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# Roosevelt:

## THE LION AND THE FOX

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by James MacGregor Burns

ROOSEVELT: THE LION AND THE FOX

GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE (with Jack W. Peltason)

THE PRESS ON TRIAL

THE LAST BATTLE (co-author)

OPERATIONS OF THE 77TH DIVISION

country saying "We have to have a balanced budget. We have to have a balanced budget."

The President plainly wanted to answer Douglas and all the other impractical men who were chanting this account-book liturgy.

"A balanced budget isn't putting people to work. I will balance the budget as soon as I take care of the unemployed. In other words, I am not being helped.

"Hell, I can stop relief tomorrow. What happens? Tell me that! You know. I don't mean, by that, the policy of the owner of your paper. You know, as human beings, what happens if I stop relief tomorrow. It isn't any joke."

A day or two after Al Smith's biting assault on the New Deal before the Liberty League, Roosevelt asked an aide to dig up a quotation from Lincoln that the President vaguely remembered. The passage was soon on his desk:

"I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, 10,000 angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

## THIRTEEN *Foreign Policy by Makeshift*

**R**OOSEVELT'S practical, day-to-day approach to government was even more pronounced in foreign policy making than in domestic. It was not surprising. He had burned his fingers in the election campaign of 1920 in which he and Cox had fought for adherence to the League of Nations and to the principle of collective security. Candidate Roosevelt's ditching of the League in 1932 showed how far he would compromise with previous principles to realize immediate goals.

But even after Roosevelt was safely in office he cautiously skirted foreign policy shoals on which he feared his political popularity and his domestic program might be wrecked. His treatment of the London Economic Conference, his nationalist economic policies during 1933, his continuation of the Hoover policies on the League and on war debts seemed on their face a planned and consistent retreat from the internationalist tendencies of the Democratic party of Wilson and Cox. But they were not. For alongside these policies he fashioned measures of international co-operation that enabled him to veer back and forth between isolationism and internationalism as political conditions required.

The political climate and terrain in which the President acted did not make a foreign policy of principle any easier. To be sure, the framers of the Constitution a century and a half before had wisely given the chief executive a good deal of initiative and power in foreign policy making. But disapproval of treaties had been left in the hands of one-third plus one of the senators, and most international projects called for funds that could be denied by a majority of legislators in either House, or by a stubborn committee. Even in the executive branch he headed the President faced centrifugal forces: the cliquishness of Foreign Service officers; the narrow class loyalties of some of the "striped pants" set; the tangle of bureaucratic rivalries; and curious tie-ins between careerists in the ugly old building that housed the State Department and powerful congressmen on Capitol Hill. A host of politicians had their fingers in the foreign policy pie.

Outside Washington were the millions of voters who held the destinies of foreign policy makers in their hands. And here was the most unstable foundation of all on which to build a consistent program of foreign relations. Great numbers of these voters were colossally ignorant of affairs beyond the three-mile limit; as the old story went, they were more concerned about a dogfight in Main Street than a flare-up in distant Ruritania. Others were rigidly bound by loyalties absorbed in the countries of their national origin. Still others were prisoners of ancient fears and shibboleths: that wily foreign diplomats always played Uncle Sam for a sucker, that America had never lost a war and never won a peace conference, that salvation lay in keeping free of entangling alliances.

Yet all this was only one dimension in which Roosevelt had to shape foreign policies. For these policies by definition were influenced in turn by the political climate in foreign lands. The character of the Nazi ideology, the balance of power in the French Chamber of Deputies, the foreign policy attitudes of British labor, the silent struggle within the Kremlin, the fortunes of Chinese war lords, were all elements in the equation of world power. Reading long letters from his ambassadors, lurching with foreign envoys, quizzing his unofficial agents who had just seen MacDonald or Goering or Mussolini, leafing through lengthy studies by State Department economists, Roosevelt had to make judgments day after day on mighty imponderables imperfectly understood.

Even worse, all these forces were in ceaseless motion. An assassination in Japan, an election in France, a palace revolt in South America, a crucial cabinet session in Downing Street, the rising misery of Asiatic millions, the vast fermenting and steaming of distant ideologies—any of these could jar the unstable equilibrium of world politics. The United States was no exception. Not only was its politics plagued by the usual unpredictabilities, but the American people, lacking stable attitudes built on long experience in foreign policy making, swung fitfully from one foreign policy mood to another, from isolation to neutralism to participation in world politics.

No wonder that Roosevelt moved warily on the darkling plain of foreign policy. No wonder that he wrote a friend early in 1934, "In the present European situation I feel very much as if I were groping for a door in a blank wall. The situation may get better and enable us to give some leadership." But what if the situation grew worse, and leadership all the more imperative?

