

Why 'Europe First'?

The Cultural, Economic and Ideological Underpinnings of America's 'Europe First' Strategy, 1940-1941

*"That those threats to the American way of life and to the interests of the United States in Europe, Latin America and the Far East – against which threats the huge new defence program of this country is directed – all stem, in the last analysis from the power of Nazi Germany."*¹

*"The Atlantic world, unless it destroys itself, will remain infinitely superior in vigor and inventive power to the too prolific and not too well-nourished Orientals."*²

*"Since Germany is the predominant member of the Axis Powers, the Atlantic and European area is considered to be the decisive theatre. The principal United States Military effort will be exerted in that theatre."*³

Nearly seventy years have passed since the Roosevelt administration tacitly accepted the 'Europe First' policy as the controlling element of American grand strategy in the Second World War. Three generations of historians have traced the genesis and evolution of "the most important strategic concept of the war".⁴ Most of the scholarship centres on how the official documents and reports shaped American strategic policy. We know that American war planning began before the US was actively engaged in battle and that the Navy had a prominent voice in matters of strategy. We know that President Franklin D. Roosevelt stayed aloof from the hypothetical discussions of his military

¹ Resolution of the Miller Group at the Century Club in New York City on 11 July 1940. As quoted in Walter Johnson, *The Battle Against Isolation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp. 247.

² Harold Callender, "Two Oceans, Two Worlds," *New York Times*, 6 Oct 1940.

³ United States-British Staff Conversations Report, (ABC-1), reprinted in U.S. Congress, *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigations of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79th Congress, 1st session, (Washington, 1946), pp. 1492.

⁴ Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*, (Washington: US GPO 1950), pp. 11. The US Army official history series set the narrative for most historians. The official historians' aim in writing these accounts was "not to defend the decisions, but to record them, to present the reasons for making them, and to recite the developments apparently traceable to them." See for instance Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*, pp. 85-125; Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in *Command Decisions*, ed., Kent Robert Greenfield, (Washington, US GPO 1960), pp. 11-47 and Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume I*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1947), pp. 40-49. For a biographical account that also delves into the 'Europe First' matter see B. Mitchell Simpson, *Admiral Harold R. Stark: Architect of Victory, 1939-1945*. Columbia: South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 62-82 and George C. Dyer, *The Amphibians Came to Conquer: The Story of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner*. (Washington: US GPO, 1968), pp. 152-165. For an account that sees the 'Europe First' strategy as part of an American plan to become the preeminent power in the North Atlantic community see James R. Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937-1941*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 162-266. Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), pp. 67-156. After looking at course material and curricula from the Army War College (AWC) archives, Gole states the 'Europe First' policy "was the professional opinion of the American soldiers in 1937...It would not change." pp. 77. For a brief outline of the 'Europe-First' concept, see also, Grace Person Hayes, *History of the JCS in World War II: The War Against Japan*, (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1953), pp. 5-16.

advisors and avoided official endorsement of their contingency plans.⁵ In general, historians have done an admirable job of examining *how* the 'Europe First' policy came into being, but they have not really explained *why* Europe and the Atlantic eclipsed the Far East and the Pacific as the decisive theatre for American strategists.

Scholars leave one fundamental question largely unanswered – why 'Europe First'?⁶ This paper investigates the economic and intellectual milieu in which American policymakers drafted the 'Europe First' strategy. It aims to introduce a host of non-governmental sources to cast light on this complex strategic decision. Policymaking does not occur in a vacuum. The notion that political officials and soldiers can transcend the spirit of their age and render themselves immune to the impulses of their cultural and business environment is most improbable. Rather, the perceptions of leaders and institutions are shaped by rapid changes abroad and the concomitant responses of powerful voices at home.⁷ Historian Steven Casey argues that Roosevelt kept his ear attuned to the hum of what Americans said and thought about the war.⁸ Consequently, to develop a better understanding of the 'Europe First' strategy, this paper will incorporate a body of official and non-official speeches, Congressional testimony, important public pronouncements, and contemporary articles from academe and the press. The period under consideration – May 1940 to May 1941 – constitutes the year in which American officers created, shaped and integrated the 'Europe First' strategy into official US doctrine. It is clear that most civilians in President Roosevelt's administration, academics, politicians, journalists, and military officers viewed Hitler's Germany as the preeminent threat to the ideological and economic integrity of the United States. In December 1941, President Roosevelt declared that, in the event of a German victory, "all of us in the Americas would be living at the point of gun – a gun loaded with explosive bullets, economic as well as military."⁹ Japan, embroiled in a costly war of attrition on the Chinese mainland since July 1937, presented a challenge to American interests in the Far East but

⁵ Robert E. Sherwood maintains that President Roosevelt refused official sanction of the military's policy papers lest he face impeachment for breaching the legal boundaries of the American constitution. He understood that any binding agreements or secret treaties concluded with other powers might be grounds for his removal from office. Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), pp. 274. See also Mark M. Lowenthal, "Roosevelt and the Coming of the War: The Search for United States Policy, 1937-42," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, (1981), pp. 414.

⁶ Samuel Eliot Morison offered the most concrete answer when he wrote that "it was rightly feared that if the war in the West were unduly prolonged, German scientists would invent secret weapons that would prove irresistible...There was no time to lose in eliminating German science from the war. There was no comparable peril from Japanese science." See Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume I*, pp. 47.

⁷ On the importance of recognizing culture and ideology in the history of American foreign policy see, for example, Akira Iriye, "Culture and International History," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, pp. 241-256; Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Robert Kelley, "Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon," *American Historical Review* 82 (June 1977), pp. 531-562; Walter L. Hixson, "Leffler Takes a Linguistic Turn," *Diplomatic History* 29 (2005), pp. 419-21.

⁸ Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 215. Moreover, Casey demonstrates that "the president also recognized that he could not pursue a particular course in the face of deep-seated and overwhelming popular opposition from across the political spectrum, especially when it was a highly salient issue, such as planning Germany's defeat..." pp. 219.

⁹ Fireside Chat on National Security, 29 December 1940, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: 1940 Volume* (hereafter cited as *PPA 1940*), pp. 635.

nothing on the scale of that posed by her Axis allies in Europe. The evidence is clear that many influential policymakers, diplomats, business leaders and academics saw it that way. What made Germany so dangerous for so many was not the prospect of the United States being invaded, occupied and destroyed by the *Wehrmacht*. It was, rather, an odious form of socio-economic totalitarianism, one inimical to American interests and ideals that made Hitler the preeminent threat to the safety and security of the United States.

This paper will unfold in three main parts. First, a brief introduction to the evolution of America's 'Europe First' strategy will precede a discussion of the widened conception of 'national security' in the early 1940s. Second, I will illustrate the economic rationale behind a 'Europe First' policy. Lastly, I will analyze the ideological and cultural arguments for a focus on Europe. In sum, this interpretation of the 'Europe First' strategy suggests that concrete economic interests and intangible ideological and cultural drivers pushed the United States to plan for the concentration of her moral and material energies in the Atlantic theatre. This paper does not profess to be the final word on American motives for a 'Europe First' policy. It merely aims to highlight certain influences that informed the American decision to set a first priority on defeating Germany in a war that seemed inevitable.

'Europe First' required that the American military conduct offensive operations across the Atlantic towards Germany before making any serious efforts to tackle Japanese aggression in the Far East. Roosevelt and his top defence advisors saw the defeat of Germany, in collaboration with the British, as a prerequisite for the final defeat of the Axis powers. Here it is necessary to paint, in broad strokes, the development of this policy as recorded in important documents and the existing literature.

