AN ISOLATIONIST FACES WAR: A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS
OF SENATOR ROBERT A. TAFT
BETWEEN 1939 AND 1945

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INTRODUCTION

When Japanese bombers appeared over Pearl Harbor early that Sunday morning in December, they not only destroyed a sizable portion of the American Pacific fleet, but they also effectively silenced the many Americans who had voiced their determination to keep the United States out of war. These American isolationists of the nineteen-thirties and early nineteen-forties had consistently opposed the foreign policy of the Roosevelt administration because of their strong conviction that measures such as lend-lease, the amending of the Neutrality Acts, and the extension of the convoy system across the Atlantic would inevitably draw the United States into the conflict which raged in Europe and the Far East.

Among this group was a freshman Senator from Ohio, Robert Alphonso Taft. Taft was destined one day to be a prominent leader in American political life, and, even in 1939, the newly elected Senator quickly became a respected Washington figure.

This thesis is an attempt to understand why this well-known American took an isolationist stand prior to World War II and to examine how the entry of the United States into the war affected his views regarding America's
proper role in foreign affairs. It will also attempt to determine the underlying philosophy of Senator Taft's views on foreign policy and the extent to which he was consistent in his views.

The terms "isolationist" and "internationalist" used in this paper have such emotional connotations in American political life that an explanation of how they have been defined may prove valuable. By isolationist is meant a person who believed that the United States should not make any prior political commitments in foreign affairs and should become involved in war only if the United States itself were attacked. The isolationists were often referred to as "non-interventionists" in the pre-war period. An internationalist is assumed to be one who believed that the United States should not remain aloof but was obligated to assist in maintaining peace and liberty in the world, both for moral reasons and for self-protection. The internationalists were usually supporters of collective security after World War I; they were frequently termed "interventionists" before World War II.

In the preparation of this paper, reliance has been upon Taft's public speeches, his published articles and books, and his record in Congress. Because he was often mentioned as a candidate for President and because of his position of leadership in the Republican Party, his
speeches were frequently and widely quoted and he was often interviewed. Therefore, his public papers and remarks are, in his case, a fertile source of information.

In 1953, shortly after Senator Taft's death, his private papers were deposited by his family in the Library of Congress. In 1958, after the death of his wife, his four sons made the papers a gift to the Library but placed restrictions upon their use. The Library then began the process of cataloguing the 300,000 Taft items. According to publications of the Library of Congress, many of Taft's papers deal with the election campaigns in which he was a potential candidate and his foreign policy opinions in the later years of his life.¹

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF AN ISOLATIONIST

Robert Alphonso Taft was born into a family whose name had been associated with American politics for generations. His grandfather Alphonso had been Secretary of War and Attorney-General in the cabinet of President Grant. The eldest child of President William Howard Taft, Robert inherited the political inclinations of his family and never lost the desire to return again to the White House as an occupant rather than as a guest.\(^1\)

He was born in Cincinnati in 1889 and practiced law in that city for several years. With his wife Martha Bowers Taft, he reared four sons in a large white house on Indian Hill. Despite this Ohio background and the fact that he was consistently viewed as an excellent example of a conservative midwestern Republican, his life included many experiences which were not common to the typical midwestern politician.

Most of his education was in eastern schools. Studious as a child, he first showed intellectual promise at his Uncle Horace's Taft School in Connecticut. Later his superior intelligence and intense desire to excel won him
top college honors, first as an undergraduate at Yale and then at Harvard Law School, where he edited the Harvard Law Review. When he took the bar examination in Ohio, his was the highest grade.\(^2\) His exposure to the thinking of eastern professors during his formative years did not, however, prevent his later opposing their ideas in both foreign and domestic policies.

He was also widely traveled. As the son of the Governor General of the Philippines in 1900, Taft had lived in the exotic atmosphere of Manila. While yet a young man, he had traveled extensively in Europe. When he was barred from serving in the armed forces during World War I because of bad eyesight, Taft worked instead in Europe for the American Relief Administration under the supervision of Herbert Hoover. During this experience, he saw not only the suffering of war victims but also became an admirer of Hoover, who in turn thought highly of his young aide. Taft shared many of Hoover's political beliefs.\(^3\)

Just as his eastern education had not affected his midwestern ideas, Taft's cosmopolitan background of travel did not prevent his later acceptance of the isolationism prevalent in the Midwest. One of his family's biographers believes that his service with the Relief Administration had the effect of helping him to become a disillusioned skeptic in world politics rather than a convert to an
international outlook because he was introduced through it to the atmosphere of intrigue and power politics which marked the Paris Peace Conference.  

Taft, like his father, was disappointed that the United States did not join the League of Nations. Whatever the effect his sojourn in Europe was eventually to have on his thinking, the young Taft was at this point in his life a moderate internationalist. He believed that Wilson’s Fourteen Points were too vague to be successfully applied in practice, and he did not entirely approve of the League Covenant which Wilson advocated. He was somewhat skeptical that an international police force or executive would work, but, as he wrote to his father from Paris, the League without an agreement to use force was worse than useless.  

Returning to Ohio to take up his law practice after World War I, Taft built up a successful corporate law business. His place in Cincinnati society and in the Cincinnati business world was assured by the fact that he was a Taft, but skill and hard work also helped him to count among his clients the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Gruen Watch Company, the Cincinnati Milling Machine Company, and other prominent manufacturers and businessmen. His successful legal background could not always be judged a help to him when he entered politics. He was labeled, understandably, as a spokesman for the business interests.
When politics inevitably beckoned, he started as a lowly precinct worker, ringing doorbells to get out the vote. He was still precinct committeeman when he went to the United States Senate in 1939. From 1921 to 1926, Taft was a member of the Ohio House of Representatives where he chose as his specialty the unpopular and complicated task of revising the Ohio tax system. Although he served as Republican floor leader and later as Speaker of the House during his final two years in the Ohio House of Representatives, one later writer would call these years, except for the tax reform bill, "three fireless terms." In 1930 he was elected to a term in the State Senate but lost his campaign for reelection in the New Deal landslide of 1932.