### GOOD NEIGHBORS AND GOOD FENCES

Lacking a general principle by which to make foreign policy, Roosevelt improvised from one situation to another. The result was a jumble of separate and somewhat clashing policies. The President ranged back and forth from the old political internationalism of the Democratic party to the economic nationalism implicit in the New Deal, from the anti-imperialism of the Bryan Democrats to traditional power politics.

In veering from one policy to another Roosevelt was less concerned with fitting his policy into a larger framework than with overcoming immediate problems. In a sense he followed a middle way in foreign policy as he did in domestic. Yet again his middle way was no straight line between two ordered philosophies, but only a kind of geometric median across which Roosevelt tacked from one policy to another.

The gnawing problem of war debts hung on through the first term. Roosevelt departed little from the Hoover policies. Congress had forbidden the Executive to reduce or cancel the debts, and he made no attempt to alter this stand; but he knew too that full payment was impossible. In this impasse the President explored a variety of schemes, shifting figures around on scratch paper. All this came to naught, and Congress grew more and more testy as the nations sent token payments or no payments at all. The upshot was passage in 1934 of a bill of the belligerent old isolationist Hiram Johnson that forbade the floating of loans in this country by defaulting nations. Over objections from the State and Treasury departments Roosevelt, in a concession to congressional isolationists, signed the measure into law.

Disarmament was a sterner test of United States harmony with its old allies. The World Disarmament Conference at Geneva had been deadlocked for almost a year when Roosevelt took office, and Hitler's seizure of power made prospects seem even more dismal. In May 1933 the President sent a personal appeal to the heads of fifty-four nations asking that they enter a nonaggression pact, eliminate offensive weapons, and sharply curb arms and armies. A few days later Roosevelt and Hull authorized Norman Davis, chairman of the United States delegation at Geneva, to go much further. If arms could be reduced, he announced, Washington would be willing not only to consult with other nations but to refrain from any action tending to defeat a collective effort against a nation breaching the peace, if we agreed with the rightness of that effort.

If this bald announcement represented a trial balloon, it was quickly shot down by salvos from more than one quarter. Germany

was already readying orders for aircraft, and its factories were pouring out chemicals, steel, and small arms. France, fearful as ever of German *revanche*, was holding out for special guarantees. And in the ornate old room on Capitol Hill where met the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, potent senators opposed this gesture toward internationalism. The disarmament conference was soon deadlocked again.

In October Hitler announced Germany's withdrawal from both the conference and the League. The greatest arms race in history was on.

The collapse of the conference pushed Roosevelt and Hull back into a new emphasis on naval disarmament. Japan was demanding naval parity, and Roosevelt sought to join with the British in a common stand against the looming threat in the Orient. But the British, more concerned about German than Japanese rearmament, were not easy to work with. In November 1934 an angry Roosevelt told Davis that he must constantly impress Sir John Simon, British foreign secretary, "and a few other Tories" with the "simple fact that if Great Britain is even suspected of preferring to play with Japan to playing with us, we shall be compelled, in the interest of American security, to approach public sentiment in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa in a definite effort to make these Dominions understand clearly that their future security is linked with us in the United States." He added that Davis would "best know how to inject this thought into the minds of Simon, Chamberlain, Baldwin, and MacDonald in the most diplomatic way."

Here was an astonishing move—a threat in effect to detach the sympathies of the dominions from the mother country, and to establish with them an anti-Japanese alignment with the United States as the center stone. The effort came to naught; a week later Hull was instructing Davis on the need for an early, open, and conclusive indication of American and British alignment on naval limitation. Roosevelt's threat was significant, however, in showing how the hard steel of power politics showed through the velvet of diplomatic relations even between two friendly nations.

As for American participation in international organizations, Roosevelt continued to play a most cautious game. Speaking to the Woodrow Wilson Foundation shortly after Christmas 1933, he paid tribute to the League as a common meeting place for international discussion, as a means of settling disputes, and as an aid in labor, health, and other matters. The United States was cooperating openly in using its machinery. But, he continued, "we are not members and we do not contemplate membership." At one time he thought of appointing an American ambassador to the

League, but he feared the reaction of the isolationists. And he was cautious even on technical co-operation. When Phillips told him that the Department of Agriculture wanted to have a representative on a committee of League experts on the international meat trade, Roosevelt replied: "What would be the effect of this? Is it perhaps going too far toward official membership in a direct official committee of the League itself?"