Admiral Harold R. Stark, US Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), was the strategic author of the American 'Europe First' policy.¹⁰ Stark's 12 November 1940 "Memorandum on National Policy" summed up the predicament of the United States should it find itself in a two-front war: "if Britain wins decisively against Germany we could win everywhere; but if she loses...while we might not lose everywhere, we might, possibly, not win anywhere."¹¹ Should the United States enter the war as an active belligerent, Stark recommended that "we direct our efforts toward an eventual strong offensive in the Atlantic as an ally of the British and a defensive in the Pacific...the full national offensive would be exerted in a single direction, rather than be expended in areas far distant from each other."¹² In the opinion of one

¹⁰ There is evidence to suggest Stark is not the sole author. Of particular interest is a footnote in Mark S. Watson's *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* that states "The impulse for 'Plan Dog' probably came from Naval War College discussions of April 1940, for when Captain Turner came from that institution to Washington to head the Navy WPD, on 25 October, he brought with him the April studies and the conclusions to which they led – notably that in a two-ocean war priority should be given to the defeat of Germany which would end the threats to Western Hemisphere security; that aid to democracies would hasten defeat; and that action against a belligerent Japan should be initially defensive.," pp. 118. This author's appeals to the US Naval War College Archives brought nothing. The official archivist could not locate Captain Turner's aforementioned 'April studies.'

¹¹ Memo, Stark for Secretary of the Navy, 12 Nov 40, pp. 1, accessed from <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box4/a48b01.html> on 16 December 2009. In fact, while he prepared a rough draft of this memo, Stark also gave a public warning about the dangers facing the nation. On 27 October, 'Navy Day,' Stark addressed the country over radio saying, "It has become evident to us all that the United States Navy might be confronted with problems at sea beyond the scope of our previous conceptions; and that we might, quite possibly, have to face those problems alone. I violate no confidence when I tell you, we must consider the possibility of simultaneous attacks in either or both oceans," see "Navy Chief Warns We Must Be Ready," *New York Times*, 28 Oct 1940.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24. In a rejoinder to Stark's November memorandum, Joseph Mason Reeves, an advisor in the Office of the Secretary of the Navy, agreed with the treatise and its general conclusions adding, "I do not think that Hong Kong, India and British Possessions in the Far East in any way compare in importance to holding those vital areas in Europe...If victory in the Atlantic and Europe is insured," continued Reeves, "then we are secure both in the Atlantic and Pacific. If victory in Europe is only partial, or if it should be a reverse, we are still in an

prominent historian, Stark's paper "constitutes perhaps the most important single document in the development of World War II strategy."¹³ The CNO's "most comprehensive analysis" also gave expression to the thoughts of General George C. Marshall and his colleagues in the US Army.¹⁴

Stark's lucid appreciation of American strategic policy, subsequently known as the 'Plan Dog' memo, established a common strategic foundation for American officers in their staff conversations with the British two months later. Secret staff conversations in Washington, initiated at the behest of Stark, ran from 29 January to 27 March 1941 "to determine the best methods by which the armed forces of the United States and the British Commonwealth...could defeat Germany and the Powers allied with her, should the United States be compelled to resort to war."¹⁵ Their final report (ABC-1) echoed Stark's recommendations. "Since Germany is the predominant member of the Axis Powers," the report stated, "the Atlantic and European area is considered to be the decisive theatre...If Japan does enter the war, the military strategy in the Far East will be defensive."¹⁶ US military officers guarded the carefully worded proposals laid out in the ABC-1 report. The American military reprinted, word-for-word, the general strategic concept agreed to at the secret US-British staff conference in the US Navy War Plan RAINBOW-5 as a "general assumption."¹⁷ One British officer privy to subsequent discussions in Washington that summer characterized ABC-1 as the American "bible," since they "object to any proposal which they consider to be in conflict with that document."¹⁸ On 5 May 1941, Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, approved the RAINBOW-5 war plan and on 4 June Secretary of War, Henry Stimson followed suit. Thus, from Admiral Stark's 'Plan Dog' memo, through the ABC-1 report, and on to RAINBOW-5, 'Europe First' became a cardinal feature of American wartime policy and a unifying element in the United State's relationship with Great Britain.¹⁹ As the following pages show, a multitude

advantageous position to defend the Americas." See Memorandum for Admiral Stark, 6 Nov 40, accessed from, <<http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box4/a46j01.html>> on 16 December 2009.

¹³ Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," pp. 35.

¹⁴ While a 'Europe First' orientation was a surprising turn for American naval thinking, army strategists had long been thinking in terms of Europe and the Atlantic. Since 1937, students at the USAWC understood that "Concentration of allied military force against the enemy center of gravity, Germany, was the best means of attaining victory in the world war." A Joint Planning Committee Exploratory Study undertaken in April 1939 wrote that "In the event of such a concerted aggression there can be no doubt that the vital interests of the United States would require offensive measures in the Atlantic against Germany and Italy to preserve the vital security of the Caribbean and the Panama Canal. If this is done it will be necessary to assume a defensive attitude in the Eastern Pacific...If the United States on the other hand should decide to undertake offensive operations by a Western Pacific advance, she must take due cognizance at all times of the situation and its potentialities in the Western Atlantic in regard to German and Italian activities..." On 17 June 1940, as German armies raced through France, Gen. George C. Marshall chaired a staff conference in which he posed the question – "Are we not forced into a question of reframing our naval policy, that is [into] purely defensive action in the Pacific with a main effort on the Atlantic side?" See Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940*, pp. 77, and Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*, pp. 98-108.

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigations of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79th Congress, 1st session, (Washington: GPO, 1946), pp. 1487. The American representatives at the conference included Major-General S.D. Embick, Brigadier-General Sherman Miles, Brigadier-General L.T. Gerow, Colonel J.T. McNarney, Rear-Admiral R.L. Ghormley, Rear-Admiral R.K. Turner, Captain A.G. Kirk, Captain DeWitt C. Ramsey and Lt.-Colonel O.T. Pfeiffer.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1493.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 957-958.

¹⁸ Admiralty to B.A.D. Washington, 23 Aug 41, RG 24, vol. 5181, file no. 15-9-6, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

¹⁹ Also noteworthy is a "Brief of Strategic Concept of Operations Required to Defeat Our Potential Enemies," prepared by the Army G-1, G-2 and G-3 in July 1941 which stated "the principle theatre of operations is

of ideological and economic impressions about the Nazi threat made anything other than a 'Europe First' policy utterly improbable from a national security point of view.

Evolving conceptions of national security encompassed more than the physical defence of the American homeland. Contemporaries conceived of security in economic and ideological terms – it was not the sole purview of military men. Indeed, John A. Thompson suggests that Roosevelt's hesitant moves towards war with the Axis cannot be explained by American anxiety over a military attack.²⁰ Instead, Thompson maintains that a growing realization of America's vast potential power to defend freedom, democracy and international liberalism propelled the Roosevelt administration into war. Thompson's thesis is reflected in the thinking of Edward Mead Earle, a military and foreign affairs specialist with the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study. At a conference in New York's Astor Hotel on 13 November 1940, Earle argued that defense required more "than mere sitting back and waiting until the enemy is at one's gate."²¹ Making his case for the aggressive use of American economic, diplomatic and military power "beyond our mere territorial possessions," Earle broadened the contemporary understandings of national security at the very moment when Admiral Stark penned his now-infamous 'Plan Dog' memo. In fact, Stark incorporated a similar conception of America's national security interests, writing, "As I see it, our major national objectives in the immediate future might be stated as preservation of the territorial, economic, and ideological integrity of the United States."²² Furthermore, Stark recognized the direct link between foreign trade, economic welfare, and the ability of the United States to acquire diplomatic advantage and develop military capabilities.²³ Any attempt to explain the 'Europe First' policy should take into consideration the expanded definition of national security, which encompassed more than the physical integrity of the United States.