From Taft's earliest days in politics, he was considered a party regular. When his brother Charles and other prominent Cincinnati citizens formed a City Charter Committee to end the reign of machine corruption in Cincinnati, Taft refused to join their campaign. He explained that he preferred to correct evils from within and opposed the city management plan and proportional representation on the grounds that they weakened the two-party system and made party responsibility difficult. This experience reveals two basic facets of Taft's character. He was not a reformer and he had deep and abiding party loyalty. One
biographer suggests that the latter trait was a remnant of his dismay over the Republican Party split in 1912 which had cost his father another term in the presidency. The loyalty of Senator Taft to his party caused one observer of Taft in Washington to remark that "he simply was one of the most intensely partisan men in the recent history of American politics."12

After his defeat in 1932, Taft retired from politics until 1938, when he became a candidate for the United States Senate. Because Taft was thought of as a poor vote-getter after his 1932 defeat, he had first to win a hard-fought primary campaign against Judge Arthur Day, the party's officially endorsed candidate. His victory over Day by a margin of 70,000 votes caused his political light to burn brightly once again. His Democratic opponent in the election was the New Dealer Robert Bulkley, who had the blessings of the Washington administration. To defeat Bulkley, Taft tirelessly canvassed the state, speaking in 87 of the 88 Ohio counties. A large campaign fund and his skill in dealing with facts during the debates to which he challenged Bulkley were important factors in explaining his surprising winning margin of 170,000 votes.13

Also invaluable in this victory was the help of his witty, charming, and politically adept wife. As the daughter of Lloyd Bowers, the Solicitor General appointed
by President William Howard Taft, Mrs. Taft had early been introduced to the world of politics. So well received were her amusing speeches and her warm personality during the 1938 campaign that one Ohio newspaper informed its readers after the election that Bob and Martha had been elected.14 What Taft's personality lacked, Martha Taft's supplied, and she was always an important asset to his career.

Taft's ultimate success in politics was somewhat hampered by both his appearance and his personality. Tall, rawboned, a careless dresser with myopic eyes behind thick, rimless glasses, he seemed shy, solemn, and preoccupied in outward appearance. "Colorless" was a common term which magazine writers used when first describing his chances for the presidency. One article introducing him as a possible candidate in 1940 summarized him as having the "glamour of a pint of branch water" and "as subtle as a load of buckshot."15

Subtlety, tact, and glamour were indeed missing from Taft's character. He detested the trappings of publicity. His flat, dry voice and blunt, dull manner when making speeches were also handicaps. He gave observers the impression of being aloof and cold. His friends were eager to assure the public that his private character was very different from his public image and frequently
mentioned his dry wit and austere charm. Friend and foe alike respected him for his intelligence, his fiercely competitive spirit, his hard work, his mastery of facts, and his courageous willingness to take a stand on controversial public issues. Although his candor often earned him unfavorable publicity, his honesty and frankness in stating his views also entitled him to be described as a man of immense integrity.

The philosophy which Taft strongly upheld even at the risk of a loss of popularity included a belief in economy in government, individual liberty, and the free enterprise system regulated to a bare minimum. He admired local self-government and was suspicious of growing federal power. He revered the Constitution and the place of Congress in the constitutional system. He feared constantly the decline in the authority of Congress and the corresponding ascendancy of the executive branch. In short, his was a totally anti-New Deal philosophy. He was one of the most severe and unremitting critics of the Roosevelt administration from his earliest days in the Senate. Many of his views were the logical result of his having been born into a midwestern, orthodox, upper-class Republican family which stressed self-reliance, public service, hard work, and which, although not extremely wealthy, was comfortably able to provide its
members with both security and moderate luxury.

Taft served in the Senate until his death in 1953. He was the natural leader of the conservative wing of his party, and the Taft Republicans were fiercely determined that he should win the prize of the presidency. In every major presidential campaign but one from 1940 to 1952, he was seriously mentioned as a Republican candidate. In 1944, he stepped aside voluntarily to favor the candidacy of one of his fellow Ohio politicians, John W. Bricker. Although he never gained his greatest goal, he did attain the pinnacle of power in the Senate, eventually being regarded as "Mr. Republican." In later years, Taft came to accept some welfare measures and shifted his thinking in foreign affairs from a position of isolation to acceptance of many ideas of the internationalists, but he remained essentially a conservative until his death. Even though his views were not accepted by the majority of his fellow Congressmen, he was recognized by them as an expert in many fields of legislation, including taxation, banking, and labor law.

The irony of Taft's political career lay in the fact that, as he entered the Senate for the first time in 1939, domestic issues, on which he had such strong convictions and to which he had devoted serious thought, were not to be the main concern. The first major debate of the
Seventy-sixth Congress would concern the proposed changes in the Neutrality Act of 1937. This irony would haunt Taft throughout his career. By training and inclination, he was best equipped to deal with domestic problems, yet the problem of world affairs constantly intruded. As a prominent Republican leader who hoped someday to be President, he could not remain silent and was forced to consider and deliberate the issues of foreign policy—an area some would call his "blind spot."
NOTES


4Ross, An American Family, p. 314.

5Ibid., p. 316.


9Walter Davenport, "Bashful Buckeye," Collier's, CV (April 16, 1940), 32.

10Ibid., p. 34.

11White, The Taft Story, p. 5.

12Ibid., p. 142.

13Davenport, "Bashful Buckeye," Collier's, CV (April 16, 1940), 32.


15Davenport, "Bashful Buckeye," Collier's, XV (April 16, 1940), 11.

16Ross, An American Family, pp. 365-68; Richard H. Rovere, "Taft: Is This the Best We've Got?" Harper's, LXXXVI (April 1948), 291.
Taft summarized his beliefs many times in speeches; see, for example, "America at War," *Vital Speeches*, VIII (1942), 232.

White, *The Taft Story*, pp. 41-44.


This point is stressed in John P. Armstrong, "The Enigma of Senator Taft and American Foreign Policy," *Review of Politics*, XVII (April 1955), 208.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ISOLATIONISM

Taft and the other isolationists of the nineteen-thirties were the heirs to a lofty American tradition. Isolation had its roots in the relief with which the first settlers escaped from the tribulations of European politics. It drew strength from the geographical isolation which made diplomatic isolation possible. It was confirmed by the folk heroes of early America. Washington, Adams, Jefferson--each firmly advised Americans to follow a policy of neutrality and non-entanglement. Finally, isolation was a necessity in a country coping with the problems of settling a vast frontier, developing immense resources and assimilating many cultural strains.  

Although isolation never meant a complete withdrawal from the affairs of the world, it was always intended to keep the United States out of European wars and to insure freedom of action by avoiding any sort of political entanglement. It was, in short, an ideal policy for a new republic to follow. True isolation was never--and never could be--practiced. From its beginnings as an independent
country, the United States was vastly interested in trade with Europe, took a lively interest in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere, and considered itself a model for small democracies.\(^2\)

Not until the period just prior to 1900 did the United States begin to awaken to the possibilities of world power. Interest in overseas markets, the settlement of the last frontier, naval enthusiasm, and a missionary zeal all combined to cause some Americans to consider the desirability of overseas expansion.\(^3\) The possessions acquired as a result of the Spanish-American War forced increasing attention to world affairs. Yet even involvement in the Spanish-American War could not be said to have violated the central tenet of American isolation—non-entanglement in European politics or wars.

The war which began in 1914 finally drew a reluctant America into European war and caused the first serious break with the isolationist past. With great misgivings the United States took the fateful step of declaring war against Germany on April 6, 1917. For two and one-half years the American government had earnestly attempted to remain aloof without abandoning the traditional rights of a neutral nation to freedom of the seas. Americans comforted themselves with the thought they were not only being revenged for the sinking of American ships and the
loss of American lives, but that they would also be "making the world safe for democracy," as President Wilson stated.