Of a milder political coloration than the League were two other world agencies: the International Labor Organization and the Permanent Court of International Justice. It was on Miss Perkins' initiative that the Senate and House passed by simple majority vote a joint resolution authorizing membership in the ILO. Roosevelt had said to her, "I may be President of the United States, I may be in favor of the ILO, but I can't do it alone." The result was that Miss Perkins did it alone. On Roosevelt's advice and with his blessing—but with no other help from him—she trudged from Pittman to Johnson to Borah explaining that the ILO had existed before the League, was not part of it, and no loss of sovereignty was involved. After thus patiently lining up virtually every member of the Foreign Relations Committee, she got the resolution through.

Joining the World Court also seemed politically feasible. Both party platforms in 1932 had called for adherence to the watered-down protocols that safeguarded United States sovereignty. Largely on Hull's initiative, Roosevelt decided to push ratification at the beginning of the 1935 session. Trouble loomed from the start. Roosevelt's cabinet was divided, and Chairman Key Pittman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was so lukewarm that he asked the President to get Robinson to lead the fight. For a while Roosevelt and Hull thought they had the needed two-thirds of the senators. But a lightning mobilization of isolationist opinion commanded by Hearst, Father Coughlin, Will Rogers, and others unloosed a flood of telegrams onto Capitol Hill, and enough senators wavered to defeat the measure.

Although Roosevelt had not thrown himself into the fight as had Hull, he was stung by the rebuff. Ickes at a cabinet meeting noticed a bitter tinge to his laughter, and a hint that he wanted to hurt the thirty-six dissenters. If the thirty-six ever got to heaven, Roosevelt wrote Robinson, "they will be doing a great deal of apologizing for a very long time—that is if God is against war—and I think He is." But Roosevelt's chief reaction was a feeling that he had to wait out public opinion. Adherence would come eventually, he wrote Elihu Root, "but today, quite frankly, the wind everywhere blows against us." And to Stimson he sent somber words:

"Thank you for that mighty nice note. It heartens me. You are right that we know the enemy. In normal times the radio and other

appeals by them would not have been effective. However, these are not normal times; people are jumpy and very ready to run after strange gods. This is so in every other country as well as our own.

"I fear common sense dictates no new method for the time being—but I have an unfortunately long memory and I am not forgetting either our enemies or our objectives."

Most internationalist of all the administration's foreign policies was the trade agreements program. Chiefly responsible for the program, however, was Hull, not Roosevelt, who remained perched between isolationists and internationalists in his own administration and party.

In his maiden speech to Congress at the age of thirty-six Hull had called for lower tariffs; he had fought for them ever since; and now, as Secretary of State, the tenacious old Tennessean saw his great opportunity. Roosevelt had given him the impression during the years before 1932 that he favored reciprocal tariff agreements between nations. But when Hull tried to push his ideas during the first Hundred Days, he ran straight into the nationalistic emphasis in AAA and NRA. His trade program was sidetracked. On one thing, though, Hull and Roosevelt were fully agreed. No substantial tariff reduction could be achieved unless power was delegated to the President. To run a low tariff bill through the congressional gauntlet was to expose it to decimation by congressmen with special interests. Only the President could act for a more general interest.

But would Roosevelt act? Slowly he came round during 1933 to some kind of trade agreements program; when, however, he set up a committee to co-ordinate foreign trade relations, he picked as head a vigorous opponent of tariff reductions, George N. Peek. At the same time that the President was pushing ahead with a trade agreements bill he named Peek foreign trade adviser. Hull was stunned by this appointment. A few months after the bill became law, the President allowed Peek to negotiate a barter agreement with Germany. When Hull and Peek disagreed over the most-favored-nation clause, Roosevelt asked Hull to spend "a couple of hours some evening" with Peek talking things over. "In pure theory you and I think alike," Roosevelt wrote Hull, "but every once in a while we have to modify a principle to meet a hard and disagreeable fact!"

Such a tug of war could not last. Under heavy pressure from Hull, the President finally swung against Peek and his barter plans. Later Peek resigned with a bitter statement.

Hull also took the lead in applying the Good Neighbor doctrine to the rest of the Americas, but here he had full backing from the President. Torn by strife and discontent, resentful of the years of

interference by its Big Brother of the North, Latin America was skeptical toward Democratic party promises of no more meddling in its internal affairs. The real test of the new line could come only in a concrete situation, and Cuba, long a ward of the United States, provided such a test. When palace revolt followed revolt in Havana during 1933, the ugly situation seemed to threaten American commercial interests in the island. Worried by the rioting and army mutinies, Ambassador Sumner Welles in Cuba proposed a "strictly limited intervention," but Hull and Roosevelt refused. Later they erased a festering sore by abrogating the Platt Amendment, which had restricted Cuba's sovereignty. As further proof of the Good Neighbor policy Roosevelt also withdrew marines from Haiti and eased relations with Panama. Capping the whole program was the patient nurturing of friendly relations by Hull at the seventh Pan-American Conference in Montevideo, the first such gathering that a United States Secretary of State had attended.

