

Chapter 33: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Shadow of War (1933-1941)

The London Conference

- The London Economic Conference (1933) was an assembly of 66 nations who wanted to work together to solve the global depression
 - They wanted to stabilize the currencies as a primary goal, so that exchange rates could remain stable
 - FDR did not send delegates to the conference because he wanted to focus on recovering the local economy before focusing on a global recovery scheme
 - The American negativity about stabilizing global currencies essentially doomed the Congress and it did not have much impact
- The failure of the conference allowed for bad values to develop
 - Very strong nationalism could develop with more isolated countries

Freedom For (from?) the Filipinos and Recognition for the Russians

- The American sentiment towards keeping the Philippines in America declined
 - Isolationism and the Great Depression greatly reduced the imperialist sentiment in the U.S.
 - There was strong domestic competition of sugar from the Philippines unhampered by tariffs for foreign nations
 - Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act (1934) to provision the freedom of the Philippines in 1946
- FDR officially recognized the Soviet Union as a nation in 1933
 - This was partly to improve trade relations
 - This was mostly to improve relations to have Russia act as an ally against the aggressive Japanese and Russians

Culture and Society: The American decisions to avoid the London Economic Conference and give the Philippines its freedom goes along with the strong American peacetime non-interventionist scheme. It shows that while economic issues and a stable economy were a recent issue of the U.S., and despite strong imperialism from McKinley's presidency, isolationism remained the top priority of the Americans. This is an example of the strong isolationist feeling of the time period since WWI, which the Americans considered a failure (because few of the democratic goals in Wilson's Fourteen Points were achieved and the Treaty of Versailles wasn't even approved in the U.S.). This shows the societal fear of intervening, which was even more powerful than the urge to protect democracy. Unfortunately, this mindset helped the fascist and totalitarian governments of Germany and Japan, who were better armed than the Allied forces; this set up for a complete reversal of this mindset when the U.S. set off to war patriotically with an interventionist mindset after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Becoming a Good Neighbor

- Militaristic intervention in the Americas outside of the U.S. had brooded "an evil harvest of resentment, suspicion, and fear"

- FDR thus renounced military intervention in Latin America and promoted the Good Neighbor policy
 - It focused on “consultation and nonintervention”
 - American troops left Haiti in 1934
 - Some Platt Amendment provisions were removed from Cuba in 1934
- FDR personally visited some of the Latin American countries to promote his policy and establish kinder relations

Secretary Hull's Reciprocal Trade Agreements

- The Reciprocal Trade Agreements (1934) was passed by Congress to open up the U.S. to a more free-market economy
 - It was largely advocated by Secretary of State Hull, who believed that high tariffs worsened global economies, which in turn led to the violence and the war
 - Hull also helped negotiate trade with 21 countries
 - The new policy simply lowered tariffs, not actually revising the tariff system

Work, Exchange, and Technology: The Good Neighbor Policy and the subsequent Reciprocal Trade Agreements put a new emphasis on free and fair trade between nations. This broke the protectionist system of high tariffs and isolationism and enacted a new system of a more globalized economy with lower tariffs. These lowered tariffs were used to improve the economies of the nations involved in commerce, which was believed to be a cause of the Depression and WWII. As a result, this economic policy of free trade had the power to lower poverty internationally and therefore have the political effect of preventing against war based on the desperate situations that brought about WWII. It left a legacy of free trade that continues to be used instead of protectionism because of its economic benefits. This opening of trade, along with Roosevelt's New Deal policies, were two of the major policies that helped to reverse the Great Depression's bad economy and provide a long-term solution to prevent future depressions caused by protectionism.

Storm-Cellar Isolationism

- There was a rise of totalitarianism in nations of the world after the war and the depression
 - Joseph Stalin became the dictator of Russia
 - He caused purges of anti-communists and sent people to labor camps
 - Benito Mussolini became the fascist authoritarian leader of Italy
 - They attacked Ethiopia in 1935 and took over
 - Adolf Hitler became the dictator of Germany
 - He took Germany out of the League of Nations and began re-arming the nation
 - He allied with Italy to form the Rome-Berlin Axis
 - Japan also began to arm itself
 - It left the League of Nations as well and ended the Washington Naval Treaty
 - They joined Germany and Italy with the Tripartite Pact
- The U.S. continued to remain isolationist despite these dictatorial governments forming
 - One reason was that they knew that other nations would not repay their debts