There was a broad consensus among academics, government officials, bankers, businessmen, and farmers that Nazi Germany presented a formidable threat to the economic stability of the United States in a way that Japan simply did not.²⁴ First, Germany's occupation of Western Europe significantly reduced the volume of trade flowing between European and American ports. Second, the loss of lucrative European markets for agricultural exports put American farmers in a difficult position. Third, Germany's economic forays into Latin America encouraged perceptions of a Nazi threat to the Western Hemisphere. And last, Germany's brand of fascism spawned a economic system incompatible with American interests and values.

Figures released by the Commerce Department in November 1940 illustrate the painful consequences of the German conquest of much of Western Europe. In September 1939, American

Europe...the defeat of our potential enemies is primarily dependent on the defeat of Germany," Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*, pp. 353.

²⁰ John A. Thompson, "Conceptions of National Security and American Entry into World War II," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 16, (2005), pp. 685.

²¹ Edward Mead Earle, "Political and Military Strategy for the United States," (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Political Science), reprinted in *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, vol. 19, (Jan 1941), pp. 3.

²² Memo, Stark for Secretary of the Navy, 12 Nov 40, pp. 3, accessed from <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box4/a48b01.html> on 16 December 2009.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19.

²⁴ My conceptual framework for this section draws heavily from discussions on 'economic security.' For a concise introduction see, Michael Sheehan, *International Security: An Analytical Survey*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), pp. 65-81, and Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework For Analysis*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), pp. 95-117.

exports to Europe outnumbered, threefold, her exports to Asia.²⁵ By late-September 1940, 90 percent of America's European exports went to one country – Great Britain.²⁶ Imports from Europe to the United States dropped from \$41,532,000 in September 1939 to \$15,762,000 in September 1940. A financial breakdown by country for the month of September illustrates the magnitude of this loss. Imports from Belgium declined from \$4,323,000 to \$374,000; French firms shipped \$3,851,000-worth of exports to the United States in September 1939 but only \$267,000 in September 1940; American imports from the Netherlands collapsed to a mere \$67,000 from \$4,650,000 one year before, and trade with Italy and Germany had all but evaporated. In contrast, American exports to China actually increased from \$2,636,000 in September 1939 to \$3,849,000 in September 1940. Despite admonitions from Julean Arnold, the American commercial attaché in China, that "The Pacific is our natural sphere," the value of American exports to Africa exceeded her exports to the Chinese mainland.²⁷ Consequently, Germany's control over Western Europe and Italy's aggressive policies in the Mediterranean basin canalised American trade to Britain and limited the range of exports primarily to implements of war.²⁸

This dangerous alteration in the flow of American trade to Europe had "perceptible effects upon the internal economy" of the United States.²⁹ The effects of German conquest over the continent were most profound on "America's greatest industry" - farming. Thirty-two million Americans, or 24 percent of the population, lived on farms in 1940.³⁰ The closing of European markets hammered cotton farmers in the Deep South, disrupted grain producers in the Midwest and strangled apple growers in New England. Surpluses swelled warehouses and resulted in a sudden decline in prices.³¹ Capital, frightened by the risks of war and the prospects of government intervention, stayed clear of the domestic farm industry.³² In late February 1941, as American and British officers wrangled over the details of the ABC-1 report, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) released figures showing a precipitous decline in the export of certain products overseas. American tobacco growers lost the lucrative European export market that normally took 250 million pounds of the crop annually.³³ Similarly, cotton exports to

²⁵ Associated Press, "U.S. Exports Off 55 Million In September," *Washington Post*, 1 Nov 1940. In 1939, European countries bought \$120,825,000-worth of American exports while all the Asian countries, principally Japan, bought \$43,970,000.

²⁶ "U.S. Trade Picture is Redrawn by War," *New York Times*, 20 Oct 1940.

²⁷ "U.S. War Interests Seen in Far East," *New York Times*, 20 Oct 1940.

²⁸ "Lost Markets," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 Oct 1940. The editorialist, fulminating at the mythological link between war and prosperity asks, "Does the increase in British purchases offset losses elsewhere? No. England has been compelled to purchase huge quantities of engines of destruction, airplanes and bombs, cannon and shells, rifles and bullets. None of these pays for themselves by creation of new wealth nor do they raise anybody's standard of living. Their sole purpose is destruction of accumulated wealth and the fruits of past labour."

²⁹ Harold Callender, "America's Trade Set-Up Transformed By War," *New York Times*, 9 Feb 1941.

³⁰ "Census of Population, 1940," Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, (1941), pp. 8. Retrieved from, <<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1941-02.pdf>> on 12 April 2010.

³¹ "Roaring Chicago Grain Pit Choked by War Changes," *The Washington Post*, 6 Oct 1940; "War Hits Apple Trade Here," *New York Times*, 8 Sept 1940; Wholesale Prices of Coffee and Sugar Skid to New Lows as War Piles Up U.S. Surpluses, *The Washington Post*, 2 Aug 1940. According to the Associated Press, sugar traded at .85 cents per pound in autumn 1940 and 2.25 cents one year previous; the price of coffee hovered around 5.41 cents per pound in September 1940 instead of the 6-7 cents of 1939. Altogether, in September 1940, coffee exporters held an excess of 10 million bags of beans normally destined for European markets.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Luther Huston, "Markets For Farmers Now A Major Concern," *New York Times*, 23 Feb 1940. According to the Guaranty Trust Company of New York, the British, in an effort to woo Turkey away from the Axis orbit, dropped imports of Georgian, Virginian and Carolinian tobacco for the Turkish crop. This diplomatic manoeuvre simply added to the grievous loss of America's former continental markets.

Europe, which totalled 6 million bales in 1939, dropped to 1.5 million bales after the 1940 harvest.³⁴ American wheat exports to Europe, which in 1938-39 totalled 100 million bushels, amounted to 20 million bushels in 1940-41. In addition, Hitler's territorial acquisitions and the British blockade closed the market for 10 million bushels of apples, 3 million boxes of oranges, and 75 million pounds of pork.³⁵ According to Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard, the farming difficulties created "societal implications that are simply tremendous."³⁶ An estimated 7-8 million people were involved in an industry without viable markets, living "on a bare subsistence level under conditions that exhaust the resources of the soil and debase human standards of living."³⁷ A July 1940 report produced by the Guaranty Trust Company, an investment bank in New York, stated, "The countries that have been stricken from the list of probable buyers in the last four months normally represent, in the aggregate, a huge market for the products of our farms."³⁸ It continued, "Nothing has yet appeared to offer a promise of even approximate compensation for this prospective loss...On the basis of present realities, it seems likely that the trend of foreign trade will be even less favourable than that reported thus far during the war period."³⁹

A US Department of Agriculture (USDA) paper echoed the gloomy predictions of the private sector. In December 1940, the USDA's foreign trade authorities outlined the dire consequences of a German victory in the war. The report stated that from 1909 to 1913 Germany took about one-fifth of US farm exports; but by 1938, that proportion had dropped to only four percent. The USDA projected, not unreasonably, that policies already at work in Germany before the war would extend to territories under Nazi control. The USDA report stated, "There is no good reason to expect that our farm export trade would fare better in a Nazi-dominated Europe than it did in Nazi Germany."⁴⁰ Moreover, even if Great Britain survived and established some *modus vivendi* with the Axis powers, the report forecast that a drastic collapse in the standard of living and domestic population would impair the ability of British consumers to pay for American crops. Squeezed out the European markets by a German authority dependent on alternative sources of supply, the USDA projected a frightening image of the future for American export farmers. Similarly, in an address to the National Farm Institute in February 1941, Vice President Henry A. Wallace warned that "triumphant naziism (sic) will undoubtedly channel all purchases of food for Europe through corporations following a single price policy...It will be a buyers market and the terms of buying will be set by the Nazis."⁴¹ Wallace stated that a healthy resumption of agricultural trade with European markets depended on Hitler's defeat.