By 1936 Roosevelt could call the Good Neighbor policy "a fact, active, present, pertinent and effective." Yet it was notable that the foreign policy on which he took the most fixed and principled stand was essentially a negative policy—one of noninterference—whatever positive results might flow from it. To be sure, persistent noninterference was not easy, but it was far easier than a persistent policy of intervention or collective security.

In any event, Roosevelt did not put all his bets on treaties and noninterference as a basis for good neighborliness, at least outside the Americas. Good fences, too, made for good neighbors, and some of his fences bristled with spikes and spears. Within a week of Roosevelt's inauguration Swanson announced that the navy would be built up to treaty strength, and three months later the President allotted almost a quarter billion from NRA appropriations for this purpose. But the build-up of armed strength during the first term was slow and quiet. Roosevelt did not want to publicize defense unduly. When McIntyre told him early in 1934 that patriotic organizations were asking him to proclaim "National Defense Week," Roosevelt answered tersely, "Don't do it."

#### STORM CLOUDS AND STORM CELLARS

In the white marble caucus room of the Senate Office Building late in 1934 sat the stage managers of a carefully planned, elaborately staged drama. In the center behind the long table was the hero of the drama, a stern, hard-faced young senator named Gerald P. Nye; flanking him were other idols of American isolationism—Arthur H. Vandenberg, Bennett Champ Clark, Homer T. Bone. Of villains in this drama there were many: evil, bloodsucking "merchants of

death," who paraded before the committee day after day to confess their sins. Of heroines there was only one: an ethereal being, always appealed to but never seen, a figure named Peace. Crowded behind the villains was the chorus, the spectators who craned their necks and muttered with indignation as the play unfolded.

Such was the Nye committee investigating the munitions industry. Like many other famous Senate investigations, the Nye probe was less a search for data than a dramatization of things already known or rightly suspected. But the charges were dramatic and shocking. Arms makers had bribed politicians, shared patents, divided up business, reaped incredible profits, evaded taxes—all in the sordid trade of death weapons. Even worse, munitions makers helped foment wars to boost their profits.

Rarely have Senate hearings fallen with such heavy impact on the stream of American opinion. Horrendous titles suddenly blazoned forth in book stores and magazine stands: "merchants of death" were deep in "iron, blood and profits"; it was "one hell of a business." The timing was flawless. The revelations coincided with and contributed to a deep revulsion against entanglement in European quarrels. Writers were busy showing that 1917 was not due to German submarines or a conception of neutral rights, but to a few greedy capitalists. Germany was not so guilty after all. The Americans had been saps and suckers.

With war clouds piling up again in Europe, millions of Americans vowed, "Never again." Women organized peace societies. College students formed the "Veterans of Future Wars" to collect their bonuses now, before they had to fight and die. Isolationism was strong everywhere, but especially in the Midwest, Northwest, and Rockies; in election after election these sections sent to Congress men like William E. Borah of Idaho, Key Pittman of Nevada, Burton Wheeler of Montana, young Bob La Follette of Wisconsin, and Nye of North Dakota, who championed the isolationist cause. This cause, charged with emotion and bitterness, had now become a force of awesome, almost primeval power.

Where was Roosevelt in all this? Certainly he had a deep stake in preventing a mobilization of public opinion that might in turn shackle him in making foreign policy. But the President's relation to the Nye investigation was a passive one. Largely by default, Nye, a Republican isolationist, was allowed to chair the committee. Gliding with the current of opinion favoring the probe, Roosevelt not only joined the chorus denouncing the arms trade but allowed Nye access to executive papers that were greatly to aid the Senator's efforts to dramatize the skulduggery of bankers and diplomats. Even more, he tolerated—and to some extent encouraged—the Nye committee in its ambition to use intensifying disgust with arms makers

as an anvil on which to beat out a rigid policy of isolationism for the United States.

At this crucial juncture Roosevelt offered little leadership. It was not inevitable that popular hatred of arms makers and war profiteers should deepen popular feeling that America ought to isolate itself from foreign entanglements and thus from foreign wars. That hatred might as well have bolstered a public desire to work with other nations in order to stop war and hence end the grim accouterments of battle, including merchants of death. But such a channeling of opinion demanded an active program of education—in short, leadership. Roosevelt only drifted.