- The Johnson Debt Default Act (1934) was passed, saying that the nations owing money to the U.S. could not borrow any more money

Congress Legislates Neutrality

- Some people thought that arms manufacturers, because they were so profitable from the war and the high demand of weaponry, actually caused the war to make money for themselves
- Congress tried to keep the U.S. out of war to preserve its isolationism
 - It passed the Neutrality Acts (1935, 1936, 1937)
 - These acts said that when the president declared that foreign war existed, certain trade restrictions would go into effect against the warring nations
 - Total neutrality helped the well-prepared dictatorships more than the other law-abiding nations; this policy actually helped the totalitarian nations

America Dooms Loyalist Spain

- The Spanish Civil War (1936-9) was between the republican government of Spain and fascist rebels
 - The U.S. sent 3,000 men to fight in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for the republic of Spain
- The U.S. put an arms embargo on both sides of the war in Spain
 - The democracy lost the war because the better militarily-prepared fascist rebels benefitted more from American exclusion
 - Had America or other nations helped the republican government, they likely would have won

America in the World: The American neutrality during the early parts of the WWII, strengthened especially because of the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937, was harmful to the Allied cause because it helped the aggressors more than the defenders of democracy. The Spanish, for example, could not protect their republican form of democracy in the Spanish Civil War because it received no aid against the militaristic, fascist rebels. Similarly, the Germans and the Japanese, who had geared up for war against international restrictions, were more prepared for war than the democratic nations were. As a result, the abstaining of the U.S. from favoring either side of the conflict helped the less war-ready British and French and Chinese. This would eventually lead to the demise of France to the Germans and an increasingly desperate Britain as the last stronghold of democracy in the west involved in the war. Only at that hopeless point did the U.S. deny their original plans to remain neutral and begin to favor the Allied side with the Lend-Lease Act. However, the strict sense of isolationism that held off the American Allied aid for so long showed how very reluctant the U.S. was to getting heavily involved in the war.

Appeasing Japan and Germany

- Japan began an invasion of China near Beijing in 1937
 - Roosevelt decided to not recognize this as war
 - This prevented the Neutrality Acts from going into effect
 - As a result, China still had access to American supplies (which they were dependent on)

- The Japanese still bought a lot of American weaponry
- Roosevelt gave the Quarantine Speech (1937) in response to the Japanese invasion
 - He said that the U.S. should try to quarantine the invaders by means of embargo
 - Many people were angry at his speech, believed that a quarantine would drag them into this war
- Adolf Hitler was becoming very powerful in Germany
 - He initiated mandatory military involvement (i.e., like a draft), which went against the Treaty of Versailles
 - He took over the German Rhineland, which had been given away in the Treaty of Versailles
 - He persecuted Jewish people, eventually killing 6 million by the end of the war
 - He took over Austria and threatened to take over Sudetenland (part of Czechoslovakia)
 - The western European powers decided to give Sudetenland to Germany to appease them, hoping Germany would not advance farther
 - Hitler broke this promise and took the rest of Czechoslovakia later

Hitler's Belligerency and U.S. Neutrality

- The Soviet Union signed a nonaggression treaty with Germany, known as the Hitler-Stalin pact
 - This means that Germany could attack western Europe without any opposition from eastern Europe (i.e., Russia)
- Germany and the Soviet Union invaded and captured Poland in only a few weeks
- The U.S. was strongly anti-Nazi but still wanted to stay out of the war
 - People started to debate the Neutrality Acts now that Britain and France had gone to war against Germany and needed American weapons, which were blocked by the act
 - The Neutrality Act of 1939 was passed, which allowed warring nations to buy from the U.S. so long as they brought their own ships (so that the U.S. merchant ships would not be torpedoed) and paid in cash (to avoid debt)
 - This helped the western European democracies, which had a strong navy, but hurt China, which was blockaded by Japan's strong navy

The Fall of France

- The "phony war" was a period of inaction in war after the capture of Poland
 - Soviet Russia took over Finland in the phony war period
 - The phony war ended with the German invasions of Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and then France
 - France fell under the German and Italian invasions
- After France was captured, Britain was the only major anti-German power in western Europe
 - The U.S. was heavily alarmed by this
 - FDR called for "huge airfleets and a two-ocean navy" (one for Europe and one for Asia with Japan)
 - This called for \$37 billion dollars, more than all of WWI combined
 - Congress passed a conscription law (draft) in 1940

