information was not averse to taking advantage of the immediate situation in Washington to obtain a decision which he had every reason to know would not have been sanctioned by the late Ambassador." Cadogan added, "The conduct of the M.of I. over this is unworthy of a 3rd rate sensational newspaper editor. It is indecent and disgusting." PRO FO 371/24232, A5183/26/45, minutes by Whitehead, Balfour, and Cadogan, all 22 December 1940.

established such intimate and cordial relations with you and your Executive. We have lost a good friend and high Interpreter.” He later added, “I need not tell you what a loss this is for me personally and to the War Cabinet.”¹⁹⁸ In a speech to the House of Commons, on 19 December 1940, Churchill paid tribute to Lothian, bestowing praise on his great success as ambassador to the United States: “I take the opportunity of expressing the grief which the House has felt in all quarters at the untimely, sudden death of our Ambassador in the United States, Lord Lothian.” After a few observations about his character and career, Churchill noted that many people sitting in the chamber, himself included, had misjudged his ability:

. . . when he was appointed before the war to the Embassy in the United States, the most important of all the functions outside this country that can be discharged by any British subject, there were various opinions upon the wisdom of that choice. Very soon, however, it was seen that the new Ambassador was gaining in influence every day, that his stature rose with the greatness of the topics confided to him, and that the contacts which he established, the intimate relations which he developed, with the high personnel of the United States Administration, the friendship to which the President of the United States has himself testified -- all the evidence showed the remarkable efficiency and success with which he discharged his important and extremely delicate and difficult mission.

Indeed, the prime minister concluded by noting that Lothian died at the height of his influence:

Suddenly, he is taken from us. He passes away. But I cannot help feeling that to die at the height of a man’s career, the highest moment of his effort here in this world, universally honoured and admired, to die while great issues are still commanding the whole of his interest, to be taken at a moment when he could already see ultimate success in view -- is not the most unenviable of fates. I feel that the House would have wished me to express, in these few words, the sorrow which we feel at his death, and also the very grievous and practical sense that we have of the loss we have suffered at this particular juncture in having been deprived of his invaluable services.¹⁹⁹

Lothian’s sudden and unexpected death was mourned as deeply in the United States as in Britain.

Roosevelt was stung by the news of Lothian’s death, which he received while still at sea. The two men had developed a warm personal friendship, although Lothian had suffered the president’s wrath during their last important meeting. At once, Roosevelt dispatched, through the State Department, a message to

¹⁹⁸ PRO PREM 3/468, Churchill to Roosevelt, 13 December 1940, 21 December 1940; Churchill, 503; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 942; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1225; Lee, 183, entry for 20 December 1940. Kimball writes that although eulogists are “universally prone to exaggerate, in this case he may well have made an accurate assessment.” Kimball, 115.

¹⁹⁹ Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1257-1258.

the press and a message to King George VI, expressing shock and grief at this abrupt loss of a personal friend, who was also America's great friend: "I am shocked beyond measure to hear of the sudden passing of my old friend and your Ambassador." Over the previous 25 years, the president wrote, "we had come to understand and trust each other."²⁰⁰ Cordell Hull described Lothian's death as "an acute loss," and immediately cabled Churchill and Halifax.²⁰¹ He later wrote that few ambassadors had ever assumed their posts at so tense a moment. "Lothian to my mind was unexcelled as an ambassador by anyone of my acquaintance. His . . . "outstanding ability, his willingness and readiness to grasp our point of view and to represent that of his own Government, and his pleasing personality, made him an unsurpassed medium through which to carry on relations between the two Governments."²⁰² Harold Ickes wrote that Lothian "knew America as few Europeans do. He was thoroughly democratic, knew our American habits and psychology and was very popular here. His death is a severe loss."²⁰³ The Australian ambassador Lord Casey wrote in his memoirs that one of the Justices of the American Supreme Court said to him, "Americans love a lord, but only if he doesn't act like a lord. Lothian was universally liked and very greatly respected. He did a great job."²⁰⁴ Lothian's old friend, the American diplomat Norman Davis wrote that in all of his experience, he had never known of his own country being quite so affected by a foreigner's death: "In some indescribable way he had completely endeared himself to the country, not only to those who knew him but to those who did not know him." A taxi driver reportedly told Mr. Davis's secretary, "You know lady, I didn't think Americans would ever be keen

²⁰⁰ PRO FO 371/24246, A5071/301/45, Tel. 3051, Butler to Foreign Office, 12 December 1940; *The Washington Post*, 13 December 1940, 7; Davis, *The War President*, 70; Sherwood, 224; Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI*, 519.

²⁰¹ PRO FO 371/24246, A5128/301/45, Tel. 3052, Butler to Foreign Office, 12 December 1940; Hull, 874. The next day, Hull told Butler that "he had never been so distressed by the loss of a diplomatic colleague." PRO FO 371/24246, A5128/301/45, Tel. 3071, Butler to Foreign Office, 12 December 1940

²⁰² Hull, 874; Hyde, 48.

²⁰³ *The Washington Post*, 13 December 1940, 7. This article solicited tributes from virtually all the major cabinet members with whom Lothian worked -- Hull, Ickes, Stimson, Knox, and Morgenthau -- as well as other cabinet members, Eleanor Roosevelt, and members of Congress.

²⁰⁴ Casey, 45.

about an Englishman, but I swear every customer I have had today feels terrible bad [sic] about that Lord Lothian's death."²⁰⁵

The State Department arranged for his temporary internment, attended by an honor guard, in Arlington National Cemetery, a rare honor reserved for only one other British representative during the war.²⁰⁶ A very large concourse attended the state funeral in Washington Episcopalian Cathedral at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, 15 December 1940. The next day, after a private cremation, his remains were placed, with ceremony, within the national vault, and ultimately beneath the mast of the battleship *Maine*, to remain there until 1945, when they were brought home to Scotland aboard an American warship. There they were finally laid in the family vault in the north transept of Jedburgh Abbey.²⁰⁷

Lothian's death created a vacuum in the conduct of Anglo-American relations. Never had the office held such importance. By the fall of 1940, both Churchill and Roosevelt preferred to conduct most of their business through Lothian, almost completely ignoring Joseph P. Kennedy in London. As recently as 10 October, Halifax informed Lothian that Kennedy was "very much out of temper" with the White House, his "principal complaint being that they had not kept him adequately informed of their policy and doings during the last two or three months. Indeed, he said, if it had not been for what he had learnt in London, he would have known nothing of what was going on."²⁰⁸ United States army attaché in London, General Raymond E. Lee, noted in his diary that Roosevelt relied upon two sources for quick and reliable information, "my cables and the information which is furnished him by Lord Lothian."²⁰⁹ Therefore, the vacancy of Massachusetts Avenue triggered an immediate flurry of speculation as to a suitable successor. Raymond Gram Swing advised Churchill, "Urgently remember that liberals won the election here so Ambassador must be Liberal." He also added, "No old school tie . . . also must not be appeasement."

²⁰⁵ Butler, Lord Lothian, 314.

²⁰⁶ Field Marshall Sir John Dill.

²⁰⁷ Butler, Lord Lothian, 312; Hyde, 48; *Time Magazine*, 23 December 1940, 10-11.

²⁰⁸ PRO FO 414/277, A4485/605/45, Halifax to Lothian, 10 October 1940.

²⁰⁹ Lee, 103, entry for 23 October 1940.