Given the powerful ground swell of isolationist feeling, the brilliance of the isolationists in marshaling their forces, the passivity of the administration, and the tension in Europe, only one outcome was possible—a national stampede for a storm cellar to sit out the tempests ahead. During the second Hundred Days, the isolationists on Capitol Hill were pressing for legislation requiring the President, in the event of war abroad, to embargo export of arms to all belligerents. Roosevelt and Hull favored such embargo authority, but they wanted to empower the President to discriminate between aggressor and victim by embargoing exports of arms only to the former. Such discretionary power, they reasoned, would help deter aggressors.

But the isolationists would have none of it. Such discretion, they shouted, would mean sure entanglement in alien quarrels. Pittman was hostile and surly. The President was riding for a fall, he warned the White House, if he insisted on "designating the aggressor in accordance with the wishes of the League of Nations." The senator said he was willing to introduce such a discretionary provision, but the President would get "licked."

The President did get licked. Mandatory arms embargo legislation passed both chambers by almost unanimous votes. Roosevelt dared not stand against the tide; he had urgent domestic bills to get through, and the isolationists were threatening to filibuster. The President signed the measure, but he warned that the inflexible provisions might drag us into war instead of keeping us out.

Why, then, did Roosevelt sign the bill? He acted mainly out of expediency. For one thing, the mandatory arms embargo section of the act was to expire in six months, and Roosevelt and Hull reasoned that they might gain discretionary power in the revision. For another, they both liked one feature of the bill—the setting up of regulation of arms traffic. Most important, Mussolini for months had been making plans for an attack on Ethiopia. A mandatory arms embargo against both nations would hurt Italy, with its need for modern arms and its possession of ships to transport them, far

more than it would hurt Haile Selassie's flintlock-armed native troops. When Roosevelt told reporters dryly that the measure met the "needs of the existing situation," he was more than hinting at his almost Machiavellian expediency.

And so it was that Roosevelt, at the very moment that dictators girded for war in Europe and Asia, was stripped of power to throw his country's weight against aggressors.

As Roosevelt scrawled his name on the Neutrality Act at the end of August 1935, Italian troops, tanks, and airplanes were pouring through the Suez Canal toward Ethiopia. To military and diplomatic strategists in chancelleries of great nations, the Neutrality Act came as confirmation of America's refusal to throw its weight into the balance of world politics. Yet Roosevelt could not stay clear of the looming conflict.

For months he and Hull had been watching the approach of that conflict. So had politicians and diplomats in Europe: Prime Minister Baldwin and Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare of Britain, and Foreign Minister Pierre Laval of France. The precise nature of the division in Europe during 1935 was shrouded in the rhetoric of collective security and the murk of secret negotiations, but two things were clear. One was the reluctance of France and Britain to antagonize Mussolini irretrievably as long as they feared Hitler more and hoped to keep the two dictators apart. The other was Mussolini's determination to grab Ethiopia, preferably through an act of violence.

Roosevelt had had a measure of grudging admiration for Mussolini; and the dictator had responded with some friendly words for the President and his New Deal. Ambassador Breckinridge Long in Rome wrote enthusiastically in 1933 about the rejuvenation of Italy, including the punctuality of the trains. Even on the very eve of invasion, Long was drawing up elaborate plans for giving Italy large slices of Ethiopia as part of a general European settlement. Roosevelt's reaction to Mussolini's war preparations during 1934 was more equivocal. On the one hand, he believed that war would be a threat to peace everywhere, and thus America was involved; on the other hand, he shied away from any involvement in the situation by refusing to do more than urge Mussolini to settle the issue peacefully. When Mussolini said it was too late—Italy had mobilized a million men and spent two billion lire—Roosevelt still hoped Italy would take the "magnificent position" of settling the issue by arbitration. But more than moral support to Ethiopia or to the idea of collective security he would not offer. Hull made clear that the United States would not join the League of Nations in imposing sanctions.

"I am very much more worried about the world situation than about the domestic," Roosevelt wrote to Senator Josiah Bailey at the end of August 1935. "I hope that there will be no explosion before I take my trip on the boat"—a reference to a long cruise that the President planned to take on the U.S.S. *Houston*. But the explosion was imminent. On October 3, 1935, Mussolini's legions thrust into Ethiopia. What now?

News of the attack came to Roosevelt on the *Houston* as the cruiser plowed along serenely off the California coast. His attitude toward Italy hardened at once. "Good!" he exclaimed loudly when news reports favorable to Ethiopia were flashed to the ship. The sympathies of Hopkins, Ickes, and his other companions were with Ethiopia. The President had left a draft neutrality proclamation with Hull, and he waited impatiently while Hull tried to find out whether hostilities formally existed. "They are dropping bombs on Ethiopia—and that is war," Roosevelt exclaimed. "Why wait for Mussolini to say so?"