Disillusionment over the peace treaty which ended the war helped to revive isolation. Many Americans were troubled over the fact that the peace terms did not live up to the idealism expressed in the Fourteen Points. They realized with a shock that, despite their sacrifices, the world had not been made safe for democracy at all. As has been pointed out, the young Robert Taft, in Paris during the peace conference, was among those who felt disgust over the realities of European politics.

The unpleasant spectacle of a stubborn President Wilson and a hostile Congress bitterly arguing over the question of American participation in the League of Nations followed. Probably most Americans in 1919, including Robert A. Taft, favored joining the League, but when the Senate finally voted against participation on either Wilsonian or Republican terms, with something like relief the United States turned once more to concentrating on domestic issues.

With this return to the pursuit of peacetime goals almost all Americans also began the return to a more isolationist mood. The growth of the isolationist sentiment during the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties was
caused by many factors. Very important was the American
distaste for the end result of the participation in World
War I. During the nineteen-twenties, revisionist histori-
ans had begun to reassess the reasons for World War I and
to rethink the reasons the United States had finally inter-
vened. Books like Origins of the War by Sidney B. Fay,
Why We Fought by C. Hartley Crattan, and the popular The
Road to War by Walter Millis revealed that the causes of
World War I were infinitely complex and could not entirely
be laid at the feet of the Central Powers. These authors
questioned whether the United States had not been tricked
into war by Allied propaganda, hungry profiteers, and a
smug, unjustified sense of the moral mission of America. 6

More popular books and the motion pictures reinforced
the idea that all wars are evil. 7 All Quiet on the Wes-
tern Front played to thousands of ordinary citizens who
would within a few years be grimly determined that their
sons should not play a part in another European war.

Disgust with Europe also arose over the troublesome
problem of the war debts. 8 In the confused state of
world finance which followed World War I, repayment of
the debts to the United States was difficult for the
European nations, but Americans were reluctant to accept
this fact.

The convening of the Nye committee in 1934 gave offi-
cial sanction to the growing isolationist sentiment.
Gerald P. Nye, an isolationist senator from North Dakota, did not have the background to sift the truth from the maze of evidence regarding United States intervention in 1917. No thoughtful observer of the committee was surprised that the final Nye committee report simply placed the blame for American intervention at the door of the bankers and munitions manufacturers who, the committee assumed, had maneuvered the country into war in an unholy desire to make money.  

Supporting the conclusions of the committee was another round of historical tracts including *Merchants of Death*, edited by Helmuth C. Englebrocht, who confirmed the thesis that the international arms trade had been most responsible for American involvement. The prominent historian Charles A. Beard wrote *The Devil Theory of War* from the same viewpoint. Other writers posed the theory that, although the United States could obviously no longer maintain the traditional rights of a neutral on the seas during a modern war, the country could maintain neutrality in the future and could have done so in 1917.  

Inspired by the revisionist thinking and by the Nye Committee report, Congress passed the First Neutrality Act, which sought to prevent Americans from making the same mistakes which had resulted in intervention in World War I. The law declared that in the event of war, the President,
at his discretion, could declare that a state of war existed, impose an arms embargo on all belligerents, and warn Americans that they traveled on belligerent ships at their own risk. In 1936, another Neutrality Act extended the original provisions of this bill for fourteen months and prohibited loans to belligerent powers as well. The President could also extend the arms embargo to any new belligerent entering a war, even if that nation was the victim of aggression. Finally, in 1937 was passed a permanent Third Neutrality Act, containing the arms embargo features and extending the prohibition on loans to warring nations indefinitely. Americans were expressly forbidden to travel on belligerent ships; the arming of American ships was also forbidden. A policy of "cash and carry" for any goods purchased by belligerent nations was to remain in effect until May 1, 1939.

The depression which had begun in 1929 naturally tended to focus the attention of the nation on domestic problems to the exclusion of foreign affairs. Like most Americans, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had been content to let foreign problems lie dormant during the early years of his presidency as he dealt with the economic crisis in America. He signed the Neutrality Acts with only a brief comment concerning their "inflexible" restrictions.

The Japanese had invaded Manchuria four years before
the first test was made of the new American thinking as embodied in the Neutrality Acts. In 1935, Italy wantonly invaded Ethiopia. President Roosevelt invoked the Neutrality Act. Theoretically, the policy should have worked ideally in this conflict. Italy was the aggressor, and, since Ethiopia was a poor country which did not trade with the United States, Italy would have been more likely to have purchased weapons from the United States. However, items such as oil were not included in the arms embargo; already the neutrality policy of the United States showed a flaw.\textsuperscript{12}

The European situation grew more serious in 1936 and 1937. Civil war broke out in Spain, Hitler sent troops into the supposedly demilitarized Rhineland, and the "China incident" developed into full-scale war between Japan and China. Thus far President Roosevelt had offered no strong opposition to the policy of Congress as expressed in the Neutrality Acts. Now he took the first cautious step toward awakening the country to the dangers of totalitarian aggression. In his famous "quarantine of the aggressors" speech in October 1937, the President said

Peace-loving nations must make a concerted effort in opposition to those violators of treaties and those ignorings of humane instincts which today are creating a state of international anarchy from which there is no escape through mere isolation or neutrality....\textsuperscript{13}

The outcry which followed this speech convinced Roosevelt
of the strength of isolationist feeling, and he retreated in his next press conference. Thereafter, he was careful to gauge the strength of public opinion on any measures he wished to take which would aid the nations fighting aggression. Later historians would charge that Roosevelt had tricked the United States into entering the war through the "back door" and that his public pronouncements never hinted at how strong was his determination to place American strength at the service of the Allies in their battle against the Axis powers. In reply, his admirers explained that the President was able to lead the country only to the extent that public opinion would follow.

In the years that followed this quarantine speech, public opinion began to form into two vocal and determined groups. The internationalists, who had been largely slumbering during the nineteen-thirties, were awakened by Hitler's atrocities against the Jews, by his ruthless despoiling of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and by the increasing boldness of Japanese expansion in the Far East. At the same time, the isolationists became ever more determined to stay out of the nightmare of war.

Both sides agreed that the United States should avoid actually going to war. In fact, probably on no question of import had the American people ever been so united as in their desire to avoid war. In a poll taken in June 1940,
84 percent of those polled voiced their belief that the United States should not go to war. The division between the internationalists and the isolationists was caused by the question of how this could best be accomplished. The isolationists, or non-interventionists, maintained that the best way was to follow a policy of strict neutrality and to rely on the broad oceans which separated the United States from Europe, even though Americans might be morally revolted by Hitler. It was with this group that Robert Taft would take his stand. The internationalists, or interventionists, believed war would be avoided by aiding the Allies who were fighting America's fight. From September 1939, when war was declared in Europe, until December 7, 1941, a battle raged between these two points of view—a battle so vehement that one author has likened it to the gulf over the slavery question.