Hitler placed American farmers in an intolerable position. Only the prospect of a British victory offered some hope that an international trading regime based on liberal impulses might return. In essence, the USDA expressed the convictions of Admiral Stark and his colleagues when it stated in its December report that a British victory over the Axis in Europe, "would, so far as our farm exports are concerned, be the least painful of all possible outcomes of the war."⁴² Overall, America's 'Europe First' strategy evolved during a period of intense uncertainty over the future of American farm exports. The exigencies presented by Germany's control over Western European markets created a palpable sense of

³⁴ "Cotton Export Subsidy May Be Raised in Move to Stimulate Demand," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 Aug 1940.

³⁵ "Markets For Farmers Now A Major Concern," *New York Times*, 23 Feb 1940.

³⁶ As quoted in *ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Quoted in "Business to Feel Farm-Export Drop," *New York Times*, 22 Jul 1940.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Report quoted in Ovid Martin, "U.S. Farmer Worries About Markets at War's Close," *The Washington Post*, 8 Dec 1940.

⁴¹ Quoted in, Winthrop Lyman, "Wallace Sees Economic Ruin if Nazis Win," *The Washington Post*, 23 Feb 1941.

⁴² Quoted in Ovid Martin, "U.S. Farmer Worries About Markets at War's Close," *The Washington Post*, 8 Dec 1940.

dread amongst farmers struggling to offload crop surpluses. The 'Europe First' decision must be situated within the context of America's growing agricultural anxiety.

Closely linked to fears over the loss of European export markets was the related prospect of Germany's economic penetration of a prostrate Latin America. David G. Haglund argues, "It is impossible to understand why the United States abandoned its policy of noninvolvement in European political and military affairs and entered into a *de facto* alliance with Great Britain during the late summer of 1940 without taking into account the important role that Latin America occupied in the international strategic calculations of policymakers in Washington."⁴³ Similarly, it is impossible to understand the 'Europe First' strategy without reference to the American anxiety over the perceived Nazi menace to the economic and political integrity of the Latin American Republics. On 2 July 1940, Sherman Miles, the assistant chief of staff for the Military Intelligence Division and a participant in the US-British staff talks in 1941, drafted a report for Marshall outlining the political and economic vulnerabilities of Latin America. "The regimes in all the Latin American republics are unstable and tend to be authoritarian," wrote Miles. "They have more in common with fascism than democracy...All of them, but particularly Argentina and Uruguay, are susceptible to the kind of economic pressure that Germany can generate. All of them have traditions of revolution and in all of them there are factions which would welcome Axis aid to seize and, in some cases, to retain power."⁴⁴ Dr. Fernando de los Rios, a professor in New York's 'New School for Social Research,' provided information similar to that found in Miles' intelligence report. According to Rios, by 1940 an estimated 1.2-1.3 million Germans lived in "Ibero-America."⁴⁵ In explaining the role of Germany's sizable émigré communities in Latin America, Rios suggested: "They are advanced guards, called upon to spread the new gospel, the new ideal, instruments for the sale and consumption of German products, organs of infiltration, vigilance and information...They constitute the point of support when the decisive hour, the military hour, arrives."⁴⁶ These assessments of the German peril in Latin America surfaced as Hitler consolidated his control over Western Europe and American officers nurtured the 'Europe First' strategy. At the very least, it suggests that the perceived need to block the spread of Nazi power to the southern half of the Western Hemisphere conditioned American policymakers to view Germany as the preeminent threat.

American political figures led a public chorus warning of the impending Nazi pressures in Latin America. In an address at the University of Pennsylvania on 18 September 1940, Herbert Hoover warned that if Germany triumphed in Europe, Latin American trade could reorient itself towards a totalitarian bloc. "Our South American cousins cannot live unless they sell their agricultural surpluses into the totalitarian areas," claimed Hoover, "We produce a surplus of many of the same commodities,

⁴³ David G. Haglund, *Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), pp. 1.

⁴⁴ As quoted in David G. Haglund, *Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940*, pp. 215.

⁴⁵ "According to the best available data," Rios reported that 800,000 Germans lived in Brazil, 250,000 in Argentina, 40,000 in Chile, 15,000 in Venezuela, and 6,000 in Ecuador. Moreover, Argentina contained 203 German-language schools, 301 German societies, and 43,725 Argentinean members of the Nazi party. By 1940, German émigrés built 2,010 schools on Brazilian soil and founded 2,299 German societies and social organizations. See, Fernando de los Rios, "Nazi Infiltration in Ibero-America," *Social Research*, 7:1/4 (1940), pp. 391-392. In contrast, Brazil, the largest recipient of Japanese migrants in Latin America, contained at the very most, 75,000 people of Japanese descent. Peru, another favourite destination for Japanese immigrants, had only 30,000 on the eve of the Second World War. Compared to the German numbers then, these are slight. See Donald Hastings, "Japanese Immigration and Assimilation in Brazil," *International Migration Review*, 3, (Spring 1969), pp. 36 and Ayumi Takenaka, "The Japanese of Peru: History of Immigration, Settlement and Racialization," *Latin American Perspectives*, 31, (May 2004), pp. 92

⁴⁶ Fernando de los Rios, "Nazi Infiltration in Ibero-America," pp. 394.

and they will buy totalitarian manufactured goods in return. Any other expectation is a sheer illusion.”⁴⁷ Roosevelt’s Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, echoed Hoover’s anxieties in a speech to the New York University School of Law on 30 January 1941. Welles surmised that Germany’s economic infiltration of Latin America would presage fascist political subversion and perhaps military occupation.

Some of the greatest of the South American nations depend almost entirely upon Europe for their export trade...Under the German barter system, the Axis powers would inevitably attempt to impose a commercial and financial strangle hold upon these neighbours of ours, and would at the same time undertake that same policy of political infiltration as a result of commercial concessions which had been carried out in so many instances in their dealings with the smaller nations of Europe.⁴⁸

Vice-President Henry A. Wallace conveyed the same idea in his final report as Secretary of Agriculture. Wallace discounted the immediate danger of direct German military action in Latin America and instead pointed to “the danger of economic pressure.”⁴⁹ “A huge Germanic corporation might control the purchase of all the exports of agricultural products from the New World to Europe.” That could lead to the “heavy movements toward this hemisphere of goods, capital and of population, along with propaganda, controlled news and [German] political ideas.”⁵⁰ The day after Secretary Wallace released his report, Secretary Knox, in a speech to the Canadian Society of New York, said that German “Economic conquest of South America...would speedily and unquestionably be followed by political infiltration, and somewhere in the vast regions of the south, Germany would soon find a base from which she could operate a new terror.”⁵¹ Knox warned the audience that “all this is not a figment of the imagination,” but rather, “a blunt forecast of what could happen to us if the Axis powers conquered the world.”⁵²

American businessmen shared the suspicions of their political leaders and expressed their consternation over a wide range of German threats to Latin America. At a luncheon meeting of the Export Managers Club of New York, A.W. Zelomek, an economist with the International Statistics Bureau, warned that Germany’s master plan for the Western Hemisphere involved trading manufactured goods for raw materials and making the weaker countries of South America dependent on Nazi goodwill.⁵³ Real estate mogul and former American diplomat John Cudahy, fresh from his post as Ambassador to Belgium, spoke of Nazi ambitions in the Western Hemisphere. Cudahy “was told by experts of the Reich,” that “South America has a growing need for the chemicals, electro-technical machinery, glass, porcelain, etc., that Germany can turn out so well.” Furthermore, Cudahy anticipated the start of German infrastructure developments in Latin America. “As these demands of the South American continent expand,” wrote Cudahy, “German engineers with German equipment will dig tunnels, level inclinations and lay out roads and routes of transport, while German machinery will be

⁴⁷ Herbert Hoover, “Free Men are the Only Basis for Prosperity and Progress,” (Delivered at the Bicentennial Celebration of the University of Pennsylvania on the subject of ‘Post-War Economic Problems,’ Philadelphia, September 18, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1940), pp. 94.