While rumors were rife in both Washington and New York, Churchill's initial preference was for David Lloyd George, "if he could trust him," wrote Colville. The prime minister believed, Colville wrote, that Lloyd George "would be loyal to him. If not, he could always sack him."²¹⁰ On 14 December 1940, therefore, Churchill telegraphed Roosevelt, "asking if Lloyd George would be acceptable as Ambassador." Although Roosevelt was less than enthusiastic, he wrote Churchill the next day, "Choice will be entirely agreeable. I knew him in world war." The president added, however, that "I assume that over here he will in no way play into the hands of the appeasers."²¹¹

The choice of Lloyd George, however, proved to be far more controversial among the British. Wheeler-Bennett described Churchill's consideration of Lloyd George as "preposterous." Moreover, it caused much consternation among the Embassy staff, which quickly descended "into a combination of panic and near-mutiny." Neville Butler emphatically noted that "Rightly or wrongly, Lloyd George is, I think, regarded in this country as an appeaser and as not unwilling to consider making terms with Germany." Churchill also received, in very quick order, messages from several Dominions leaders,²¹² deprecating at length his proposal to appoint Lloyd George to Washington. To the relief of many, however, Lloyd George let Churchill off the hook, declining the appointment on medical grounds, his doctor having advised that he was too old.²¹³

²¹⁰ Casey, 46; Colville, 309, entry for 12 December 1940; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 942; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1220-1221. Colville himself suggested Lord Cranborne or Sir Robert Vansittart. Although Churchill had thought of both and considered Cranborne particularly suitable, he favored Lloyd George, on the grounds that his knowledge of munitions problems and his fiery personality marked him out. When Colville suggested moving Sir Stafford Cripps from Russia, Churchill replied that Cripps "was a lunatic in a country of lunatics. It would be a pity to move him." Colville, 309, entry for 12 December 1940.

²¹¹ Colville, 311, entry for 13 December 1940, 316, entry for 14 December 1940; Davis, *The War President*, 80; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 946, 952; Gilbert *War Papers*, 1223, 1225, 1236-1237.

²¹² William Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada; Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia; Field-Marshal Jan Christian Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa; and Peter Fraser, Prime Minister of New Zealand.

²¹³ Colville, 320, entry for 16 December 1940; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, 952; Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1244-1245. Roosevelt, who vividly recalled Lloyd George's publicly proclaimed admiration for Hitler in the mid-1930s, but did not want to be placed in a position of giving an explicit refusal, was relieved. So was Clementine Churchill, who later wrote after the war, "I was in an agony of fear he should accept." Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1245, note one; Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 117-118.

In the end, the prime minister's choice flew directly in the face of Swing's advice. Churchill selected an arch-Tory, an Etonian and a patrician, whose political career had been closely identified with the expediency of appeasement: the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax. Halifax himself was appalled by the idea. He knew enough of the United States to have appointed Lothian, and he understood that, as a former viceroy of India, he was not a suitable successor. He was a six-foot-six, living, breathing personification of every negative stereotype that Americans had always nurtured with regard to Britain, particularly when compared to the "democratic, easygoing, informal, and ever accessible" Lothian. Churchill, however, insisted that the appointment of Halifax could not fail to impress the Americans, and he called upon the foreign secretary to accept "This high and perilous charge . . . on which our whole future depends."²¹⁴

Clearly, Churchill stood to gain politically from Halifax's departure from London. With the death of Neville Chamberlain in October 1940, Halifax inherited the mantle of Munich and thus became a political liability. His appointment would therefore enable Churchill to consolidate his own hold on the War Cabinet, moving Anthony Eden back into the Foreign Office and assuming control of the War Office himself. Halifax fought valiantly to change Churchill's mind, but to no avail. When the prime minister sweetened the offer with an arrangement whereby he would retain a seat in the War Cabinet, Halifax finally accepted the job. The news of the appointment, however, fell heavily on American journalists and British propagandists alike. Murrow confessed that he himself was appalled, while René MacColl simply recorded in his diary: "22 December 1940 . . . Halifax is Ambassador. Christ."²¹⁵

Significance: Lothian Nudges the United States to "Unsordidness"

In the meantime, President Roosevelt returned to Washington D.C. on Sunday evening, 16 December 1940, well rested, suntanned, and in excellent humor. He met with Morgenthau over lunch the next day, 17 December, and laid out the ideas he had developed during his vacation. The president

²¹⁴ Cull, 124; Gilbert, War Papers, 1251-1252, 1266-1267; Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI, 519-520; Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 118.

²¹⁵ Cadogan, 341-343, entry for 20 December 1940; Cull, 124; Gilbert, War Papers, 1267-1268.

bluntly stated that “the thing to do is to get away from the dollar sign. I don’t want to put the thing in terms of dollars or loans.” He suggested, instead, that the United States increase its production and then give Britain what it needed with the proviso that it return the goods after the war in kind, properly repaired, with any depreciations also paid in kind. Morgenthau enthusiastically embraced the proposal, although he acknowledged that it would be better to appear to be driving a hard bargain.²¹⁶

That same afternoon, Roosevelt faced a press conference and publicly addressed Britain’s imminent dollar crisis. After a few opening remarks, in which he denied that there was any real news to report, Roosevelt presented the administration’s rationale for continuing and increasing aid to Britain. He stressed that he was “talking selfishly, from the American point of view,” and flatly asserted that British defense orders had been and were a “tremendous asset to American defense.” The “one thing necessary for American national defense is additional productive facilities . . . factories, shipbuilding ways, munitions plants, et cetera, and so on,” he told reporters. British orders helped to create those facilities and stimulate expansion, so they must be encouraged. The question, of course, was how to do this? Roosevelt ruled out both straightforward loans and direct gifts. Instead, he proposed that the United States take over British orders and then “lease or sell” them to Britain, justifying such a plan on the grounds that, “The best defense of Great Britain is the best defense of the United States.” What he was trying to do, the president explained, was “eliminate the dollar sign.” He illustrated the concept with an analogy, which he borrowed from Harold Ickes:

Suppose my neighbor’s home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him put out his fire. Now, what do I do? I don’t say to him before that operation, ‘Neighbor, my garden hose cost me fifteen dollars; you have to pay me fifteen dollars for it.’ What is the transaction that goes on? I don’t want fifteen dollars -- I want my garden hose back after the fire is over.

In the end, it was necessary, the president stressed, to lease Britain essential munitions in the interest of American security, “with the understanding that when the show was over, we would get repaid

²¹⁶ Blum, 208-209; Davis, *The War President*, 73-74; Kimball, 120-121; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 238. Lash, 263. Over the next several days, Roosevelt’s other chief advisers, Stimson, Hull, and Knox, generally came out in favor of the novel proposals. Hull, 872-873; Kimball, 124-125.

sometime in kind, thereby leaving out the dollar mark in the form of a dollar debt and substituting for it a gentleman's obligation to pay in kind." In answering questions, Roosevelt made it clear that these proposals would require congressional legislation. He insisted, however, that he was not seeking to repeal the Neutrality Act. Instead, he wanted to bypass its anti-loan provisions and to avoid the war debts that had poisoned Anglo-American relations in the 1920s and 1930s. He was evasive, however, when confronted with questions about whether this brought the United States closer to war or questions about American preparedness. Roosevelt simply emphasized that he intended Lend-Lease to galvanize American rearmament, as well as to provide aid to Britain.²¹⁷

The implication of Roosevelt's proposed Lend-Lease proposal was crystal clear. If it achieved congressional approval, Lend-Lease would tie the British and American economies so closely together as virtually to fuse them, as the war went on, into a single planned economy -- and therefore commit the United States so firmly to a British victory that American entry into the war was certain, if or when such entry became necessary to assure British victory. After all, since the late summer of 1940, Britain and the United States had begun to share military and scientific secrets. In a formal agreement reached only three weeks prior to Roosevelt's press conference, Britain and the United States had agreed to standardize their basic designs for planes, tanks, guns, and military vehicles so that they could be used interchangeably by the two countries. Furthermore, Roosevelt had recently approved Admiral Stark's long-pending request for highly secret military staff talks, to be held in Washington beginning in January 1941, between representatives of the British and American chiefs of staff.²¹⁸ Consequently, the fusion of the two nations' economies was to be matched by that of their military science, their armed forces, and the strategies and tactics for their employment.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Davis, The War President, 74-76; Gilbert, Churchill and America, 209; Dimpleby-Reynolds, 132; Kimball, 121-122; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 238-240; Lash, 263-264; Reynolds, Munich to Pearl Harbor, 105-106; Sherwood, 225-226.