Two powerful, well-organized pressure groups were formed to influence public opinion, the President, and the Congress. In 1940 the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, aiming to give all aid to the Allies short of actual involvement in the war, was formed with William Allen White, the editor of the Emporia (Kansas) Gazette as its first chairman. Many of its members even came to accept the idea that the United States might have
to go to war. This organization might be said usually to have reflected the views of the Roosevelt administration, although it was a private group. The most effective non-interventionist group was America First, which counted among its adherents many famous Americans including Charles Lindbergh, Mrs. Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Edward Rickenbacker, and Mrs. Robert A. Taft. America First was hampered in its efforts by having to fight a rear-guard action to purge itself of Nazi and anti-Semitic groups. It was largely conservative in its political views; it strongly opposed such measures as lend-lease, the arming of merchant ships, the extension of the convoy system, and any other actions which were obviously unneutral in their intentions. Although Robert Taft never became an official member of America First, he sympathized with many of their actions and statements.

The battle over American foreign policy had begun even before these official pressure groups were formed. When the Seventy-sixth Congress met in January 1939, the European situation was very ominous, and the President was emboldened to speak frankly to Congress on the subject of foreign policy in his January message. He advocated measures "short of war" which would convince the aggressors of our sentiments and which would be of aid to the victims of aggression. Specifically, President Roosevelt
wished Congress to amend the Neutrality Act of 1937 to
repeal the arms embargo. Among the members of the
Congress who debated this issue was Robert Alphonso Taft.
NOTES


2 Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, pp. 13-16.


5 Link, American Epoch, p. 276; Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, pp. 115-16.


7 Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 256.

8 Ibid., p. 241.


12 Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 262.

13 Roosevelt, Public Papers, VI, 1937, pp. 408, 410.

14 Ibid., pp. 424-25.
This argument is well presented in Charles A. Beard, American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1912-1940 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) and in Beard, President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); another treatment is Charles C. Tansill, Backdoor to War: The Roosevelt Foreign Policy (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952).


Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 268.

Public Opinion Quarterly, IV (December 1940), p. 714.


Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 287.

Cole, America First, pp. 6-8.

Cole, America First, p. 15; Ross, An American Family, p.

Cole is by far the best source for the problems and policies of the America First organization and discusses at length the problems of America First in ridding itself of the anti-Semite groups and Nazi sympathizers.

Roosevelt, Public Papers, VIII, 1939, p. 3.
CHAPTER III

THE FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS OF SENATOR TAFT,
1939-1941

To determine the reasons for the isolationism of Senator Taft, a review of his stand on each of the vital foreign policy questions between 1939 and December 1941 is necessary. With characteristic candor he plainly stated his views despite criticism from the internationalists and despite the growing approval on the part of the majority of Americans of the policies of the Roosevelt administration.

The last important victory of the isolationist bloc in Congress was the successful struggle to prevent the amending of the Neutrality Act of 1937 during the first session of the Seventy-sixth Congress. During the debate, Taft praised the law and opposed any attempt to amend it to give more discretionary powers to the President. He particularly objected to President Roosevelt’s statement that "measures short of war" should be taken to aid the Allies, declaring that such measures must mean the President wished Congress to give him unlimited authority to favor one nation over another. In Taft’s opinion, such
a policy would inevitably lead to war and was contrary to the traditional concept of neutrality followed by the United States since the days of George Washington.² Taft scornfully dismissed the suggestion that the United States had a part to play in aiding the struggles of the democracies by remarking

no one has ever suggested before that a single nation should range over the world, like a knight-errant, protecting democracy and ideals of good faith, and tilting, like Don Quixote, against the windmills of Fascism.³

During the summer that followed the failure to amend the Neutrality Act, Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Reassured about Communist intentions, the Nazi dictator sent his troops across the border into Poland, thus lighting the flames of World War II. President Roosevelt immediately invoked the Neutrality Act and then, concerned about the safety of the Western Hemisphere, called a conference at Panama of the Foreign Ministers of the American republics. At this meeting several steps were taken to safeguard the Americas, including the defining of a neutral belt 300 miles wide around the Hemisphere into which the belligerents were not to carry the war.⁴ His fears of Nazi aggression reinforced by the formal declaration of war in Europe, Roosevelt called a special session of Congress, pleading once again for the repeal of the arms embargo—-an embargo which obviously
worked to the disadvantage of the Allies.\textsuperscript{5}

For six weeks Congress debated. Events in Europe had caused Taft to make a shift in his thinking. He now advocated, as President Roosevelt wished, the lifting of the arms embargo. By this action Taft demonstrated one of his most characteristic and admirable traits. When he believed that he had been proven to be mistaken, he was willing to change his opinions. He now was taking a far more moderate stand than die-hard isolationists such as Senators Gerald Nye, William E. Borah, and Hiram Johnson. Nye, for example, considered any change at all in the Neutrality Act to be the "symbol of the first step on the part of the United States on a steady tramp, tramp, tramp into war."\textsuperscript{6} Taft dismissed such ideas as nonsense.\textsuperscript{7}

Taft explained his change of opinion regarding the arms embargo by pointing out that such an embargo really made war more likely since it "favors large nations with all the facilities for the manufacture of arms against small nations which do not have those facilities,"\textsuperscript{8} thus encouraging those aggressive nations who have prepared for war. It was, he believed, illogical to sell to nations at peace who might be potential aggressors, but not to those countries who had had unjust war inflicted upon them. Furthermore, "the distinction between the shipment of munitions and raw materials, between gun cotton and cotton is
sentimental rather than real," he said. He also noted that the repeal of the embargo would aid France and Great Britain. Since the law would be a "sound policy" and "not unneutral," he considered this fact an important argument for repeal because certainly "our sympathies are with those governments against Hitlerism." 

Although he now was willing to vote to repeal the arms embargo, Taft's basic reaction to the threat of war had not changed. He still believed that the United States could stay out "if we are determined to stay out." He minimized the possibility of a Nazi victory, calling the fear that England and France might be defeated "imaginary." During the debates in Congress, he continued to prove that he accepted the philosophy back of the Neutrality Act by arguing against any credits to belligerent nations, but approving "cash and carry," and advocating the prohibition of any American ships sailing to Europe. He disapproved strongly of the wide discretion given to President Roosevelt to declare war zones and called for a legislative declaration of a war zone "covering all water within 300 miles of Europe...."