- At first it called for 1.2 million troops and 800,000 reserves but was increased
- At the Havana Conference (1940), the U.S. agreed to share the responsibility of the Monroe Doctrine with all of the Latin American countries
 - In other words, all of the countries in the Americas were to fight against European intervention

Politics and Power: WWII was all about military gain and power for the Germans, the Soviets (in the beginning), and the Japanese, and about stopping the Axis powers and Soviet Russia from advancing for the Allied forces. The U.S. and the western European nations first tried to appease Germany from taking too much of Europe by giving them a section of Czechoslovakia. When Germany continued to conquer more of Europe, the U.S. and the Allies looked to more military means of stopping Germany. While Germany conquered Poland, Denmark, France, and other European nations, the U.S. looked to gain Latin America as a potential ally. With the Havana Conference in 1940, the U.S. had the Latin American nations agree to protect the Americas from European rule — in other words, FDR rallied up the Americas together against the Axis. In the meantime, the U.S. also began gearing up for war by increasing their arms manufacturing rates. The beginning of the German invasion of other nations was when the U.S. really began preparing for war, even though it had not officially declared war yet. Therefore, the U.S. gained military (hard) power, while also gaining trust (soft power) with the Latin American nations, greatly increasing its potential impact in war when it became officially involved.

Refugees from the Holocaust

- The German people were goaded on to persecute the Jews
 - Pogroms were “mob attacks approved or condoned by local authorities” against the Jewish people
 - Nazi propaganda spread via the radio also increased anti-Semitism
 - Kristallnacht (“the night of broken glass”) was a night when 91 Jews died, 31,000 were sent to concentration camps, and many of their shop windows were shattered and vandalized
 - Many Jews tried to flee, but not all nations were welcoming
- The War Refugee Board (1942) was created to help Jews
 - It saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from being deported to a concentration camp
 - It only saved 150,000 Jews, while over 6,000,000 died over the course of the war

Culture and Society: Although there were many historical nativist efforts in the U.S. ranging from the forced re-settlement of Native Americans into reservations, Southern efforts to restrict the rights of African Americans, and anti-immigration violence and laws in the 19th and early 20th centuries, none were as terrible as the Holocaust and its anti-semitism. Germany’s culture became tainted with the deaths and resettlements into concentration camps of millions of Jewish people. The persecution of Jews became a part of their culture, similar to the U.S.’s nativist efforts, but much more violently. Conversely, it became a part of American society to feel pity for the Jewish people and protect them with the War Refugee Board, but this was not too successful. Germany had exploited a war on an entire culture (Judaism) as well as on other nations.

Bolstering Britain

- Hitler was preparing for an invasion of Great Britain now that France had fallen
 - It began airstrikes on British cities, which were strongly protected by the British Air Force
- FDR had to choose between interacting with war or not
 - People who supported the war effort believed that Britain's fight was America's fight as well (against totalitarianism), and believed that the U.S. could be involved without directly fighting in the war
 - Isolationists wanted to continue policy of isolationism at all costs
- When Britain needed warships, FDR gave them fifty old warships in exchange for naval bases in Europe
 - Pro-British Americans supported this
 - FDR pushed this through without the approval of Congress because of its urgency
 - This broke American neutrality, although it did not push it to war

Shattering the Two-Term Tradition

- The Republicans chose energetic Wendell L. Willkie for their presidential nominee in 1940
 - He was very likeable and popular, despite his lack of political experience
 - He made many speeches and criticized the manner of FDR's supposedly dictatorial rule
 - He supported many of the liberal policies of FDR, only differing on the way they were carried out
- FDR made few speeches because he was still busy with issues involving the war
- FDR won the presidential election of 1940
 - This broke the two-term precedent of previous presidents

American and National Identity: President FDR created a new precedent when he took on a third presidential term — this broke the standard two-term limit that George Washington had set, which was almost law and formed a part of the national history and identity. While this did not break any laws (at the time, presidents did not have term limits) but it did show that presidents could have the potential to be popular enough to go past the traditional two-term limit. This followed the “don't swap horses in the middle of the stream” advice by Lincoln: because FDR had been successful with the New Deal policies in the midst of the worst economic depression in U.S. history, and because he had kept the U.S. out of war like promised for an extended period of time, the people chose not to switch him out because WWII was still raging. However, because Republicans and other critics viewed the two-term limit as a sacred part of American identity as an unofficial safeguard against an indefinite rule (which would then be similar to a dictatorship), the 22nd Amendment giving a two-term limit on the president was passed, thus preserving the two-term limit (for later presidents).