²¹⁸ Davis, The War President, 77; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, 285.

²¹⁹ Davis, The War President, 77.

Roosevelt's efforts culminated in a major foreign policy address to the nation on 29 December 1940, the night of a ferocious German air raid on London. The president chose to deliver the speech in a "fireside chat," his first in months, because he could mold public opinion far more rapidly and reliably through the wider and more personal contact of radio. This was not, he began, a talk on war, but rather a discussion on how to keep out of the conflict. For the first half of the address, Roosevelt concentrated on creating a sense of crisis. He asserted that America now faced the greatest danger in its history, quoting Hitler's recent speech, in which he stated that "there are two worlds that stand opposed to each other," with no possibility of reconciliation between them. The president maintained that the Axis "New Order" was simply a "revival of the oldest and the worst tyranny" in which there was "no liberty, no religion, no hope." When American appeasers talked of a "negotiated peace," they were deluding themselves. That, Roosevelt stated, would be a "dictated peace" with a "gang of outlaws," who had made it clear that "there can be no ultimate peace between their philosophy of government and our philosophy of government."

The president then elaborated on his plans for aiding Britain. He insisted again that American security and the chances of staying out of the war were in large part dependent upon the survival of Britain, and that he had no intention of declaring war or sending troops to Europe. The sole purpose of national policy was "to keep war away from our country and our people." If Britain went down, Axis powers would "control the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and the high seas." Moreover, he warned, "all of us, in all the Americas, would be living at the point of a gun -- a gun loaded with explosive bullets economic as well as military. Frankly and definitely there is danger ahead -- danger against which we must prepare. But we well know that we cannot escape danger; or the fear of danger, by crawling into bed and pulling the covers over our head." What the British needed, therefore, were the "implements of war, the planes, the tanks, the guns, the freighters which will enable them to fight for their liberty and our security." Their needs, moreover, must be integrated with those of the United States. Present industrial efforts, however, were not good enough: "we must have more ships, more guns, more planes -- more of everything. This can be done only if we discard the notion of 'business as usual.'" Therefore, the United States should become "the great arsenal of democracy." The inference was very

clear; the United States was to provide the wherewithal by which Britain would fight the Axis. He placed no limit of any kind on the material aid to be given, and thus totally committed the United States to providing full aid to Britain.²²⁰

The public reaction to the speech was extraordinarily positive, to a degree that surprised and delighted Roosevelt. Seventy-five percent of those polled indicated that they had heard or read his words. More important, public reaction ran well in the president's favor. Mail and telegrams to the White House ran at 100-to-one in favor, and the Gallup poll found that, among those who heard or read the speech, 61 percent agreed with the president's position, whereas only 24 percent were opposed. Highly encouraged by this support, the president gave the Treasury Department the green light to finish drafting the appropriate legislation.²²¹ As a result, on 11 March 1941, after two months of speeches, lobbying, and extensive news coverage on both sides of the Atlantic, Roosevelt signed into law H.R. 1776, popularly known as the Lend-Lease Act. The bill represented an extraordinary grant of power to the executive branch of the American government, which therefore enabled the United States to provide Britain with over \$31 billion dollars worth of war materials, in spite of London's inability to pay for those goods.

At the same time, the passage of Lend-Lease likewise represented a significant British success in securing an explicit and extensive package of American material assistance. Because the British government had actively endeavored to win such American support since the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, many more observers regarded Lend-Lease as not only an unambiguous American commitment to Britain, but a victory more uplifting and ultimately more valuable than the first actual British military successes of the war that same December.²²²

²²⁰ Davis, *The War President*, 81-84; Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, 210; Johnson, 189-190; Kimball, 127-129; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 244-247; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 106-107; Sherwood, 226-228.

²²¹ Chadwin, 149-150; Davis, *The War President*, 84; Kimball, 129; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, 249-250; Reynolds, *Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 108.

²²² In *Operation Compass*, the first major Allied military offensive operation in the Western Desert Campaign, which began on 6-9 December 1940, British forces pushed Italian forces across a great stretch of western Egypt, into Libya, and captured over 100,000 Italian soldiers with very few casualties of their own. Millett and Murray, 98-100.

While this notable achievement obviously cannot be attributed to the efforts of one individual exclusively, it is nevertheless clear that the role of Lord Lothian was both central and critical. Similar to most British officials, Lothian recognized that, because Britain was nearing the limits of its financial and shipping resources, the United States was subsequently nearing the limits of its “cash and carry” neutrality. This likewise meant that, in order to provide Britain with substantial material aid, the Roosevelt administration would have to seek and secure congressional approval. Unlike most British officials, however, Lothian understood that it generally took about six months to translate congressional approval into practical reality. Furthermore, and more significantly, Lothian did not believe that Roosevelt’s reelection would lead quickly or automatically to an extension of American assistance to Britain. He therefore took certain initiatives in order to push the Roosevelt administration into action. On the one hand, he persuaded a reluctant Churchill to send Roosevelt “the letter,” an honest and thorough overview of Britain’s position and needs. On the other hand, on top of his ongoing efforts to publicize Britain’s plight through the British Press Service, the Inter-Allied Information Committee, and his contacts with pro-interventionist American groups, Lothian went public on 23 November 1940, upon his return to the United States, with a sober and realistic explanation of that situation, especially with respect to the dollar gap. While Roosevelt apparently was only beginning to face up to this problem, Lothian’s remarks sparked off a major press and political debate that ultimately compelled the president to take action. Churchill’s letter, arriving during a much-needed vacation when he had time to think, helped force the president into a comprehensive program for presentation to Congress, in part due to the climate of opinion Lothian had already helped to create in the United States preceding its arrival.

Similar to the destroyers-for-bases deal, the conclusion of Lend-Lease inspired a variety of interpretations. Winston Churchill described the measure, in a speech before Parliament, as “the most unsordid act in the history of any nation,” as the United States would ultimately provide Britain with over \$31 billion dollars worth of equipment and materiel. Not all Britons, however, agreed with Churchill. Many became convinced, during and especially after the war, that the United States had taken advantage

of London's financial crisis in order to increase the American share of the global economic market at Britain's expense; even Adolf Hitler accused the United States of taking advantage of Britain's woes.²²³

For better or worse, this "unsordid act" nevertheless represented an irrevocable commitment on the part of the United States to Britain -- and Lord Lothian was at the center of its creation. Although it would still be nine months before the United States finally entered the war, driven in, as Lothian had always maintained it would be, by a direct attack on a vital American interest, the Lend-Lease Act represented the creation of arguably the most productive and cooperative coalition of modern history -- the Anglo-American Alliance against Nazi Germany.