⁴⁸ Sumner Welles, “Their Victory is Our Security,” (Delivered at the Annual Dinner of the Alumni Association of the New York University School of Law, New York, January 30, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 9 (1941), pp. 270-271.

⁴⁹ Quoted in, “Wallace Warns of Peril to Trade if Totalitarianism is Triumphant,” *New York Times*, 18 Jan 1941.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Quoted in, “U.S. United in Hate of Axis, Says Knox,” *New York Times*, 19 Jan 1941.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ “Predict Disruption of Post-War Trade,” *New York Times*, 5 Mar 1941.

installed in South America's growing industrial plant."⁵⁴ It is important to note this threat emanated from Germany and not Japan. At the fourth Pan-American conference at George Washington University on 13 January 1941, William C. Johnstone, dean of the junior college at George Washington and an authority on Japanese affairs, "offered statistics to show that Japanese trade competition in South and Central America has been overemphasized."⁵⁵ He explained that Japan's share of the global trade with territories "south of the Rio Grande" amounted to 3.7 percent and her imports only 2 percent. American policymakers, academics and business leaders harboured visions of German agents labouring to undermine the basis of American economic and political supremacy in Latin America. A long German respite would allow Hitler time to tighten his grip over Europe and usurp South American trade from American firms. Economic penetration of the Latin Republics would be the first step in Germany's quest to dominate, politically and militarily, the southern half of the Western Hemisphere. These public speeches and reports emerged while Admiral Stark drafted 'Plan Dog' and British and American officers gathered in Washington for secret staff conversations. The public and private depictions of German activities and ambitions in Latin America were contemporaneous with the development of the 'Europe First' strategy.

Most important for explaining the 'Europe First' strategy on an economic basis is the dominant perception of Germany's alternative economic philosophy – a system of economic organization contrary to American interests and traditions. In fact, according to a poll from the American Institute of Public Opinion, Americans were more concerned about the economic consequences of a Nazi victory than they were about the military or ideological aspects.⁵⁶ American understanding of Germany's plan for the restructuring of the European economy on foundations built by Berlin was well developed.⁵⁷ In the months following the fall of France, German officials unveiled their vision for the postwar reorganization of the European economy. The basic features of this vision, in outline, consisted of a supranational trading structure centred on Berlin, the reichs-mark as a continental currency, government controlled monopolies, and a system of barter trade agreements implemented through the direction of Nazi officials.⁵⁸ Dr. Harold G. Moulton, President of the Brookings Institute, insisted that Hitler's use of slave labour would impair the ability of American firms to compete with German companies. Addressing his audience in Atlantic City, Moulton said American "markets will be flooded with goods produced at low

⁵⁴ John Cudahy, "Nazis Offer Views on Trade in Future," *New York Times*, 27 Apr 1941.

⁵⁵ "Japan's Trade in Americas Held Overrated," *The Washington Post*, 14 Jan 1941.

⁵⁶ Dr. George Gallup, "The Gallup Poll: 71 Percent Say Nazi Victory Over Britain Would Have Adverse Effects on Their Lives," *The Washington Post*, 25 Jan 1941.

⁵⁷ American perceptions of Japan's vision for an East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, by contrast, were vague and ill defined. A review of the American press reveals little in the way of discussion of Japan's economic policies in East Asia. However, for a good overview of the contemporary public understanding of Japanese policies in the Far East see Frederick V. Field, "The Way to Get Out of a Hole is to Widen It," (Address by the Secretary of the American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations, delivered before the Institute of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, June 24, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1941), pp. 39-42 and Thomas W. Lamont, "The Far Eastern Threat: A Friendly Caution to Japan," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 19 (Jan 1941), pp. 229-236. Lamont, a banker and unofficial diplomat, recognized that Britain's "resistance" and "control of the Atlantic" were "the pivot of American security on both sides of this hemisphere," pp. 231-232.

⁵⁸ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 175; Louis P. Lochner, "Funk Threatens America With Being 'Locked Out' of Europe," *The Washington Post*, 26 Jul 1940; "Schacht Prepares Plan for Post-War Europe," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 Sept 1940; Otto D. Tolschus, "Nazis' New Europe Applied in Sweden," *New York Times*, 13 Jul 1940; Lloyd Lehrbas, "Nazis Transforming Holland into an 'Economic Colony,'" *The Washington Post*, 26 Feb 1941; "Europe Trade Bloc Called Nazis' Aim," *New York Times*, 26 Sept 1940; "Reich Wants Triumph," *New York Times*, 10 Nov 1940; Paul Catz, "Dutch Trade Bars Expected to Stay," *New York Times*, 26 Aug 1940.

cost by sweated labour in dictator countries.”⁵⁹ Hans Staudinger, an economist and former official in the Prussian Ministry of Trade and Industry, argued that “totalitarian barter trade” provided a method for “political conquest by economic means.”⁶⁰ Staudinger spelled out the general principles of National Socialist economic policy. He claimed the barter system was “one of their principal weapons for reducing hard pressed agricultural and raw material countries to political and economic dependency” – a weapon “more effective overseas than bombing planes and submarines.”⁶¹ Louis Domeratzky, Chief of the Commerce Department’s Division of Regional Information, viewed the German barter system as a key tool in the ability of Hitler to exert political leverage over dependent satellite states.⁶² This use of state-controlled markets for diplomatic manipulation and political control challenged American ideals of economic liberalism, which stressed unfettered international markets, entrepreneurial free will, minimal regulations, and governmental non-interference. Conversely, a statist view of the economy was central to American policymakers’ perceptions of Germany’s political vision.

Informed by the policies undertaken in occupied Europe by German officials, a torrent of speeches detailing the moral and material hazards of Nazi economics filled the air just as America’s military men finalized the ‘Europe First’ strategy. Matthew Woll, third vice president of the American Federation of Labor, argued the war “is not one of mere military forces, but one of philosophies.”⁶³ In the same way, Eugene P. Thomas, president of the National Foreign Trade Council, urged Americans not to sacrifice their “democratic philosophy of trade,” which he identified as maintaining an “open door to world markets.”⁶⁴ Thomas suggested that a “Hitlerized Europe” aimed to establish a closed trading bloc detrimental to American interests.⁶⁵ The Chairman of the Catholic Association’s International Law and Organization Committee, Charles G. Fenwick, called German barter agreements “the opening wedge for Nazi propaganda so highly systemized” that it will be impossible to resist.⁶⁶ In a radio address on 18 May 1941, Secretary of State Cordell Hull said that every country coming under the thumb of Hitler “is reduced forthwith to an economic master-and-slave relationship.”⁶⁷ According to Hull, autarkic economic policies designed to benefit Berlin at the expense of her neighbours demonstrated that “there is not the slightest pretense of promoting mutually profitable trade with other countries upon the basis of equality and fair dealing.”⁶⁸ Colonel William J. Donovan, back from his fact-finding mission as the President’s “unofficial representative” in Europe, spoke at length about the economic system imposed on a subjugated Europe. In a radio address broadcast over three national networks, he denounced Hitler’s Third Reich and argued “Nazi doctrine” aimed to use foreign trade “as an instrument of pressure

⁵⁹ Quoted in, Thomas P. Swift, “Gas Heads Warned of Post-War Stress,” *New York Times*, 9 Oct 1940.

⁶⁰ Hans Staudinger, “The Future of Totalitarian Barter Trade,” *Social Research*, 7:1/4 (1940), pp. 410.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 427.

⁶² Louis Domeratzky, “The Industrial Power of the Nazis,” *Foreign Affairs*, 19 (Apr 1941), pp. 642. In December 1940, a collection of central and east European countries joined the Axis. The Slovak Republic, Hungary, and Romania signed the Tripartite Pact giving Hitler an abundance of natural resources and greater flexibility and freedom of action on his eastern flank.