In November 1939, Taft and 62 Senators voted to lift the arms embargo. The new Neutrality Act of 1939 inaugurated a trade policy that was totally "cash and carry."
After a period of "phony war" in the winter of 1939 and early 1940, Hitler's legions struck again in the spring, engulfing in rapid succession Denmark, Norway, Holland, Luxembourg, and Belgium. Prompted by the growing seriousness of the Nazi menace, President Roosevelt sent a special message to Congress on May 16, 1940, calling for increased expenditures for the American armed forces and a plan to build 50,000 airplanes a year. 15

Taft, along with most isolationists, concurred in this demand for increased appropriations for defense, assuring his listeners in a radio address in May that "there is no disagreement on the necessity for preparedness. There is no disposition to skimp either on the part of Congress or the people of the United States." 16

However, he could not resist using the preparedness issue to criticize what he believed were typically New Deal deficiencies. He described several mistakes in the defense program, citing the lack of a definite plan for defense and the lack of coordination between government departments as proof of the confusion which existed. He advised having a single director of defense. Since industry must provide the weapons for defense, he regarded "the New Deal's hostility to industry" as an obstacle to preparing for defense. In addition, Taft opposed at every opportunity "the unsound fiscal policies of the
administration," which, he reminded Congress, made paying for the defense build-up even more difficult. Because of his opposition to New Deal economic policies, Taft was especially wary of giving the administration any "blank check" appropriations for defense.17

During the summer of 1940, public opinion, which remained solidly in favor of staying out of war, began to show signs of other changes. After the fall of France in June and the beginning of the Battle of Britain during the summer, the percentage of Americans who thought the Allies would win steadily declined. Whereas polls in September 1938 showed 86 percent definitely believed that the Allies could win,18 by July 1940 only 32 percent were equally confident of an Allied victory. Similarly, in May 1940, 36 percent of those polled thought helping England was more important than avoiding war; by September 52 percent voted for helping England even at the risk of war.19

Always sensitive to the tides of public thinking and firmly convinced that the security of the United States depended upon aiding the Allies, during the summer of 1940 Roosevelt moved steadily into a position of limited American participation on the side of Great Britain. In September, after finding a way to negotiate without having to consult a Congress more isolationist than public opinion, the President traded fifty overage destroyers to England
in exchange for air and naval bases on British soil in the New World. Roosevelt was throwing down the gauntlet to the isolationist bloc in Congress.

Even isolationists like Taft could no longer argue that Hitler and his armies had little chance of victory, but Taft was still confident that the United States could protect itself, no matter how great the threat. He protested that all of the recent policies of the Roosevelt administration had been "based on the theory that if the British are defeated we shall be immediately subjected to attack by Germany and Italy." Such an idea he believed to be unwarranted by the facts; he did not "believe that the Germans could effectively attack the United States even if they should destroy the British fleet or capture part of it." He had unlimited confidence in the ability of the navy to defend the United States. He denied that the United States, if sufficiently prepared, would ever face an actual attack by a European or Asiatic nation.

The certainty that the United States was invulnerable to attack enabled Taft, despite his avowed concern for preparedness, to oppose compulsory peacetime conscription on the grounds that it was an unnecessary infringement of freedom. Favoring a two-ocean navy and a strong defense posture did not mean, he asserted in a radio broadcast in September 1940, that he agreed that an army of over one
million or a peacetime draft was necessary. "We are not at war," he reminded his listeners; "it is just as dangerous to exaggerate the emergency as it is to under-estimate the emergency." To take a step on the road toward totalitarian government was unthinkable to him; a compulsory draft was contrary to liberty and American precedent. He reasoned that protecting the United States from the Nazi menace did not require bankrupting the country and authorizing the conscription of men whose lives and occupations would be seriously affected. He offered as a solution to the dilemma of staying prepared without authorizing a draft making the army a more attractive service and thereby increasing voluntary enlistments. He preferred almost any alternative to the principles of compulsion; compulsion, he firmly believed, might lead to the eventual conscription of industry and "a regimentation of most labor like is done in Communist and Fascist states, which we are now apparently seeking to emulate."

Again, Taft and the other isolationists found themselves on the losing side; the Senate passed the first peacetime selective service by a vote of 47 to 25.

Much of Taft's energy in the early months of 1940 had been directed toward offering himself as a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. Despite the fact that some columnists regarded him as too inexperienced,
he was seriously considered as an important rival to Senator Arthur Vandenberg and Thomas E. Dewey. 28 Although he preferred to criticize the domestic actions of the New Deal, Taft found himself required to express his views on the foreign situation repeatedly. He had hoped, since both parties pledged themselves to peace, that foreign policy would not be a key issue in 1940. When formally announcing his candidacy, he had stated that he was for peace, neutrality, and "keeping out of European affairs." 29 However, he was not unwilling to use foreign policy as a weapon against the Democrats, saying that the suspicion was that if Democrats were elected "they will not be so strenuous in favor of American neutrality," 30 and that "the Republican Party is a peace party; the Democratic Party may or may not be a peace party." 31

When the Republicans convened in Philadelphia in June 1940, the rival forces of Dewey, Taft, and Vandenberg—all of whom at this point were taking an isolationist stand—cancelled each other out, and the dark horse internationalist Wendell Willkie was nominated. Observers credited the Willkie nomination to the dynamic organization of his supporters. Taft himself was impressed by the efficiency of the Willkie campaign organization at the convention. 32

Much of the Willkie campaign oratory before November
centered on New Deal domestic policies and on Roosevelt's third term ambitious. Finally, in a desperate bid for victory, Willkie temporarily abandoned his basic agreement with Roosevelt on the international issue and began to promise that a Republican victory would mean no war. In the upsurge for Willkie which followed, Roosevelt was forced to justify his defense measures and to promise that American boys would not be sent into any foreign wars. Willkie later called his statements just so much "campaign nonsense," and Roosevelt undoubtedly regretted many of his more extreme promises. However, Taft and the other isolationists used these campaign promises repeatedly to challenge Roosevelt's requests for increased participation on the side of Great Britain. In particular, during the debate over the Lend-Lease bill, Taft accused the President of breaking his pledges to the American people and of deliberately acting in defiance of their expressed wishes.

The next great crisis to face the isolationists occurred in January 1941. When Congress convened, President Roosevelt disclosed his plan to lend, lease, sell, or barter any defense article to any country whose defense the President deemed vital to the defense of the United States. If enacted, this extremely unconventional idea would be a clear acceptance of the argument being preached by the interventionists that aid to Britain was indispensable
to American security.