²²³ Kimball, 236-241.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Philip Henry Kerr, eleventh Marquis of Lothian, enjoyed a career of public service stretching from the zenith of British imperial power in the early twentieth century to the darkest hours of 1940. He never held any elected public office or bore executive responsibility for any department of state. He was never a statesman of the first rank. Nevertheless, he managed to be near the “centre of power” at frequent intervals from January 1917, with his appointment to the secretariat of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, until his death in December 1940. His most significant role, however, was his service as the British ambassador to the United States from August 1939 to December 1940. Lord Lothian was ambassador for only a brief time, but his ambassadorship coincided with a crucial period in relations between Britain and the United States -- the first year of the Second World War, when Britain faced Nazi Germany essentially without allies, while the United States remained neutral. Lothian ultimately became a primary intermediary between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, particularly during the summer and fall of 1940, although he had to overcome his association with appeasement and the infamous “Cliveden Set” in order to win their confidence. In that capacity, he helped to broker the celebrated Destroyers-for-Bases deal and lay the foundations for Lend-Lease, which represented one of the great turning points of the war. Lend-Lease not only represented a program of American assistance to Britain, which was hardly compatible with neutrality, it became the essential foundation in the establishment of the Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War. In a vital and fundamental way, therefore, Lothian’s efforts effectively laid the foundations of the “Special Relationship.”

Lothian, whose father was an officer in the British army and had served in India and Ireland, grew up an imperialist, convinced of the virtues of British imperial supremacy. His first administrative experience was as an early protégé of Lord Milner, a member of Milner’s “Kindergarten,” which implemented South Africa’s post-Boer War reconstruction from 1905-1910. Thereafter, he returned to Britain, where he helped to found and edit *The Round Table*, a journal established to promote closer integration within the British Empire. During and after the First World War, however, he saw at first

hand the limits of British power and worried about the ramifications of further British decline. The consequence of his worries was a growing faith in the concept of international federation.¹

Although Lothian believed that the extension and consolidation of *Pax Britannica* would prevent international dissolution and anarchy, with the decline of British power, he concluded that the best alternative was *Pax Anglo-Americana*. Indeed, the defining theme of Lothian's entire public career was his persistent advocacy of strong Anglo-American cooperation as the bedrock of any international federation.² Although he began advocating stronger Anglo-American relations long before the outbreak of the Great War, Lothian in the interwar years urged the United States to undertake a much more central role in international affairs. For example, he called on Washington to assume a leading role in the League of Nations to ensure that institution's success. In 1925, Lothian became the secretary to the Rhodes Trust, a position he would hold until 1939, which enabled him to undertake even more sustained work to facilitate closer connections with the United States. Anglo-American relations during the interwar years were, in fact, characterized by an underlying mistrust, caused principally by war debts, naval rivalry, and divergent approaches to international security. Lothian nevertheless dedicated his career to the promotion of Anglo-American harmony. In part, he worked for a closer and more wide ranging Anglo-American relationship due to his disillusionment with the League of Nations. In the absence of an effective mechanism for collective security, moreover, his faith in the absolute necessity for Anglo-American cooperation helps to explain his appeasement of Nazi Germany during the 1930s. Lothian's appeasement resulted from his conviction that Britain desperately had to prevent a war that it could not win alone. Without American assistance, he argued, Britain was simply too weak to oppose Germany alone.

Lothian assumed control of the British Embassy in the United States immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War. During the first eight months, however, several factors limited his influence. First, his enthusiasm for Anglo-American cooperation was not shared in the British cabinet,

¹ John Turner emphasizes that Lothian's exposition of federalist principles as a solution for many international maladies, and even for political problems within the nation-state, was taken up by others to such an extent that he has become identified, especially in Europe, as a progenitor of European integration. Turner, 1.

² Roberts, 103.

where there persisted a fundamental distrust of the United States, a concern about becoming dependent on American aid, and growing strains over the issue, revisited from the First World War, of belligerent versus neutral rights on the seas. Second, the military circumstances of the “Phoney War” did not necessitate Anglo-American relations becoming a priority. Britain focused its most serious diplomatic efforts on keeping Italy and the Balkan states neutral, and thus keeping the war out of the Mediterranean. The British believed that, if they could survive the initial German onslaught, through their own bombing campaigns, blockade, and global economic resources, the Germans might accept a negotiated peace. Third, the delicate state of American public opinion constrained Lothian, at least initially. On the advice of his predecessor, Sir Ronald Lindsay, Lothian assumed a low profile, particularly as Roosevelt sought to secure repeal of the American arms embargo in favor of “cash and carry” legislation.

Beginning in May and June 1940, however, Lothian began to play a far more central role in Anglo-American relations. The collapse of France significantly altered the character of the war for both London and Washington, since both had considered the French as their first line of defense. Thus, Britain increasingly saw American assistance as vital to its survival, while the United States increasingly saw the British fleet as its main line of defense from Nazi Germany. The collapse of France, moreover, coincided with the change in British leadership, as Winston Churchill, who was considerably more enthusiastic about an Anglo-American alliance, replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister. As a consequence of this intensification of the war, Lothian followed up Churchill’s request, of mid-May 1940, for American destroyers. He told Roosevelt, in effect, that if Britain collapsed for want of American help, the United States would be confronted with a widespread naval crisis. With its main fleet at Hawaii to deter Japan and a weak Atlantic squadron on the East Coast, the United States would have to confront naval threats on both coasts. When Roosevelt suggested that if the worst happened, the British fleet might cross the Atlantic to American waters, Lothian replied that, unless the United States had entered the war, British public opinion would not likely entrust its fleet to a neutral America. Lothian’s argument established the guidelines for subsequent discussions over the summer. Indeed, Churchill followed Lothian’s lead and emphasized that if the battle was lost in Europe due to inadequate American support, there would be no

British fleet to help defend the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, if defeated, a pro-German cabinet in Britain might be compelled to surrender the fleet in order to procure better terms.

Over the summer of 1940, Lothian grew increasingly frustrated by American complacency. In particular, he was annoyed by the hesitation on the part of the Roosevelt administration, for political reasons, to openly address Britain's dire military situation, much less enter the war itself. As a result, Lothian endeavored to force the issue. During the summer of 1940, Lothian took three initiatives that helped to shape a political environment far more favorable to the British position. First, Lothian began taking steps to generate more widespread popular support for Britain through a public relations campaign. Although sensitive to long-held American suspicions of British propaganda, he made numerous public speeches that focused on a series of important themes -- themes that would underlie his publicity efforts over the next year. He condemned German treachery. He emphasized the common foundations of democracy in Britain and the United States and thus presented the British cause as synonymous with the American way of life. Most important, he emphasized that the survival of Britain was essential to the security of the United States. In addition, Lothian made himself accessible to American journalists in order to disseminate Britain's position to a larger audience. As a former journalist, he understood the impact of the press upon American public opinion and the shaping of a public consensus. Nicholas Cull, in his study of British propaganda in the United States before Pearl Harbor, lauded Lothian's skillful management of British public relations, particularly in convincing London to provide more accurate information and greater access to American journalists. As a result, Lothian's efforts helped to transform American opinion, not only toward Britain but the war itself. While in the late 1930s, many Americans were isolationists and relatively suspicious of Britain, by the end of 1941, they generally associated the survival of Britain with American security and were increasingly ready to risk war in order to aid the Allies. Cull, therefore, described Lothian as "the single most significant figure in the development of British propaganda in the United States."³ Likewise, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett stated that Lothian's "constant harping" upon the issue helped to prepare and condition "the minds of Americans for the impact

³ Cull, 20.

of the momentous events which were being matured in secret.” From the very beginning of the war, he argued, Lothian’s profound knowledge of the American people and his understanding of propaganda enabled him to direct a public relations campaign that attained remarkable proportions and had far-reaching effects.⁴