⁶³ Quoted in “U.S. Can’t Be Free Alone, Woll Says,” *New York Times*, 20 Jan 1941.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Charles E. Egan, “War Has Crippled Old Foreign Trade,” *New York Times*, 1 Sept 1940.

⁶⁵ Eugene P. Thomas, “Difficulties We May Have to Face,” (Delivered at the Meeting of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, Oct 29, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1940), pp. 123.

⁶⁶ Address at the Fifteenth Annual Catholic Association for International Peace at Trinity College, quoted in “Dr. McMahon Assails U.S. Isolationists,” *New York Times*, 16 Apr 1941.

⁶⁷ Cordell Hull, “We Will Not Permit Our Purpose to be Frustrated,” (Delivered over radio from Washington D.C., May 18, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 16 (1941), pp. 484

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 484.

to serve Nazi Germany's military and economic interests."⁶⁹ Regimented trade policies governed by an autocratic party-controlled bureaucracy conflicted with the American ideal. Donovan insisted, "a German dominated Europe, with its whole industry under government direction, would have the American economy based upon individual enterprise at its mercy." He depicted the economic future of America. Isolated in a sea of totalitarian governments operating state-controlled cartels, American *laissez-faire* capitalism and dynamic individualism would face a perilous existence. Maury Maverick, mayor of San Antonio and an ardent interventionist, shared Donovan's fears for the existence of American free market capitalism. Maverick insisted that Europe's future was intimately connected with "the democratic or capitalist ways of life, our economic structure, our groceries and our liberty."⁷⁰ In an address at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, former Republican Presidential candidate Wendell L. Willkie referred to the Europeans as "80,000,000 people in a prison wall of trade limits and economic degradation...The well-being, standard of living, and the very liberty of our people...cannot survive in a world where Nazism reigns supreme."⁷¹ Military planning for the 'Europe First' strategy occurred in an environment saturated with public statements itemizing the economic vision of Nazi Germany. Academics and public figureheads portrayed this totalitarian system of economic organization as a threat to the welfare of American values and institutions. Admiral Stark and the conferees at the American-British staff talks promulgated the 'Europe First' strategy as domestic elites discussed the economic implications of Germany's conquest over Western Europe, Nazi penetration into Latin America, and the totalitarian vision for the global economy.

Cultural and ideological claims to a 'Europe First' policy accompanied the economic argument. President Roosevelt led the charge.⁷² As Steven Casey illustrates, the president positioned Western Europe at the centre of his "mental map."⁷³ At the University of Virginia in June 1940, the President decried National Socialism as the moral antithesis of "that ancient stock" from Jamestown and Plymouth Rock, which recently witnessed "the destruction of freedom in their ancestral lands across the sea."⁷⁴ In

⁶⁹ Colonel William J. Donovan, "There is a Moral Force in Wars," (NBC, CBS and MBS radio broadcast, March 26, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 13 (1941), pp. 387-388.

⁷⁰ Maury Maverick, "America and Civilization Can be Saved," (Delivered at the Coliseum in Chicago, Illinois, September 18, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1940), pp. 6.

⁷¹ Wendell L. Willkie, "Democracy to Live Must be Expanding," (Delivered in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 24, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 13 (1941), pp. 409.

⁷² Culturally and personally, for President Roosevelt, Europe mattered. Certainly, Roosevelt's own experiences and cultural affinity with his brethren in Europe conditioned him to see the continent as more than the degenerative outpost of power politics that some Midwestern isolationists liked to portray. His thoroughly patrician upbringing brought him into contact with a variety European ideals and people. Roosevelt first visited the continent at the age of three. He spent his summers bird watching with the Earl of Liverpool and bicycling through the Rhineland with his private tutor. Roosevelt attended the elite Groton preparatory school in Massachusetts where he was educated under Endicott Peabody in the finest tradition of western liberal arts. He learned French and German with a smattering of classical Greek and Latin before moving on to complete his formal education at Harvard. For their honeymoon, Franklin and Eleanor embarked on a three-month grand tour of the continent, visiting the Alps, Venice, London and Paris. See Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Apprenticeship*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1952), pp. 21-40. Fellow Groton alumni include Sumner Welles, Joseph C. Grew, Averill Harriman and Dean Acheson.

⁷³ Steven Casey, "Franklin D. Roosevelt," in Steven Casey and Jonathan Wright, eds., *Mental Maps in the Era of the Two World Wars*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 222. Casey and Wright explain that "mental maps" are "made up of many layers: their family backgrounds, education, [and] political values." As a conceptual tool, "mental maps" help policymakers make sense of the world and serve as a guide for action. See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers," *International Political Science Review*, vol. 1, no. 4, (1980), pp. 498-501.

⁷⁴ Address at the University of Virginia, 10 June 1940, *PPA 1940*, pp. 261.

December 1940, he reminded the American people that “there can be no ultimate peace between their philosophy of government and our philosophy of government.”⁷⁵ Hitler wrapped “the servants of God in chains,” said Roosevelt. Under such conditions in Europe, “there is no liberty, no religion, [and] no hope.”⁷⁶ In his annual message to Congress in January 1941, he suggested that “under a dictator’s peace” there could be no freedom of expression, freedom of religion “or even good business.”⁷⁷ The President reiterated this theme throughout the spring of 1941. Roosevelt presented the United States as the inheritor of a European-inspired Western civilization under attack from fascist hordes. At the annual dinner for White House Press correspondents, Roosevelt declared Nazism worse than “Prussian autocracy.”⁷⁸ Hitler, the President stated, was seeking “to establish systems of government based on the regimentation of all human beings by a handful of individual rulers.” Days later, at the opening of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., Roosevelt told his audience that “to accept the work of German painters such as Holbein and Dürer, of Italians like Botticelli and Raphael, of painters of the Low Countries like Van Dyck and Rembrandt” is to accept a collection of cultural artefacts representative of the democratic human spirit.⁷⁹ That tradition, Roosevelt said, was under threat “where it first found form and meaning.”⁸⁰

The President expressed his most potent ideological arguments for a ‘Europe First’ strategy during his radio address announcing an “unlimited national emergency” in May 1941. Calling the United States “a perpetual home of freedom, of tolerance, and of devotion to the word of God,” Roosevelt stated that the American government would do everything in its power to fight for the “continuation of human liberties” and stop “the advance of Hitlerism.”⁸¹ Roosevelt conjured up images of “children goose-stepping in search of new gods” and asserted that in the struggle between “human slavery and human freedom – between pagan brutality and the Christian ideal,” the United States “will not accept a Hitler-dominated world.”⁸² Roosevelt’s vociferous denunciations of the spiritual values and moral agenda of Nazi Germany came nearly one month after the Secretary of the Navy officially approved RAINBOW-5. The President’s moralistic rhetoric is suggestive of the cultural and ideological underpinnings of the ‘Europe First’ strategy.

Roosevelt found ample company amongst East Coast journalists and intellectuals. With their eyes cast across the Atlantic, academics and newspaper editors recoiled at the illiberal agenda of Hitler’s Germany and provided ideological justifications for a ‘Europe First’ strategy. On 11 July 1940, Lewis W. Douglas, President of Mutual Life Insurance Company and a future Ambassador to Great Britain, hosted a dinner party for thirty men affiliated with the American interventionist movement. Meeting at the Century Club in downtown Manhattan, the dinner guests drafted a resolution remarkably similar to statements seen in ‘Plan Dog’ and ABC-1. They affirmed, “That those threats to the American way of life and to the interests of the United States in Europe, Latin America and the Far East, all stem, in the last analysis from the power of Nazi Germany.”⁸³ Harold Callender, a writer with the *New York Times*,

⁷⁵ Fireside Chat on National Security, 29 December 1940, *PPA 1940*, pp. 635.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 639.