The debating ability of Senator Taft put him in the forefront of the desperate battle of the isolationists against the passage of the Lend-Lease bill, H.R. 1776. Attacking the weakest points in the interventionist arguments, Taft demanded to know why, if a British victory was essential to American security, we did not declare war against Germany at once. He emphatically denied that Lend-Lease could be regarded as a defense measure; in fact, he argued that the President, the Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Naval Operations were being given the authority to give away material essential to American defense. Taft even found a way to ridicule the bill, making the widely quoted remark that "lending war equipment is much like lending chewing gum ... we certainly do not want the same gum back." Taft saw in the Lend-Lease bill an unwarranted and extremely dangerous grant of power to the President. He pointed out four powers which he believed the bill conveyed to the President unnecessarily. He contended that the bill would give the President authority to exchange, lease, lend, or give away the entire Army and Navy—except the men—"an extraordinary grant of power, a power to which no Congress, except a rubber-stamp Congress, could possibly agree." Furthermore, the "bill imposes practically
no limitation on the President's power to involve the United States in financial expense." Third, he objected to the fact that the bill permitted the President to finance the purchase by Great Britain of goods produced in any country in the world, instead of limiting the purchases to American-made goods. This feature prompted Taft to declare that "this bill might well be called a bill to make Uncle Sam the best and biggest Santa Claus the world has ever seen." Finally, Taft argued that the bill proposed to give the authority to the President to enter and intervene in the European war and to engage in acts which "are obviously acts of war."39

To assume that Taft, because he opposed the Lend-Lease Act, was unsympathetic to England's anguish would be unfair. He conceded the need for aid to Great Britain and believed that most Americans agreed with him.40 As a substitute to Lend-Lease, he suggested a two billion dollar loan to England, Canada, and Greece.41

The logic of Taft and the other isolationists was sound. Lend-Lease was decidedly unneutral, it did allow the President wide discretion in helping the Allies, and it was not in accord with traditional American policy during European wars. So lengthy and stormy was the debate over the bill that night sessions of Congress were considered; one observer estimated that 405,000 words were
spoken by its opponents—three times as many as by supporters of the bill. Despite this torrent of words, all amendments to restrict the President’s use of Lend-Lease authority were voted down, and finally the bill passed the Senate. That a strong minority dissented can be seen from the fact that the final vote was 60-31.

The American people, despite the contention of isolationists during the debate to the contrary, approved the decision to help Great Britain increasingly. A poll taken in July 1941 on the question of the foreign policy of the administration revealed that 60 percent thought the Republicans in Congress should support Roosevelt in matters of foreign policy.

In March of 1941 Taft brought his logical, incisive mind to bear on the decision of President Roosevelt to use the navy to convoy vessels bound to a belligerent nation. The interventionists maintained that there was little logic in providing lend-lease equipment to Britain if the United States did not guarantee its delivery. Taft refuted this argument by saying that the President did not have the power to authorize convoys under his powers as Commander-in-Chief if the practically necessary result was war. Such an act, Taft believed, was an infringement on the power of Congress to declare or not declare war.

He also denied that the convoy system was vital, citing
as proof the fact that only four percent of the ships carrying munitions to England between January and April 1941 had been sunk. In a radio broadcast he informed the public that "I suspect the real purpose of advocating convoys is to provide an effective means of getting us into the war, rather than any concern about the arrival of our munitions." 47

Taft was equally adamant in his denial that the President had any legal or constitutional right to send American troops to Iceland which was geographically "a part of the continent of Europe." 48 Speaking in Congress in July on this subject, he announced that he desired "to place on record my strenuous protest against the policy which is involving us in war without the authorization from Congress." 49

In the summer of 1941, Hitler, ignoring his non-aggression pact, invaded the Soviet Union. Taft, like many isolationists, now affirmed that every argument for intervention on the side of Britain had been weakened. He believed that any threat to the United States of an attack by Hitler had been lessened. Not only would Hitler now give his full attention to fighting the Communists, he would also have access to the vast raw materials of Russia and would be less interested in the resources of the Western Hemisphere. More importantly, Taft reminded his
listeners in a radio broadcast, the moral argument that the European war was one between totalitarian governments and democracies had been forever shattered "so going to war even to spread our highest ideals is absurd." He called a victory of communism an even greater menace to the United States "from an ideological standpoint than the victory of fascism," since communism masqueraded under a democratic guise which might appeal to many. In the same broadcast, he optimistically suggested that the invasion of Russia might mean Hitler had given up the idea of conquering Britain; perhaps the situation would lead to peace discussions by the end of 1941.50

The German campaign in Russia was used by isolationists in the late summer of 1941 to justify their opposition to the extension of the service of peacetime draftees beyond one year. Arguing that the need for such action had been lessened by military developments in Europe, they were so successful in their efforts that the bill to extend the draft passed the House by a single vote, 203-202.51 Less opposition to the bill developed in the Senate, but there Taft was among the 30 nay votes. Although he was not now so rigorously opposed to the draft, he did urge that a man be asked to serve no longer than 18 months.52

By the end of 1941 the United States was moving toward
an ever-increasing participation on the side of the Allies and was girding for an even greater defense effort. The Roosevelt administration now sought authority to guarantee the delivery of war materials all the way to Europe, if necessary. Already American merchant ships, including the Kearny and the Reuben James, had come under attack as they engaged in convoy duty. President Roosevelt had disclosed in a fireside chat that he had ordered the navy to "shoot on sight." In October 1941 Congress debated the question of modifying the Neutrality Act of 1939 to allow the arming of American merchant ships. On this last important issue before war was declared by the United States, the isolationists, battling gamely to the end, were voted down. In fact, Congress went further to allow American ships to travel to belligerent ports carrying any kind of cargo. The Neutrality Acts to keep the United States out of war were now completely reversed.

Taft joined in this last futile battle. In a lengthy speech on the Senate floor, he argued that to accept this policy of "undeclared naval war" would be

a policy of war, a policy of war which every party in this country has denied that it wished to adopt, and which every Senator has denied that he wished to adopt. It cannot be long, in my opinion ... before we have ... the policy of complete war, including the sending of troops to Europe or to Africa or to Asia. It is almost impossible to engage in a partial war ... If American sailors are killed day by day, certainly the American people are going to feel that they are fully at war.
Within two months after this speech the United States was indeed at war, but it had come ironically as the result of an attack in the Pacific rather than as a result of the policies of increasing aid to Great Britain, as the isolationists had predicted. Like most isolationists, Taft had been less concerned with events in the Far East than with those in Europe. Early in 1939, while still supporting the neutrality legislation in its entirety, he had said that Roosevelt should have enforced an embargo in the China-Japan war, as the Neutrality Act of 1937 theoretically required. Taft wavered on this point, however; in March of 1940 he admitted that he had not really decided how far the United States could help China without provoking war with Japan—a war all the more to be avoided considering the turmoil in Europe. He finally concluded that any form of arms embargo against Japan should be initiated by the President, who had all the facts. He pointed out that public opinion in Japan, the possible success of a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and how much damage an embargo might do to Japan would all have to be weighed in making such a decision.

Revisionist historians would later charge that the actions of the Roosevelt administration in ending the commercial treaty with Japan, in placing an embargo on scrap iron and oil, and in stating plainly the United
States position in regard to Japanese expansion in China made war with Japan inevitable.\(^5\) The fact remains that Taft, and other isolationists, had largely ignored these measures when they were taken. In no public speeches did Taft protest so strongly American policy toward Japan as he did the policy toward Germany. In one speech he denied that the Japanese threat was a serious one. Like too many Americans, Taft underestimated the Japanese threat that exploded at Pearl Harbor.