In Washington, Hull had problems of his own. Some of his advisers were urging him not to issue a neutrality proclamation because it might prejudice action by the League Council, which was preparing to name Italy as an aggressor nation. But Hull wanted to act before the League did. His reason stemmed directly from the decisive element in American foreign policy making—the isolationists' hostility toward American co-operation with Geneva. Roosevelt wired him to act immediately. They both recognized that much depended on staying clear of the League.

By an extraordinary conjuncture of two events—the passage of the Neutrality Act and the invasion of an agrarian country by a nation badly needing imports of the sinews of war—Roosevelt was in the happy situation where the more he sought to cut off exports to Italy in the name of neutrality, the more he was able to assist in the imposing of economic sanctions against the aggressor. This whole tactic depended, however, on keeping Geneva's actions separate from Washington's in the public eye. The President and Hull were equal to the task. When Hoare sounded them out on some kind of action under the Kellogg Pact, they coldly rejected the idea. And so worried were they that the League might ask them to co-operate formally in sanctions, thus inviting a refusal that might throw cold water on the League's efforts, that they warned Geneva not to issue such an invitation. The British and French agreed not to.

The Neutrality Act, however, embargoed only arms and munitions; it did not embargo raw materials that Italy could convert into weapons for her warriors. From the start Roosevelt and Hull recognized this massive shortcoming. The President asked the State

Department to study the possibility of adding copper and steel to the list, in case League sanctions should include these items, and he was even ready to limit sharply the transshipment of our exports by neutrals. Informed that the Neutrality Act could not be stretched this far, Roosevelt fell back on a "moral embargo" based on the "spirit" of the act. On October 30 he denounced profiteering in Italian trade that might help prolong the war.

Despite these appeals, exports of war materials to Italy mounted. On November 15, with League sanctions slated to take effect three days later, Hull warned stiffly against an increase in such exports as oil, copper, trucks, and scrap steel. His warning covered more materials than the League sanction list, which omitted the crucial item of oil. Menaced on its most vulnerable flank, Italy hotly protested Hull's action.

But that action was still only "moral." Would the administration put teeth into it? Britain especially was eager to know the answer to this question. Her "businessmen's government" feared that if the League imposed an oil embargo against Italy, American oilmen, scorning Hull's moralities, would grab the whole Italian oil market. Britain also had the problem of dealing with the slippery figure of Laval, who had long wanted to appease Mussolini by jettisoning Ethiopia and who had stalled off a League oil embargo.

So Britain's Ambassador put the question straight to Hull. Would the United States stop increased oil exports to Italy if the League embargoed oil? Hull hesitated. Only Congress could take such action, but to appeal to Congress to embargo oil in conjunction with the League was to establish the fearful link between American policy and League collective security that he and Roosevelt had fought so hard to avoid. "We have gone as far as we can," he replied. He could not speak for Congress.

Frustrated by the administration's fear of the isolationists, the resourceful diplomats of Downing Street turned to other expedients. Hoare and Laval in Paris agreed on a plan to end the war by dismembering Ethiopia and handing over large chunks to Mussolini. Publication of the agreement set off a storm of denunciation; Hoare was sacked, and the plan was killed. But the sordid proposal also killed the high hopes for effective sanctions. The League continued to equivocate. The war went on. Italian troops struck deeper into Ethiopia, burning, bombing, spraying poison gas from the clouds.

The Hoare-Laval plan caught Roosevelt and Hull by surprise. The President was outraged; "our British friends," he said, "have come a sad cropper." For months Haile Selassie's natives fought on. Forsaken by the League, the emperor made a last appeal before he fled his country. Did the people of the world realize that he had

fought on to protect not only his people but also collective security? Were they blind to his fight for the whole of humanity? Where were his tardy allies?

"If they never come, then I say prophetically and without bitterness, 'The West will perish.'"

#### THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE

Ethiopia's betrayal left American internationalists in a sea of uncertainty and despondency. Isolationists jeered that once again Uncle Sam had been gulled by European diplomats. Most Americans were merely confused. As for Roosevelt, not since entering the White House had he been so perplexed and worried by developments abroad.

"The situation changes so fast from day to day that it is hard to do more than make wild guesses in regard to the European future," he wrote his minister in Bucharest late in January 1936. To Ambassador Straus in Paris he wrote in even more pessimistic vein. The whole European situation, the President said, was black.

"I have been increasingly concerned about the world picture ever since May, 1933. There are those who come from England and France and Germany who point to the fact that every crisis of the past three years has been muddled through with a hope that each succeeding crisis will be met peacefully in one way or another in the next few years. I hope that point of view is right but it goes against one's common sense."