⁷⁷ The Annual Message to the Congress, 6 January 1941, *PPA 1940*, pp. 665.

⁷⁸ President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Our Country is Going to Play Its Part,” (Delivered at the dinner of the White House Correspondents’ Association, Washington D.C., March 15, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 12, (1941), pp. 354.

⁷⁹ Address at the Dedication of National Gallery of Art, 17 March 1941, *PPA 1941*, pp. 72.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72.

⁸¹ A Radio Address Announcing the Proclamation of an Unlimited National Emergency, 27 May 1941, *PPA 1941*, pp. 193.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 192.

⁸³ Quoted in Walter Johnson, *The Battle Against Isolation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp. 247. Johnson indicates that some of the dinner guests mingled with Admiral Stark and other officials in Roosevelt’s

also saw “the American way of life” as dependent upon the survival of the “Atlantic world.” In October 1940, Callender provided a cultural rationale for American emphasis on Europe. “The Atlantic world, unless it destroys itself,” wrote Callender, “will remain infinitely superior in vigor and inventive power to the too prolific and not too well-nourished Orientals.”⁸⁴ Francis Pickens Miller, a future Office of Strategic Services (OSS) operative and member of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), best expressed the American affinity with Britain, Western Europe and the North Atlantic area in a July 1941 article in *Foreign Affairs*:

“The North Atlantic area is the cradle of our civilization, and the survival of the American way of life depends upon the survival of this civilization. For more than a thousand years our fathers have been building a common society on the shores of the North Atlantic. They built it by labour, by faith, and, when necessary, by arms. It is a civilization based upon a belief in the essential dignity of man, as expressed through representative government, limited by a Bill of Rights. The Atlantic Ocean has become the ocean of freedom.”⁸⁵

University Presidents chimed in. James B. Conant, President of Harvard University and a committed interventionist, gave public warnings of the dangers posed by Hitler and his minions. In November 1940, Conant compared Germany’s subjugation of Europe to the sweep of Islam across broad swaths of the Near East in the medieval period. Conant said there were three choices for Christian peoples struggling against “Mohammed and his followers” – death, servitude, “or conversion to the new religion.” He asked, “Is it different on the continent of Europe at this very moment?”⁸⁶ Days after Hitler and Mussolini divided and annexed Slovenia and British armies withdrew from the fighting in Greece, Conant told his American listeners, that “we can already feel the withering heat from the furnace of Nazi tyranny across the seas. Until the source of this evil fire is quenched, no free people can prosper or endure.”⁸⁷ Conant’s hyperbolic exhortations on the moral consequences of a German victory over the democracies persisted throughout the period when the ‘Europe First’ strategy germinated in the mind of Admiral Stark and blossomed into official policy with ABC-1 and RAINBOW 5.

Other academics and journalists shared Conant’s anxiety. On 29 November 1940, Henry M. Wriston, President of Brown University, characterized the “inherent weaknesses” of totalitarianism as physical, intellectual, economic, and spiritual impoverishment.⁸⁸ Taking aim at Liddell Hart and his “doctrine of limited liability,” Wriston called for an aggressive, offensive strategy calibrated to advance democracy and American ideals “upon an international scale.”⁸⁹ Dorothy Thompson, a leading political-affairs columnist with the *Washington Post* and next to Eleanor Roosevelt perhaps the most influential woman in America, viewed Hitler’s iconoclast régime as a threat to a 2,000-year old humanistic tradition. “The peoples of Western Europe,” Thompson wrote, “the members of our own civilization, the

administration. It seems logical to suggest that some cross-fertilization of ideas from one group to another occurred throughout the summer 1940.

⁸⁴ Harold Callender, “Two Oceans, Two Worlds,” *New York Times*, 6 Oct 1940.

⁸⁵ Francis Pickens Miller, “The Atlantic Area,” *Foreign Affairs*, 19, (July 1941), pp. 728.

⁸⁶ James B. Conant, “The Decision is Momentous,” (Delivered over nation-wide radio hook-up of CBS, November 20, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 5, pp. 148-49

⁸⁷ James B. Conant, “The Hour for Action is At Hand,” (Delivered on nation-wide Columbia hook-up from Boston, May 4, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 17, pp. 519.

⁸⁸ Henry M. Wriston, “Masters of Our Own Fate,” (Delivered at the National Interfraternity Conference Dinner, New York, November 29, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 5, (1940), pp. 156.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 157.

custodians of our common culture, are bound, gagged, tied, and struggling for liberation.”⁹⁰ She turned to this theme on several occasions during the winter of 1940-41. Thompson presented American economic, political and intellectual life as “inextricably intermingled” with European culture and tradition.⁹¹ Accordingly, Thompson saw an entire civilization at risk in the struggle with Nazi Germany - nothing less than the collective wisdom and heritage of Western music, art, literature, science, and philosophy. Ralph B. Perry, an American essayist and prominent philosopher, identified the nation’s enemy as “first of all Germany,” and characterized “the institutions and purposes of the totalitarian powers” as hostile to the political and moral sensitivities of the United States.⁹² James P. Warburg, an American banker and financial advisor to President Roosevelt, echoed the tomes of Thompson and Perry when he wrote that Hitler’s aim was to “impose upon the peoples of the world a form of physical, mental and spiritual slavery.”⁹³ Prominent journalists and American plutocrats considered Nazi Germany a dire threat to established notions of Western civilization. Their editorials and speeches provided an ideological justification for a ‘Europe First’ strategy as policymakers in Washington drafted the documents that made “Europe and the Atlantic the decisive theatre of operations.”

Political leaders in Roosevelt’s administration joined with the academics and journalists in building the ideological underpinnings of Stark’s ‘Europe First’ strategy. Using vivid and poetic imagery, George Wallace described Hitler’s fascism “a materialistic religion of darkness based on force and lies and led by prophets of evil.”⁹⁴ He portrayed the war as a grand struggle for the soul of mankind instead of a conflict over tangible imperial interests. Against the “fanatical zeal of this satanic doctrine,” said Wallace “we in the New World set the faith of Americanism, of Protestantism, of Catholicism [and] of Judaism.”⁹⁵ In a dinner speech to the Association of American Universities in November 1940, Adolf A. Berle, Assistant Secretary of State, expressed his opinion that the nature of the war was as ideological as it was material. Berle remarked that “as a result...the conflict is fought not only on land and sea and air, but in the mind of every thinking man.”⁹⁶

Sumner Welles agreed with his State Department colleague. According to Welles, Hitler’s world order endangered cherished values like the freedom to worship, the freedom to express ones thoughts and the freedom to think. “It is a world chaos of the Stone Age,” wrote Welles, “and if such an order is imposed upon the world not only will our modern civilization vanish, but the mankind will revert to barbarism.”⁹⁷ Frank Knox also spoke of Hitler’s philosophy of government as mutually exclusive with that of the United States. At a dinner address in St. Louis on 15 March 1941, Knox referred to Europe as “the birthplace of our present civilization,” and commented that the war raging overseas was nothing less than “the age-old struggle between human slavery and human liberty.”⁹⁸ John G. Winant, the American Ambassador to Britain, said Hitler’s Nazism had “called into question every tenet in the faith of civilized man” and “ruthlessly denied to man freedom of speech, freedom of religion and equality before the law.” Winant expressed his hope that an Anglo-American vision of a “civilized world of free

⁹⁰ Dorothy Thompson, “Relief or Liberation,” *The Washington Post*, 18 Dec 1940.

⁹¹ Dorothy Thompson, “The Instinct of Isolation,” *The Washington Post*, 24 Jan 1941.

⁹² Ralph Barton Perry, “Triple Action Held Vital If We Are to Defend America,” *New York Times*, 23 Sept 1940.