An analysis of Taft's deeds and words before Pearl Harbor indicates that he was an isolationist during this period primarily because he held certain deep-seated convictions which made isolation the only logical policy for him to adopt.

First, he maintained that war could never be a patriotic and self-sacrificial act—a crusade to make the world safe for democracy. Modern war he knew to be nothing more than "murder by machine." It wrecked lives, lowered the standard of living, and caused depression and hardship. To him, the idea that World War I had been a crusade for democracy was utterly false. World War I, he believed, proved that war creates more dictatorships than it saves democracies.\(^6\) The argument that World War II could be a war to preserve freedom he ridiculed by asking who could "swallow the idea that Russia is a democracy?"\(^7\) For the
United States to undertake the task of policing the world in the name of maintaining freedom everywhere would embroil the country in perpetual conflict, in his view. Therefore, he could never accept Roosevelt's statements that the United States must be an arsenal of democracy and that the country should help to spread the four freedoms throughout the globe.

Secondly, and perhaps most important in the development of his isolationism, Taft saw war as creating an increasingly totalitarian government in the United States. He believed that even preparation for war encouraged the growth of an arbitrary central government. Most of Taft's speeches in the pre-war period contain this argument that going to war would destroy democratic government. So deeply did he fear this possibility that he was even willing to risk having the United States stand alone in a Nazi world in order to avoid war. As he explained in 1939:

The danger of a complete and perhaps permanent change in the American way of life, and American democracy itself, is a strong argument against war of any kind which is not forced upon us as a matter of defense.62

Modern war, he believed, would require such large-scale government direction and the expenditure of such enormous sums that the traditional concept of American government would never reappear. Forced to admit that the President's powers as director of foreign policy were
constitutionally vast, he knew that his powers would be even more enhanced by the additional authority the President would have as commander-in-chief during wartime. Once granted, so Taft reasoned, these arbitrary powers might never be relinquished. Many times Taft opposed aid to Great Britain, not just because he saw the aid as a prelude to war, but also because the bills providing for the aid represented a gift of more power to the Executive. He even deplored the grants of additional power in the bills for which he did vote.

Paralleling his fear that war would cause a fatal growth in the power of the central government was his equally great dread that modern war would have an adverse effect on individual liberty and free enterprise. The major reason he had voted against the peacetime draft, against the extension of the draft, and had protested the lowering of the draft age to 18 was his intense dislike for any law which interfered with an individual’s private concerns. As has been indicated, he viewed the draft bills as laws which would disrupt family life, destroy the progress thousands of young men had made in their careers, and thrust immature young men into the doubtful atmosphere of army camps. He shrank from the red tape of a draft board “and their prying into men’s lives.” If the United States went to war, moreover, he believed that the
necessary regulations for fixing prices, allocating supplies, and determining defense priorities might destroy free enterprise forever.\textsuperscript{65}

Since much of Taft's political philosophy was built upon a belief in decentralized government, individual liberty, free enterprise, and economy in government, he naturally believed that any foreign policy was preferable to the war which he believed might destroy everything in which he believed. Only being attacked could justify the risks of going to war.

A less important factor in his stand on foreign policy before World War II was his anti-New Deal sentiments. He was angered by the fact that his crusade against the New Deal should have been shunted off the front page by war news. Early in 1939, before war broke out in Europe, he unwisely claimed that the administration was "ballyhooing" the foreign situation in order to distract the people from the failures of the New Deal.\textsuperscript{66} He was promptly criticized in many quarters for this remark.\textsuperscript{67} Since it was spoken at a Republican Unity Convention, one can assume that it was a politically motivated statement. Nevertheless, his statements do indicate that he especially feared a war because he had such a strong distaste for the Roosevelt administration. In a remark to the Indiana Bar Association, he said:
I do believe that the prospect of these powers being exercised should give more cause for concern in view of the philosophy of government regulation and a planned economy which dominates the present administration. 68

That he wished to limit the President by Congressional action rather than increase Roosevelt's authority to deal with the foreign emergency was to be expected. In 1939 and 1941, Taft offered amendments to various bills which would have limited the President's authority to spend money, to land American troops overseas, to mark out war zones, and to distinguish among the belligerent nations as to which should receive American goods. Despite the war crisis, Taft never ceased his criticisms of the New Deal; he made his mistrust of Roosevelt and his advisors painfully clear. Because Taft was essentially a partisan man, he could not really accept bipartisanship even in foreign policy. 69

A fourth explanation for Taft's isolation lies in his intense belief that the United States held a special place in the world and had a special task to serve as an example of democracy and constitutional government. Along with many of his fellow midwesterners, he shared a distaste for European politics and showed a certain lack of understanding of European problems. As he himself once admitted, "we may sympathize but we cannot understand all the complications of European politics." 70 As late as May 1941, he
could still view the European crisis as one more war in the typical embroilment of European minorities among themselves, rather than regarding the war as an unique crisis created by Hitler. He remarked:

There have been wars in Europe for a thousand years. There will probably be wars for years to come. Europe, its varied peoples and its small democracies, must work out their own salvation. No outsider can permanently aid them.71

His pride in America extended to his firm belief that the United States could protect itself under any circumstances. He repeatedly avowed that Germany, Italy, and Japan did not really menace the United States. Taft argued that Hitler would never attempt the obviously incredible logistical problem of transporting troops across an ocean, especially when the Nazi government would be able to command all the raw materials of a defeated Europe and Africa. Why should Hitler act in this manner, Taft asked one group, when the Germany dictator would be faced with

trying to govern a dozen different races in Europe, none of them pleased with his rule. He has a tremendous area to police, and turbulent peoples, including his own allies, who hate the Germans. No man and no race has ever succeeded in ruling Europe for long. To set out for America with the flower of the German army and leave a smoldering volcano behind him is not a thing which any reasonable man would do. Hitler may be mad, but there has been method in his madness.72

Confident that the United States could rely on the ocean frontiers and a strong navy and air force, Taft
could despise Hitler and regret England's travail, but still say "we are primarily interested in the preserving of a republican form of government in the United States, not in Europe." His pride in his country also made him recoil from the idea that the United States should defend itself by material aid to the Allies. If he accepted the idea that the defense of Great Britain was vital to the United States, he would regard it as "moral cowardice" not to send troops to help defend Great Britain.

Of course, Taft somewhat weakened his own arguments on this point by eventually moving to a position of limited aid to Great Britain. Hitler's successes, public opinion, and his own growing sympathy for the Europeans overwhelmed by the Nazis probably help to explain this inconsistency.