To Congress the President addressed an urgent warning: "Not only have peace and good-will among men grown more remote in those areas of the earth during this period, but a point has been reached where the people of the Americas must take cognizance of growing ill-will, of marked trends toward aggression, of increasing armaments, of shortening tempers—a situation which has in it many of the elements that lead to the tragedy of general war." People in such nations might wish to change aggressive policies, but lacking freedom, they were following blindly and fervently those who sought autocratic power. Such nations had not shown patience in trying to solve their problems.

"They have therefore impatiently reverted to the old belief in the law of the sword, or to the fantastic conception that they, and they alone, are chosen to fulfill a mission and that all the others among the billion and a half of human beings in the world must and shall learn from and be subject to them."

Brave words—but they masked a central ambiguity in Roosevelt's approach to neutrality. Outwardly he took the isolationists' position that arms and trade embargoes would keep America out of war

by keeping American merchants and others disentangled from war. Privately he took the internationalists' position that such embargoes—if they could be administered with discretion—could keep America out of war by discouraging aggressors from starting war. Between the two approaches a vast difference loomed. But the President made no effort to educate the people on this cardinal difference. He hoped that they would be educated by events. Unhappily for the President, events such as the Hoare-Laval agreement seemed to educate the people in the wrong direction.

And time was running out. In February of 1936 the Neutrality Act of the previous September was to expire. Roosevelt and Hull hoped to gain from Congress both legal standing for the "moral" embargo of war materials and—crucial to their whole strategy—presidential discretion in applying such an embargo. When Hull appealed to Congress for these two new provisions, he ran into a stone wall. Within a few weeks the battle was lost. Why?

The immediate reason was the power of the isolationists on Capitol Hill. Johnson and Borah lashed Hull's bill mercilessly. They were riding high on a massive wave of isolationist feeling whipped by the failure of collective security in Europe, and by new revelations of the indefatigable Nye at home. Led by Nye, Johnson & Co., the isolationists forced Roosevelt and Hull to accept an extension of the 1935 act, with some changes. Lacking guidelines from the administration, the internationalists stood by helplessly.

As Americans huddled in their storm cellars, dictators turned to the sword.

At dawn on March 7, 1936, advance units of the German army thrust into the Rhineland. In Berlin a few hours later Hitler addressed cheering members of the Reichstag, while foreign diplomats looked on in stony silence. His troops had moved, the Fuehrer announced, but Germany wanted peace. He proposed a twenty-five-year nonaggression pact with France; reciprocal demilitarization of the frontier (*i.e.*, scrapping of France's famed Maginot Line); and bilateral nonaggression pacts with Germany's eastern neighbors (but not with Soviet Russia). For ninety minutes he shouted and beseeched; then, surrounded by hundreds of armed men, he strode out of the hall.

France hesitated, and was lost. Later it became known that some of Hitler's generals had opposed the move, and that Hitler's troops would have turned back had France resisted. But the Quai d'Orsay did not dare act alone, and Downing Street equivocated. Other nations only fumed and sputtered. The League declared Germany guilty of breaching the Versailles and Locarno treaties. Roosevelt and Hull privately took a grave view of the step. But no one acted.

Throughout Roosevelt's first term Japanese soldiers, merchants, and bureaucrats were consolidating positions on the Asiatic mainland. Like a great musty fruit lying in the sun, China was decomposing on its exposed edges. In 1933 Jehol was annexed to Manchukuo, in 1935 Japanese troops seized Chahar, in 1936 they penetrated Suiyuan. Having shaken off the old naval treaties, Tokyo was now building up its fleet. Ominous as these events seemed to Roosevelt and Hull, even more fateful was the merciless struggle in Japan of militarist extremists against the moderates.

Only a month after taking office Roosevelt had written House that he wondered if a Japanese diplomat's criticism of the President's decision to keep the fleet in the Pacific had stemmed from a desire to "ingratiate himself against assassination by the Junker crowd when he gets home." The remark was prophetic. On a night late in February 1936, Ambassador Joseph Grew in Tokyo was showing the film *Naughty Marietta* to former Premier Saito and Grand Chamberlain Suzuki; a few hours later Saito was shot dead and Suzuki wounded. The insurgents were rounded up and executed but Japanese politicians had a frightening glimpse of the explosive forces breaking through the surface.

Tension was mounting in Europe. In July 1936, an Italian bomber squadron was alerted for duty in Spain. A few days later General Francisco Franco took command of revolting Moors and Foreign Legionnaires in Spanish Morocco. People's militia put down army uprisings in Madrid and other centers, but the revolt gained momentum in the north and south. Iberia quickly became a European battleground, with Italy and Germany taking the initiative. Italian troops and airmen, Nazi agents and technicians poured into rebel territory by the thousands. Within a few weeks Rome and Berlin simultaneously recognized Franco as Spain's ruler.