Lothian’s second initiative focused on urging London to court the United States with tangible offers of cooperation, without conditions. For example, in late May 1940, aware of the concern in Washington for the security of British bases in the Western Hemisphere -- specifically, the threat to American security if those bases fell under German control -- Lothian encouraged the War Cabinet to make a unilateral offer of limited facilities in three British colonies, to preempt a possible American takeover of the islands and, at the same time, promote good will. Churchill, however, was opposed to such one-sided concessions, unless it involved tangible American concessions or assistance -- a *quid pro quo*, such as destroyers or financial credits. Therefore, Lothian’s third important summer initiative was to convince Churchill to make a direct and personal plea to Roosevelt. In late July, he pushed London to understand that, with the political conventions over, the president’s nomination secured, and his attention refocusing on the war, the time was right for the prime minister to make a more direct and candid appeal. The result was Churchill’s telegram to Roosevelt on 31 July 1940, in which the prime minister set out Britain’s naval predicament in detail and explained that fifty American destroyers could sustain the Royal Navy over the next few critical months, thereby possibly deciding “the whole fate of the war.” At the same time, however, while he pushed a reluctant Churchill into action, Lothian cultivated strong working relations and had considerable contact with the leading members of Roosevelt’s cabinet who supported all-out aid to Britain, most notably Henry Morgenthau, Harold Ickes, Henry Stimson, and Frank Knox. It was due largely to their urging that Roosevelt agreed to open negotiations over destroyers and bases.

The major obstacle to Lothian’s efforts, ironically enough, was Churchill. In one respect, the prime minister regarded the American proposal, fifty or sixty destroyers in return for British bases in the

⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 93-94.

Western Hemisphere and assurances about the British fleet, as excessive and politically unacceptable in Britain. Frustrated by the prime minister's delays and objections, Lothian took steps to force the issue. First, he gave assurances to the Roosevelt administration without authorization or approval. For example, he told Roosevelt that he had been authorized to say that British naval and air facilities would be made available as soon as Britain received the American destroyers -- although he possessed, at that moment, no such authorization. Lothian also gave assurances, again without authorization, that if Britain were on the verge of collapse, its fleet would cross the Atlantic to American waters; Churchill, in the meantime, had wanted to retain the fleet as a bargaining counter, and in fact continued to insist that the United States enter the war as an essential precondition for moving the fleet.

Second, Lothian cultivated strong ties to American interventionist and pro-British pressure groups, notably the White Committee and the Century Group. In late June, once again, on his own initiative, without the approval or even the knowledge of the War Cabinet, Lothian provided the Century Group with a full statistical accounting of Britain's situation and needs, as the basis for a public relations campaign to win more widespread American support for the destroyers deal. In all likelihood, had London known, it would have disapproved of Lothian's efforts. The War Cabinet, as well as the Foreign Office, sought to avoid all appearances of undue British influence in American decision making, which might revive the American phobia about British propaganda. Churchill, in the meantime, saw only limited value in propaganda, maintaining instead that only "events" would turn opinion in the United States. More to the point, he remained confident that Washington would be swayed by recognition of its dependence on the Royal Navy and the intrinsic heroism of the Allied stand. Lothian, however, believed that the urgency of the situation justified the risk. During the summer of 1940, he recognized the existence of a gap, between the Roosevelt administration and Congress, as well as the general public, with respect to their appreciation of Britain's dire situation. The problem, as he saw it, was a lack of hard facts about British strength in destroyers. American suspicions about British propaganda diluted the impact of emotional appeals; Americans would only be convinced by an open accounting of the facts that assistance was truly needed or would advance American interests. Therefore, the data Lothian supplied secretly to

the Century Group's campaign helped to focus the attention of American opinion leaders on the real gravity of Britain's predicament. In the end, Lothian's efforts to facilitate a greater understanding and appreciation of Britain's situation, through public relations, helped to create a far more favorable reception to the deal, which was finally announced on 3 September 1940.

Even more significant, from September to December 1940, Lothian helped to lay the foundations for the Lend-Lease program. During the fall, as most Americans turned their attention to the presidential election, many British leaders, particularly Churchill and the Foreign Office, believed that Roosevelt was ready to take the ultimate step -- that once he was reelected, the United States would almost immediately enter the war. Lothian, however, played down the significance of Roosevelt's reelection and argued instead, as he had for months, that the United States would enter the war only after a direct attack on its vital interests, which could enable Roosevelt to go to Congress and win unanimous support for a declaration of war. Therefore, Lothian argued that the procuring of American assistance would require far more proactive British pressure. In the immediate aftermath of the election, when, as he predicted, the United States took no immediate steps to initiate more substantive material aid, Lothian sought to force the action once again. In mid-November, he urged Churchill to frankly and openly put Britain's cards on the table in a long, detailed letter to Roosevelt, which outlined the urgent realities of Britain's strategic, economic, and logistic positions and needs. While Churchill proved reluctant to draft and dispatch such a letter, still confident that the United States was about to enter the war, Lothian aggressively argued that the letter was vital in order to overcome powerful American misperceptions about Britain's position -- that Britain was inclined to ask for more than was necessary, and that Britain in fact had vast assets in the Dominions and the Empire, which could and should be expended before asking for American assistance. The only answer to this, he stressed, should be a "ruthless exposé of the strategic dangers." Lothian's strategy, therefore, just as it had been during the destroyers negotiations, was to respond to American misperceptions by laying out the facts. His position generated much support within the Foreign Office, including Foreign Secretary Halifax, Permanent Undersecretary Sir Alexander Cadogan, and David Scott, the assistant undersecretary with oversight of Foreign Office's American Department, all of whom urged

Churchill to follow Lothian's advice, if for no other reason than to light a fire under the Roosevelt administration. As a result, by early December 1940, following many delays, revisions, and consultations, Churchill completed the letter, which Lothian delivered to Roosevelt just before the president embarked on a short post-election Caribbean cruise. In the end, Churchill's letter provided the comprehensive view of Britain's situation for which Lothian had been striving.

Just as important was the timing of the letter. In one respect, while Roosevelt had already begun to face up to the British situation, Churchill's letter arrived during a much-needed vacation, when he had time to relax and reflect. More important, however, Britain's financial predicament had become the major focus of discussion within American policymaking circles, primarily because of another initiative taken by Lothian. Upon his arrival in New York City on 23 November, following a brief visit to Britain, Lothian intimated that Britain's financial matter was "becoming urgent," and that gold and securities were beginning to run low. He once again made these remarks without authorization or the permission of the War Cabinet. He apparently chose his words deliberately, convinced that, by going public with such candid observations, he could persuade Americans, but particularly key American opinion leaders, policy making groups, and elites, that the British situation was becoming desperate. Although some controversy exists over his precise comments, Lothian forced the administration's hand by provoking popular discussion in the United States about Britain's financial plight. Indeed, as a result of his comments, the British financial crisis remained on the front pages of American newspapers and therefore in the public eye from December 1940 to January 1941. As Wheeler-Bennett wrote, Lothian was "absolutely right. His stark assertion to the press at LaGuardia . . . set off a chain of events which in less than two months had achieved its results."⁵ The Lend-Lease Act represented the creation of arguably the most productive and cooperative coalition of modern history -- the Anglo-American alliance against Nazi Germany.