⁹³ James P. Warburg, “Axis Defeat First But Not Ultimate Road to Peace,” *New York Times*, 2 Feb 1941.

⁹⁴ Text of Wallace Speech Accepting Vice Presidential Nomination, “Wallace Address Text, Calling G.O.P.

‘Appeasement Party,’” *The Washington Post*, 30 Aug 1940.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ A.A. Berle, “The Guardians of Eternal Values,” (Delivered at a dinner of the Association of American Universities, Washington D.C., November 15, 1940), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 5, (1940), pp. 149.

⁹⁷ Sumner Welles, “Their Victory is Our Security,” pp. 270.

⁹⁸ Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, “We Must Not Retreat,” (Delivered at the St. Louis Conference of the United States Conference of Mayors, St. Louis, Mo., February 20, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 11, (1941), pp. 324.

peoples” with “Christian virtues and moral values” might survive “the Nazis’ talk of a new order.”⁹⁹ Henry Stimson lamented that Nazi Germany’s capture of Western Europe, “destroyed the Western civilization which has been slowly building up in Europe ever since the Dark Ages.” According to Stimson, the idealized traditions of western culture that Europe bequeathed to the United States “has been dashed aside and trampled on by these Nazi rulers.”¹⁰⁰ Roosevelt’s political underlings feared living in a world inhospitable to American values. They perceived that the ultimate threat to the preservation and expansion of western civilization resided in Nazi Germany’s occupation of Europe - the cultural seat of democracy, liberty, Judeo-Christian ethics, and the “American way of life.”

Embedded within all this cultural and intellectual dialogue was a sense that, if Nazi Germany survived, American values and institutions would not. If Hitler triumphed, the United States would have to adopt the same totalitarian methods of socio-economic organization it sought to destroy. Woven within this argument are the economic and ideological justifications for a ‘Europe First’ policy. As one voter commented to an American pollster in January 1941, “We’d feel the effect of dictatorship in every way. Even if this country could escape the dictatorship itself, we’d have to prepare for [the] constant threat of war. Our war preparations would cause hard times through higher taxes and a lower standard of living.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, Matthew Woll held that a global economy dominated by Germany “will force us to adopt a totalitarian philosophy here.”¹⁰² Political leaders shared this fear. In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Roosevelt’s impending Lend-Lease bill, Wendell Willkie argued that a German victory in Europe would spell disaster for American businesses and liberty. It would require “huge expenditures for defence” and massive deficit financing with an inevitable “decline in the American standard of living, the demoralization of our economic system and a weakening of our democratic institutions.”¹⁰³ In essence, Willkie insisted that if the continental United States were surrounded by totalitarian powers “we ourselves would have to adopt totalitarian controls. We would lose our liberty here at home.”¹⁰⁴ William C. Bullitt, former US ambassador in Paris, predicted that, in a world dominated by Hitler, the United States would have to emulate the fascist system of militarization “from top to bottom.”¹⁰⁵ “How long,” asked Bullitt, “we could maintain the liberties that have been the birthright of every American since the birth of our nation, no man knows.”¹⁰⁶ Along the same lines only weeks after he signed the Lend-Lease Act into law and two days after the finalization of ABC-1, Roosevelt asked, “How long would it be possible to maintain a semblance of our two-party system, with free elections, in a Nazi-dominated world?...How soon would we decide to imitate Nazism and abandon our two-party system, and regiment our people into one party – which would certainly be neither Democratic nor Republican?”¹⁰⁷ Roosevelt presented a frightening image of the future for his listeners. If Germany triumphed in the war, the President suggested that permanent mobilization against the

⁹⁹ John G. Winant, “There is No Order Nor Security in Tyranny,” (Delivered at the Pilgrims’ dinner in London England, March 18, 1941), *Vital Speeches*, vol. 7, no. 12, (1941), pp. 358-359.

¹⁰⁰ Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, “Freedom Cannot Be Saved Without Sacrifice,” (Delivered over radio from Washington, May 6, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 15, (1941), pp. 450.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in, George Gallup, “The Gallup Poll: 71 Percent Say Nazi Victory Over Britain Would Have Adverse Effects on Their Lives,” *The Washington Post*, 25 Jan 1941.

¹⁰² Quoted in “U.S. Can’t Be Free Alone, Woll Says,” *New York Times*, 20 Jan 1941.

¹⁰³ Text of Wendell L. Willkie’s formal statement before the Foreign Relations Committee, “Formal Statement Made by Willkie to Senate Committee,” *New York Times*, 12 Feb 1941.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Text of William C. Bullitt’s statement to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, “Text of Bullitt’s Statement,” *New York Times*, 26 Jan 1941.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “We Are Answering It By Deeds,” (Delivered over radio to the Jackson Day diners throughout the nation, March 29, 1941), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 7, no. 13, (1941), pp. 393.

looming dangers might extinguish multi-party elections in the United States. Roosevelt's Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of War evoked a similar picture. Frank Knox declared that "in a world ruled by totalitarian dictators" the American economy "would have to build and sustain huge standing armies...Turned in upon ourselves and bereft of all opportunity for overseas trade, our standards of living and wage levels would fall and we should be swiftly reduced to a constant daily struggle to preserve our national existence."¹⁰⁸ Henry Stimson believed that, in Hitler's new world order, the United States would have to build a large standing army to protect the Western Hemisphere against military encroachment. Under such conditions, "the good neighbour relations which now prevail throughout the American republics," would quickly deteriorate into "the same abhorrent system of forceful domination which we are seeking to keep out of this hemisphere."¹⁰⁹ Colonel Donovan concurred: "A victorious Germany would mean a grave danger to American free institutions...As a consequence the nature of the Nazi control, the very system which we most object, would be imposed upon us."¹¹⁰ This public rhetoric is suggestive of the reasons for a 'Europe First' policy. If the United States did not smother the fascist infant in its European crib, its growth might force Americans to adopt unsavoury, and indefinite, economic, political and military countermeasures. To avoid becoming a garrison state, the American strategists sought the swift destruction of Nazi Germany.

American strategists adopted the 'Europe First' policy because they recognized Hitler's Germany as the preeminent threat to the economic and ideological integrity of the United States. Broadened conceptions of national security encompassed more than physical safety from military attack. As Admiral Stark, Edward Mead Earle, and others explained, national security also entailed the defence of American values, institutions, and business interests. Hitler's conquest over much of Western Europe removed a vital market for US farm producers and allowed Germany to mobilize important industrial and human resources. Nazi Germany's military victories in Europe raised the prospect of Hitler's economic and political penetration of Latin America. And most significantly, Germany's occupation of Europe suggested that a dictatorial and autarkic economic philosophy would supplant America's preferred vision of a global economy dominated by liberal internationalism and free trade. Furthermore, American policymakers erected their 'Europe First' strategy in an intellectual milieu rife with ideological and cultural anxiety. President Roosevelt publicly assailed Hitler's 'New World Order' as inimical to American interests and values. Academics, journalists and politicians proclaimed Hitler a threat to Western civilization, humanism and the American way of life. They foresaw that Axis victory in Europe might require the United States to abandon its political traditions and turn the country into a garrison state. This article does not deny that military-strategic events like the fall of France or the fate of the British fleet influenced the decision to pursue a 'Europe First' policy. Rather, it points out that considerations of American strategic policy ought to take into account the cultural and economic context. American national interests required a 'Europe First' strategy because Hitler presented an existential threat to the material self-interest and core values of the United States.

¹⁰⁸ Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, "We Must Not Retreat," *Vital Speeches*, pp. 324.

¹⁰⁹ Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, "Freedom Cannot Be Saved Without Sacrifice," *Vital Speeches*, pp. 451.

¹¹⁰ Colonel William J. Donovan, "There is a Moral Force in Wars," *Vital Speeches*, pp. 388.

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