"What an unfortunate and terrible catastrophe in Spain!" Roosevelt wrote Ambassador Claude Bowers. But United States neutrality, he added, would be "complete." Britain and France forbade their citizens to sell arms to the Spanish government; Hull put a moral embargo on American exports, although the Neutrality Act did not apply to civil war. Italy and Germany agreed not to intervene, and kept on intervening.

In the fall of 1936 Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Axis could now forge strategic plans of united action. The democracies, divided and irresolute, were hamstrung by isolationists and appeasers in strategic positions. The West was still floundering.

## THE POLITICIAN AS FOREIGN POLICY MAKER

The record is clear. As a foreign policy maker, Roosevelt during his first term was more pussyfooting politician than political leader. He seemed to float almost helplessly on the flood tide of isolationism, rather than to seek to change both the popular attitudes and the apathy that buttressed the isolationists' strength.

He hoped that people would be educated by events; the error of this policy was that the dire events in Europe and Asia confirmed the American suspicion and fear of foreign involvement rather than prodding them into awareness of the need for collective action by the democracies. In short, a decisive act of interpretation was required, but Roosevelt did not interpret. At a minimum he might have avoided the isolationist line about keeping clear of joint action with other nations. Yet at a crucial moment—when he approved the Neutrality Act shortly before Italy's attack on Ethiopia—he talked about co-operating with other nations "without entanglement."

The awful implications of this policy of drift would become clear later on when Roosevelt sought to regain control of foreign policy making at home as the forces of aggression mounted abroad. But the immediate question is: Why did Roosevelt allow himself to be virtually immobilized by isolationist feeling? Why did he not, through words or action, seek to change popular attitudes and thus rechannel the pressures working on him?

The enigma deepens when Roosevelt's private views are considered. In his private role he was an internationalist. He believed, that is, in the proposition that America's security lay essentially in removing the economic and social causes of war and, if war threatened, in uniting the democracies, America included, against aggressive nations. But in his public role he talked about keeping America disentangled from the political affairs of other nations; he often talked, in short, like an isolationist.

The mystery deepens still further when one considers that the President had emphatic, though perhaps ill-defined, ideas about the need for leadership in a democracy. He must have recognized the potential in leadership when, in addressing the Woodrow Wilson Foundation at the end of 1933, he asserted roundly that the "blame for the danger to world peace lies not in the world population but in the political leaders of the population." At the same time he was concerned about the perennially weak leadership that the politicians gave France. He was perhaps aware, too, that simply following a line of policy lying at the mean between two extremes would not necessarily lead to the wisest course. In the case of Ethiopia, for

instance, the British and French through their indecisive maneuverings succeeded neither in keeping Mussolini out of Germany's orbit nor in vindicating the ideals of collective security. Washington's foreign policies were equally muddled.

The reasons for the sharp divergence between Roosevelt's private and public roles in foreign policy making were several. In the first place, the President's party was cleft through the middle on international issues. The internationalist wing centered in the southern and border states was balanced by isolationists rooted in the West and Midwest. To win the nomination Roosevelt had given hostages to both groups. Part of the price of success in 1932 had been categorical opposition to United States co-operation with the collective security efforts of the League, and a cautious policy of neutrality based on nonentanglement. In the second place, Roosevelt in his campaign had so ignored foreign policy, or fuzzed the issue over when he did touch on it, that he had failed to establish popular attitudes on foreign policy that he could later evoke in support of internationalism. Moreover, during his first term the President gave first priority to domestic policies; a strong line on foreign affairs might have alienated the large number of isolationist congressmen who were supporting the New Deal. Indeed, many isolationists seemed to believe that any marked interest in foreign affairs by the President was virtually a betrayal of progressivism.

In addition, the President had surrounded himself with men from both sides. Men like Hull and Howe and Morgenthau were generally on the international end of the spectrum, but others like Moley and Hopkins and Hugh Johnson and Ickes were at the opposite end. Ickes had been so pleased by the Senate action on the World Court that he had telephoned and congratulated Hiram Johnson, whom he found "as happy as a boy." The development of the New Deal's policies of economic nationalism, tinged with the rhetoric of international good will and economic co-operation, resulted from and reinforced this division.

But the main reason for Roosevelt's caution involved the future rather than the past. The election of 1936 was approaching, and at this point he was not willing to take needless risks. It was significant that after he and Mackenzie King had signed a trade agreement in Washington—and a rather moderate one at that—Roosevelt wrote to King in April 1936 that "in a sense, we both took our political lives in our hands. . . ." The immediate goal of re-election was the supreme goal; the tasks of leadership, he hoped, could be picked up later.