Sadly, and perhaps unfairly, Lothian did not live to see the results of his labors, having died suddenly on 12 December 1940. Ironically, Churchill selected as Lothian's successor, Lord Halifax, the

⁵ Wheeler-Bennett, *Special Relationships*, 113.

man who had originally pushed through Lothian's own appointment, and whom Churchill now wanted to discard as a political liability. Eventually, Halifax proved a capable and effective ambassador, but his first year was not impressive. Arthur Purvis was one of many to compare him unfavorably with his predecessor. In June 1941, according to J. Pierrepont Moffatt, an official in the United States State Department, "Purvis missed Lord Lothian whom he considered a great vitalizer. He admitted he made many mistakes, but on balance rated him as a very great British representative. Lord Halifax he found unimaginative and terse, less interested in formulating policy than in carrying out instructions."⁶

In overall terms, as Purvis observed, assessing Lothian's achievement is very much a question of balance. In some respects, critics and skeptics had been correct at the time of his appointment to question his discretion and judgment. For example, Lothian's Yale speech of 19 June 1940 and his 23 November press conference both put the Roosevelt administration momentarily on the defensive, and thus justified such reservations. Furthermore, in periods of heightened anxiety, Lothian tended to neglect the details of a problem in his pursuit of an overriding goal. For example, in his handling of the destroyers negotiations in August 1940, Lothian contributed to a degree of confusion that followed the conclusion of the deal. Over the course of the negotiations, the British asked for 20 motor torpedo boats, five heavy bombers, five flying boats and 250,000 rifles with ammunition. Although Roosevelt made it clear in August that he intended to include MTBs, planes and rifles in the deal, the final document signed by Lothian and Cordell Hull mentioned only the destroyers. Part of the problem was the generally byzantine conduct of political affairs within the Roosevelt administration. In late August, Henry Stimson and Sumner Welles, who had been in charge of the negotiations to that point, left Washington for vacations, handing matters to Hull, who had been away since the beginning of the month, unaware of what had been settled. At the same time, Lothian, in his haste to get the deal completed, misled London about the Secretary of State's attitude. Even though Hull told him on 27 August that the other items could not be considered part of the deal for legal reasons, Lothian told the Foreign Office, "Mr Hull begged me to assure you that the question of transfer of other desiderata, i.e. motor torpedo boats, flying boats and rifles, would be dealt

⁶ Reynolds, *Lord Lothian*, 57.

with in the same spirit that the President has shown hitherto and at the earliest possible moment.” Consequently, London operated under the assumption that Washington would deal on the basis that everything was on the table, and that the other items were part of the deal, although they would be handled separately for political and legal reasons. When Lothian mentioned this to Hull, the secretary immediately insisted that no promise about the other items could be inferred and that before any agreement was signed, Lothian must make this quite clear to London. It was not until the following spring, after complex legal and political difficulties, that the whole transaction was completed.⁷

Largely as a result of mistakes such as this, there remained some skepticism in London that Lothian was up to the job; hence the caustic criticism of Hugh Dalton, who wrote in his diary that, Lothian was “the sort of man Americans like,” who was “very fond of ‘large ideas’, particularly in a vague and unfinished form.”⁸ Lothian’s strong suit, he continued, “is high-minded ballyhoo. This may be quite useful in America so long as the policy of H.M.G. has not to be too exactly based upon it.”⁹

Nevertheless, Lothian was unquestionably a great success as Britain’s ambassador to the United States. There were three principal reasons for his success. First, unlike previous British ambassadors, Lothian had a better understanding of and a genuine passion for the United States. He understood how American policy making operated. He built up a close relationship of mutual trust with American leaders, based in part upon the consistency between his own liberal convictions and the thinking of Roosevelt and the New Dealers. At the same time, Lothian also appreciated that the United States would not automatically dispatch assistance on the basis of a common language and heritage, but would act when its own vital interests were threatened. Therefore, he understood the vital necessity not only of providing the Roosevelt administration with complete and honest information to justify British requests, but also of acting in an open and cooperative manner to dispel American suspicions. In doing so, Lothian had to overcome the reservations of Churchill, who was slow to adopt this tactic. In the summer of 1940, the

⁷ Blum, 181-188; Butler, Lord Lothian, 298-299; Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 769.

⁸ Dalton, 93, entry for 24 October 1940.

⁹ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 58.

prime minister delayed British offers of bases and military secrets, hoping to tie them to an acceptable *quid pro quo*. Even in November, he proved reluctant to put all Britain's cards on the table in a message to the president.

Second, Lothian had a clear-cut and plausible argument for Anglo-American cooperation, which he reiterated with persistence and simplicity: the importance of the Anglo-American division of global sea power, and the interdependence of American security in the Atlantic with the survival of the British fleet. Since 1815, the Royal Navy had been the ultimate guarantor of the Monroe Doctrine, preventing hostile powers from moving out of European waters into the Atlantic. By the late 1920s and 1930s, however, it had become clear that the era of the *Pax Britannica* was over. The growth of German air power threatened Britain's insular security, and a potential coalition of three hostile powers, Germany, Italy, and Japan, challenged its global position. Now, in 1940, with the survival of Britain at stake, Lothian maintained, it was in the interests of the United States to provide as much material assistance as possible, to ensure not only the survival of Britain itself but the defense of the Western Hemisphere as well. In speech after speech, he asserted that the United States ought therefore to share the burden of patrolling and controlling the oceans -- the American fleet in the Pacific and the Royal Navy in the Atlantic -- so that by deterrence, or if necessary by war, the totalitarian states could be tamed and a new peace system secured. Indicative of his influence is the fact that he became so closely identified with this view, which together with his demand for postwar Anglo-American cooperation, that in British governmental circles it was later termed the "Lothian Thesis."¹⁰

Last, Lothian understood that the key to lighting a fire under, and maintaining effective pressure on, the Roosevelt administration, depended first and foremost on mobilizing American public opinion. Unlike previous British ambassadors to the United States, he understood the value and power of propaganda and public relations, particularly its effect on popular opinion. Over the course of his ambassadorship, Lothian built a public relations apparatus and initiated a vigorous publicity campaign in

¹⁰ Susan A. Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States During World War II* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 989, 190-191; Roberts, 124.

the United States. He established an easy and open relationship with the press. He delivered speeches and gave press conferences to explain Britain's needs in terms calculated to win American support. He worked closely with American interventionists in order to build support for Britain among the broader American population. He deliberately leaked sensitive information explicitly to help American opinion leaders stimulate debate and apply pressure on the Roosevelt administration. Once again, Lothian had to overcome the reservations of Churchill, who feared that publicizing Britain's secrets could aid the enemy and, perhaps more important, undermine domestic morale. On one occasion, the prime minister told Lothian that Britain should not pay too much attention "to the eddies of United States opinion." Churchill preferred to wait on the "force of events" and on the response of "our best friend," the president.

In spite of Lothian's mistakes of judgment, made more often than not in the course of overzealousness, several of his early critics, including many of the Foreign Office officials who initially deplored his appointment, eventually recognized what a brilliant job Lothian did in Washington, and therefore what an invaluable asset he indeed became. Oliver Harvey, who had been one of the sharpest Foreign Office critics of Lothian's selection, wrote after the ambassador's death: "In spite of all our misgivings L. proved himself a very great Ambassador and he will be very hard indeed to replace."¹¹ Sir Robert Vansittart, to whom Lothian was for most of the 1930s a *bête noire*, "rarely right by accident in Europe," later wrote that he "spoke with early authority on the United States, where he became the greatest of all our Ambassadors."¹² Churchill noted in his tribute of 19 December that, when Lothian was appointed to the Embassy in the United States, "the most important of all the functions outside this country that can be discharged by any British subject," there were quite a few opinions upon the wisdom of that choice. Churchill reminded the House of Commons that many of those who had originally doubted Lothian's ability and temperament ultimately recognized his greatness for the post.¹³ In his own

¹¹ Rose, The Cliveden Set, 201.

¹² Vansittart, 255.