A Landmark Lend-Lease Law

- The Lend-Lease Bill (1940) allowed the U.S. to send a limitless amount of war supplies to the nations fighting the aggressors of WWI

- The bill was heavily debated because isolationists did not want to break the neutrality that was currently held by this bill, which would favor the Allies
- The bill gave over \$50 billion in war supplies to the Allies
- It ended up increasing U.S. war production, which would prepare the U.S. for its own military involvement in the war
- The Germans took the lend-lease essentially as an indirect declaration of war from the U.S., and started bombing U.S. merchant ships

Charting a New World

- The Soviet Union and Germany were having an uneasy partnership under the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 because of the division of conquered territory between them
 - Hitler decided to take action against the Soviets and attacked in 1941
 - The U.S. gave \$11 billion in supplies to aid the Soviet Union
 - A harsh winter and the Russian army stopped the German invasion
- The Atlantic Charter (1941) was a secret meeting between FDR and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (and later endorsed by Soviet Russia)
 - It was similar to Wilson's Fourteen Points as it gave guidelines for the future of democracy
 - It was very specific, giving the people of conquered territories self-determination and sovereignty rather than annexation by a victor nation
 - It called for disarmament and more peace and security
 - It called for a new "permanent system of general security" (i.e., the UN to come)
 - It was widely acclaimed by liberals
 - However, isolationists didn't like it because it involved a great foreign involvement by the U.S.

U.S. Destroyers and Hitler's U-boats Clash

- Because the British did not have enough warships, the U.S. was forced to send convoys to escort the British supply ships to or near Britain
- Some U.S. warships were attacked and some of those were sunk
- The U.S. eventually ended the Neutrality Act of 1939 (because the country was not neutral and it was trading with warring nations, both actions contradicting the act)
 - As a result, merchant ships were allowed to be armed and trade with Britain

Surprise Attack on Pearl Harbor

- The U.S. decided to enact an oil and arms embargo on Japan because of its role as an aggressor in WWII
 - The Japanese had the option to attack the rich resources of the Pacific islands or to attack the U.S. to try to get them to give in
 - The Japanese decided to attack Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 ("a day that shall live in infamy")
 - 3,000 American lives were lost
 - Congress almost unanimously decided to declare war

- Congress declared war on the Axis powers four days later on December 11, 1941

America's Transformation from Bystander to Belligerent

- The attack on Pearl Harbor helped to unite the Americans toward an interventionist cause, including many isolationists
- The U.S. had been leaning towards being involved in war, especially since France's downfall because the U.S. did not want to see Britain get taken by Germany and China by Japan, which would leave much of the world led by imperialist, dictatorial powers

America in the World: Beginning with the new Lend-Lease Bill, the U.S. became heavily invested in the World War. The U.S. began to give huge shipments of arms to the Allies, which shifted it away from Neutrality, so that it eventually terminated the then-useless Neutrality Act. Because they were essentially fighting indirectly by providing the means for which their ally Britain was to fight, Germany and Japan became more hostile towards the U.S., and German U-boats began to target U.S. merchant ships as well. Once the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, the U.S. was already essentially geared into the mindset for war. The combination of the hatred for fascism and communism, the friendship with Britain, France, and China (the latter mostly for economic reasons), and the threat to the U.S.'s own national security combined provoked a strong push towards war and interventionism, even though isolationism was so strong so recently. The U.S. and Great Britain had already declared their secondary motive, on top of stopping Germany and its Allies, to be the protectors of democracy and republican ideals, as stated in the Atlantic Charter. It was really the attack on Pearl Harbor that gave the U.S. the necessary push to fully arm itself and aid the Allies and stop the neutrality that had only hurt the Allies against the more prepared Axis powers, as well as begin to fight for the sake of democracy.