¹³ Butler, Lord Lothian, 314; Gilbert, War Papers, 1257-1258.

draft of a message to Roosevelt, the prime minister had written of Lothian as “one of our greatest Ambassadors to the United States.” On second thought, he altered the draft to read “our greatest Ambassador to the United States.”¹⁴ One of the most personal tributes was made by Wheeler-Bennett, whose original horror at the appointment changed dramatically once he began to work under Lothian in Washington. “How wrong we [he and Vansittart] both were in our assessment of the new ambassador, history was to show.” While he “had come handicapped by a past reputation,” Lothian “from the first convinced all of his ‘apostasy from heresy.’” Indeed, Wheeler-Bennett asserted, Lothian underwent a “complete metamorphosis” in Washington that triumphantly confounded his critics:

Throughout the fifteen months of his embassy he never failed to gauge the opinion of America to a nicety. He knew when to cajole and when to shock, when to appeal and when to issue a clarion-call of leadership. His humour was irresistible, his sincerity unquestioned, his statesmanship among the most inspired of our time. His was the hand who laid the foundation of ‘the Special Relationship’.¹⁵

In the United States, Francis P. Miller of the Century Group, maintained that Lothian made a tremendous impact on American public opinion during the final six months of 1940, and that his final address “was in many respects the most influential statement that any British Ambassador had ever issued in the United States”:

He spoke to us as one of us. None had spoken so plainly before, and never had an Englishman’s blunt warning been so well received. Bryce has traditionally been regarded as the British Ambassador that served his nation best in America. In my opinion Lothian served Britain better than Bryce or any other ambassador we have had since. He was as perfect for this assignment as Churchill was for war Prime Minister.¹⁶

In his own memoirs, Miller stated that while he had mistrusted Lothian’s earlier association with appeasement, as well as the effects of Christian Science, it had become evident by July 1940 “that he was

¹⁴ Butler, Lord Lothian, 318.

¹⁵ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 66, 115; quotation from 115.

¹⁶ In a letter to Butler, Miller sought to correct a handful of mistakes made by Langer and Gleason, in The Challenge of Isolation, with respect to Lothian’s role in providing the Century Group with the “Memorandum on British Defense.” He wrote that “Langer’s account of who took the initiative following [Joseph] Alsop’s interview is completely erroneous. The British Ambassador did not make the most of the situation by sending us a paper on July 28. It was the Century Group that made the most of the situation by sending Helen Mill Miller with questions to the Ambassador.” NAS, GD40/17/516/3-5, Francis P. Miller to J.R.M. Butler, 21 September 1956.

on the way to becoming one of Britain's greatest ambassadors to the United States."¹⁷ Robert Sherwood, a playwright, screenwriter, and editor, who served as a speechwriter for Roosevelt, and for a short period was the director of the Office of War Information,¹⁸ wrote that Lothian had been a "notably successful Ambassador." As a liberal, he was "well qualified to talk Roosevelt's language and, in turn to interpret Roosevelt to Churchill. He had been able to understand, as a less flexible Briton might have failed to do, the manifold domestic obstacles that beset Roosevelt's path and he most scrupulously avoided adding to the President's embarrassments by making excessive, impatient demands."¹⁹ Felix Frankfurter, a justice on the United States Supreme Court and an old friend from the ambassador's earliest travels in the United States, said that Lothian's achievement "was not due to any technical equipment or diplomatic skill. It flowed from the fact that as a frequent visitor to this country and an unostentatious traveler on its highways and byways he acquired a spontaneous love for the United States and was able to speak its language because he shared its ultimate aspirations."²⁰

A significant part of his success in the United States, to be sure, was that Lothian appealed to tangible American interests, first and foremost, rather than, as Churchill most certainly preferred, to the language of kin and common culture. Many in London criticized the ambassador for frequently placing strong Anglo-American cooperation ahead of British interests. Nevertheless, in doing so, he helped to build, particularly through his speeches, an intellectual foundation for the Anglo-American wartime alliance. At the same time, Lothian also helped to popularize, within the United States, the concept of thinking about an "Atlantic community," which increasingly dominated American foreign policy during the Cold War.²¹

¹⁷ Miller, 97.

¹⁸ His most memorable script was for the movie *The Best Years of Our Lives*, which won seven Academy Awards in 1947, including Best Picture.

¹⁹ Sherwood, 224.

²⁰ Butler, Lord Lothian, 316.

²¹ Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 58.

The key question, of course, involves Lothian's overall significance as Britain's ambassador to the United States. Over the course of his entire career, from South Africa, through *The Round Table*, Downing Street, and the Rhodes Trust, to Washington D.C., his influence can appear spotty and inconsistent. Lothian was often given to deriving policies from broad and generally expressed moral theories, which not only annoyed career diplomats and Foreign Office functionaries, but also frustrated historians, many of whom thus found it fairly difficult to identify a particular policy outcome for which he was responsible.²² Lothian also demonstrated an enthusiasm for trying to overcome difficulties by personal contact, which equally aggravated career bureaucrats. Throughout his career, Lothian made it a hallmark of his own diplomacy to see the other side's point of view, whether it happened to be Indian peasants or princes, Adolf Hitler, or the Americans. An old acquaintance, for example, the Reverend A.G. Fraser, recalled that the first time Lothian visited New York City, he gave some direction, in a snappy and condescending manner, to the hall porter in his hotel:

It was the man's business to carry out the request, but before doing so he swore at [Lothian] . . . and told him to hop off his high horse. [Lothian] apologized and all was well between them but he also went back to his room to think out the incident and see where he had failed. He concluded that he had not been thinking of the man as a man but had been thinking of him only as an instrument and so had looked through him to what he wanted done. He never forgot that lesson.²³

While this extraordinary, and at times debilitating, ability to see the other point of view obviously made Lothian a poor politician, it nevertheless made him a natural diplomat. His principal gift as Britain's ambassador, therefore, was to understand, almost inherently, how and why Americans reacted to events.²⁴ If certain officials in Whitehall did not or could not appreciate the value of understanding and addressing the "other" point of view, Lothian's unique attributes and abilities certainly did not go unnoticed in the United States. For one thing, scores of articles in American newspapers praised his skill in public relations. Moreover, his personal qualities impressed ordinary Americans as novel and surprising for a

²² Turner, 15.

²³ NAS, GD40/17/514/33, recollections of A.G. Fraser.

²⁴ Goodhart, 50.

British diplomat. Lothian appeared to lack the class-consciousness of the British establishment, and he clearly demonstrated a knack for the common touch when he hoisted a black kitten on his shoulders following the presentation of his credentials at the White House. Previous British ambassadors might have won Americans' respect, but were considered remote and unapproachable. Sir Ronald Lindsay, for example, was highly respected in Washington, but very few people could imagine him taking questions from a crowd of reporters or being photographed with a kitten on his shoulder.²⁵ Harold Callender in *The New York Times* wrote that one of Lothian's assets was that, although a Marquis, "he does not look like one, or not like the American conception of one. 'I can hardly imagine Lothian in coronet and ermine robes; it would seem comic,' said one observer, and he meant it as a compliment. He had too often seen the Ambassador wearing a soft hat and rubbers or standing with his hands in his pockets. This casualness in dress and posture . . . strikes many in Washington as a refreshing and democratic novelty in an Ambassador."²⁶ Arthur Krock, also of *The New York Times*, added that the sight of Lothian "must often have sent a pang of disappointment through the breasts of American girls who were acquainted only with the British peers of romance." Lothian, quite to the contrary, "looked like a family doctor, or a business lawyer, or the heartier type of history professor."²⁷ A journalist from Denver described Lothian as "the rare combination of perfect aristocrat and perfect democrat." A Los Angeles newspaper spoke of him as "almost the first British ambassador to talk frankly off the record," which led to "probably a better understanding of British aims and problems by the American people now than at any time in the past."²⁸

Although some would argue that by the end of 1940, the shift from isolationism to "all aid short of war," and from neutrality to active belligerency was an inevitable result of the growing challenge to American security represented by Hitler's victories, many observers in the United States credited Lothian

²⁵ Kimball, 23-24.

²⁶ *The New York Times*, 8 December 1940, 4, 27.

²⁷ *The New York Times*, 13 December 1940, 22.

²⁸ Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 315-316.

with opening the eyes of the American people. *Time* argued that, when Lothian arrived, Americans were suspicious of all foreigners, especially the British; by the time of his death, however, a major concern of most Americans was how to increase aid to Britain. “Though no historian would credit that great shift wholly to the Ambassador, there was no doubt that he had been an integral part of it. He had been right in his analysis of United States opinion, and of the course of United States foreign policy; he had answered by word and action much of United States suspicion of British ways; he had presented his view of the meaning of the war in half-a-dozen speeches which undoubtedly influenced United States thinking.”²⁹

Similarly, a *New York Times* editorial following his death attributed the change in American attitudes to Lothian’s strenuous efforts. His final speech at Baltimore, for example, was a “far-sighted reminder of truths which are more widely recognized among us today, thanks, in part, to Lord Lothian’s efforts, than when he began his term as Ambassador”:

It reminded us that the British Navy now keeps aggression from this hemisphere, that this war is primarily a struggle for bases, and that we are safe only while those bases are held by friends. He also paid us the tribute of being frank with us. The British Navy, he said, is “terribly thin” for the stupendous tasks now thrown upon it; and the issue of the war “now depends largely” upon the speed and the determination with which we in the United States can throw our material resources into the scales.

In return for paying the American people “the tribute of being frank with us,” the American people came to believe and trust Lothian: “There was a time when we might have resented such advice. We do not resent it now, for the overwhelming majority of the American people now know that it is true.” For such frankness and many other similar qualities, Lothian “will hold a high place among British Ambassadors” with the American people. As a result, the editorial concluded, “It will be hard for the British Government to find a successor who will make so few errors, or ruffle so few tempers, or leave so enduring a memory.”³⁰

Consequently, the key to Lothian’s effectiveness was that he helped to break down the traditional suspicion of British motives and intentions, through his integrity and his accessibility, unlike the

²⁹ *Time Magazine*, 23 December 1940, 10-11.

³⁰ *The New York Times*, 13 December 1940, 22.

traditional type of stand-offish upper class Britons that Americans could not abide. He placed emphasis on providing open, explicit, and honest information, which made clear how the prospect of Britain's collapse would impact direct American interests. Perhaps not without irony, he helped to undermine the more recent perceptions of British weakness caused by Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler, by proclaiming in the United States, as Churchill was proclaiming at home, that Britain was determined to fight to the bitter end. Finally, he persuaded a large number of Americans, who were terrified by the prospect of involvement in war, that the greater danger to the United States was the prospect of German victory. He did so by preaching the doctrine that he long made his own, that the safety of the United States depended upon the maintenance of a powerful British fleet operating from the British islands and other European bases.³¹ There is good reason, therefore, to concur with the judgment of J.R.M. Butler, Lothian's principal biographer. Commenting on Lothian's death, he wrote:

Exactly a year was to pass before the United States entered the war, but she was already "in effect a non-belligerent ally"; and perhaps no one except the President, the Prime Minister -- and Hitler, had contributed more to this result than the man who, as Philip Kerr, had long shown an instinctive understanding of the American outlook.³²

It is probable, then, if such a thing is indeed possible, that Lothian died at the right moment, at a point, when his most important work had been accomplished. He had been ideally suited to a fluid and uncertain period in Anglo-American relations, when London needed an ambassador to be more hands-on and proactive, a jack-of-all-trades. By 1941, however, the essence of the relationship had changed. The Roosevelt-Churchill axis was becoming the major channel of communication, top level emissaries were bypassing the official ambassadors, and much of the complex detail was handled by special missions. Furthermore, Roosevelt was coming round to the idea that he had summarily and angrily rejected when Lothian had pressed it upon him in January 1939: under the pressure of unforeseen and revolutionary events, the United States *would* have to fill the vacuum created by the contraction of British power.³³ In

³¹ Butler, Lord Lothian, 318.

³² Butler, Grand Strategy, 421.

³³ Allen, 790-794; Billington, 154; Reynolds, Lord Lothian, 59.

his memoirs, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett recalled that, as ambassador, Lothian “had been almost proconsular in his independence”:

During the Phoney War period, when the British Government was running mute, it was he who had declared to America and, through its media, to the world, what were Britain’s aims and why she was at war. When the war became open and disastrous it was he who dared to prepare American opinion for what fate might demand of it.

But by 1941, relations between the two states arrived at “the threshold of that period of personal communication and conference between the President and the Prime Minister,” which “necessarily relegated the Embassy to the level of a post-office and the Ambassador to the status of messenger-boy.” Wheeler-Bennett concluded, “It is difficult to imagine Philip Lothian in that role.”³⁴ Churchill, no doubt, agreed. In his eloquent and contemplative tribute to Lothian on 19 December 1940, the prime minister told the House of Commons:

I cannot help feeling that to die at the height of a man’s career, the highest moment of his effort here in this world, universally honoured and admired, to die while great issues are still commanding the whole of his interest, to be taken at a moment when he could already see ultimate success in view – is not the most unenviable of fates.³⁵

³⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, Special Relationships, 115-116.

³⁵ Gilbert, War Papers, 1257-1258.

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VITA

Craig Edward Saucier broke forth in New Orleans, Louisiana, in June 1959, two weeks before the release of “A Big Hunk ‘O Love” by Elvis Presley and four months before the Dodgers won their first World Series in Los Angeles. His father Charles Eberle Saucier, an officer in the United States Air Force, and mother Irene Louise Snyder Saucier, raised Craig, his sister Carrie and brother Scott over and across the globe: New Orleans; Malden, Missouri; Blytheville, Arkansas; Washington D.C.; Naples, Italy; Edwards Air Force Base, California; Bangkok, Thailand; and Alexandria, Louisiana. Craig Saucier attended high school at the International School of Bangkok, where he received a cosmopolitan education; and Alexandria Senior High School, where he received a parochial education. Uncertain about his future and unlikely to be drafted by major league baseball, he chose to settle for the conventional course of higher education to a meaningful career, particularly after the Rolling Stones in 1976 chose to replace guitarist Mick Taylor, not with Saucier but with Ron Wood. Saucier attended Louisiana State University and received, in 1981, a Bachelor of Arts degree in history, and in 1995, a Master of Arts degree in history. He was employed as a photographic assistant and research associate with the late David King Gleason from 1979 to 1992, and as a market research analyst with Advanced Strategic Research Inc., from 1992 to 1998. Since 1998, Saucier has taught western civilization and American history as an instructor in the Department of History and Political Science at Southeastern Louisiana University, in Hammond, Louisiana. In September 1993, he married Triche LeBlanc and became stepfather to Gabrielle, Sydney, and Amy. Craig and Triche have been the proud parents of Alexis [a beagle], Augie [a Saint Bernard], Archie [a Saint Bernard-Siberian Husky mix], Elvis [an Old English Sheepdog], Jerry Lee [a Bearded Collie], and Maggie [the cat]. Happily, they have seen Paul McCartney in concert on two occasions and will soon see Ringo Starr for the second time.