An interesting facet of Taft's plea for non-intervention is the frequency with which he pleaded for a calm appraisal of the situation. He disliked the emotionalism of the arguments of many who disagreed with him. Like the lawyer he was, he was able to consider the facts rationally and dispassionately, rarely affected either by his distaste for Hitler or by his sympathy for Great Britain. Not only did he answer the arguments of the interventionists that a Nazi victory would immediately threaten the United States, he was also able to marshal evidence that a Nazi victory
would have no appreciable effect on American trade—a theory advanced frequently by those in favor of aid to England. Taft replied there was no reason why the United States could not trade with Germany; trade with Japan was lively despite the fact that Japan was an autocratic country. He doubted that Americans would be willing to go to war over the question of trade and pointed out that trade with Europe by no means constituted the bulk of American overseas trade. He was confident that the United States businessman would be able to counter any attractive trade arrangement which the Nazis might offer. He also believed that the United States could maintain itself economically on a self-sufficient basis if necessary.

What factors other than his political philosophy prompted Taft to accept an isolationist position before World War II are more difficult to determine. His wife, to whom he was exceptionally devoted, was a pacifist and a member of America First. Mrs. Taft spoke repeatedly against intervention as a member of America First and as late as 1943, she appeared at an Anti-War Congress. Undoubtedly, her convictions reinforced those of her husband, although he neither accepted pacifism nor joined America First. Other members of his family, especially his brother Charles, were often more internationalist in their views than was Taft.
The Midwest has been the source of the strongest isolationist views in the twentieth century. Professor Roy A. Billington, writing in the *Political Science Quarterly*, has indicated that much of this midwestern isolation was based on the large German immigrant population in the area, on a deep-rooted suspicion of eastern and British capitalists, and on the strong Republican partisanship of the area which reacted against the internationalism of the Democratic Party. 81 To some extent, Taft was a product of his birthplace. He shared the sturdy Republicanism of the Midwest and looked with disfavor on the East many times in his life. However, his ethnic background was not German. He had been educated in the East and had traveled widely. Therefore, that he was a typical, provincial midwestern isolationist is doubtful.

He was a far more moderate and less consistent isolationist during this period than were Senators Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, Henrik Shipstead of Minnesota, Arthur Vandenburg of Michigan, or Robert La Follette of Wisconsin. 82 He was not a pacifist; he voted for every appropriation for defense, although his economical bent caused him sometimes to question the amounts being requested.

What Taft did share with isolationists from the Midwest, Far West, South, and East, was the conviction that
the only true standard by which to judge American foreign policy was by whether or not that policy would preserve American liberty. Because he did not believe that all aid to England "short of war" met this standard, he resisted attempts to amend the Neutrality Act of 1939, he protested the convoy system and the occupation of Iceland, he voted against Lend-Lease and other aid bills, and he convinced himself that a German victory would not be a threat to the United States.
NOTES


3 Ibid., p. 255.


7 Ibid., 359.

8 Ibid., 358-359.

9 "Should Congress Amend the Neutrality Act?" Congressional Digest, XVIII (October 1939), 246.


11 Ibid., 355.

12 Ibid., 356.

13 Ibid., 356-357.

14 Ibid., 1024.

15 Roosevelt, Public Papers, IX, 1940, pp. 198-203.


17 Ibid., Appendix 3178-3179; Appendix 3385-3386; Part 16, Appendix 4111-4112.
Public Opinion Quarterly, III (Oct. 1939), 599.

Public Opinion Quarterly, IV (Dec. 1940), 711, 714.

Davids, America and the World of Our Time, pp. 191-93.


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Roosevelt, Public Papers, IX, 1940, pp. 668-69.
37Congress Rec., 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 1941, LXXXVII, Part 2, 1280.
38Ibid., 1277
39Ibid., 1277-1280.
40Ibid., Part 10, Appendix 297.
41Ibid., Part 2, 1276.
42New York Times, March 2, 1941, p. 1; March 5, 1941, p. 1.
46Congress Rec., 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 1941, LXXXVII, Part 11, Appendix 1496.
47Ibid., Appendix 2343.
48Ibid., Part 8, 5926.
49Ibid.
51Link, American Epoch, p. 490.
52Congress Rec., 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 1941, LXXXVII, Part 6, 6572; 6737.
54Adler, The Isolationist Impulse, p. 316.
57Congress Rec., 76th Cong., 3d Sess., 1940, LXXXVI, Part 11, 1219.
58. Such charges are made, for example, by Charles C. Tansill in Backdoor to War: The Roosevelt Foreign Policy (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952).


66. New York Times, April 21, 1939, p.1


72. Ibid.


75 Ibid., 3178.

76 Cong. Rec., 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 1941, LXXXVII, Part 11, Appendix 1283, 1284; 2344, 2345.


79 Arthur M. Schlesinger, "His Eyes Have Seen the Glory," Collier's, CXIX (February 22, 1947), 34.

80 Ross, An American Family, p. 385.

81 "The Origins of Middle Western Isolation," Political Science Quarterly, LX (March 1945), 44-64.

82 These Senators all voted against the repeal of the arms embargo; see Cong. Rec., 76th Cong., 2d Sess., 1939, LXXXV, Part 1, 1024.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS OF SENATOR TAFT, 1942-1945

For isolationists and interventionists alike, for Republicans and Democrats both, there could be only one reply to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Along with the other 81 Senators present on December 8, 1941, Taft voted for a declaration of war against Japan.

To reporters who were naturally interested in his reaction to the Japanese attack, Taft simply replied that the declaration of war was the only course open.\(^1\) The question of who had been right in matters of foreign policy before Pearl Harbor was now, in his opinion, left to the judgment of history.\(^2\) In a call for unity in the war effort he told the Young Republican Club of Knoxville, Tennessee, early in 1942:

In the support of the war today there is no sectional division, no party division, and no division of opinion among the people. Before December 7 there was a fundamental difference of opinion with regard to our foreign policy. There were great and public debates on the question whether this country would become involved in war. But whatever differences there may have been, we all agree today that the war must be won and that we must endure every sacrifice to see that it is won.\(^3\)
On the subject of his former opposition to entry into war, Taft was understandably somewhat sensitive. He answered attacks that previous opposition to war now meant a lack of support by recalling that Abraham Lincoln had had much the same charge made against him regarding the Mexican War. Taft was quick to reply to any charge of lack of patriotism on the part of Republicans who had opposed the administration's foreign policy and affirmed that "the first purpose of the Republican Party, as a matter of course, is to support every measure which will help bring the war to a successful conclusion."5

Rather than attempting to explain away his unpopular pre-war stand, Taft continued to maintain that his position had been a logical one. Even in the face of criticism, he never renounced his belief that Germany had posed no real threat to American security and, therefore, that the United States should not have pursued a "warlike course against Germany."6 He also continued to believe that the menace from Germany had been diminished after Hitler's attack on Russia in 1941.7 Nor did Taft ever accept the idea that the war had any purpose beyond that of insuring the freedom of the people of the United States and preventing an invasion of the country. He denounced at every opportunity the idea that the United States was fighting to benefit other nations or to crusade for the
four freedoms or the principles of the Atlantic Charter. 8

He did admit that, in view of later events, he had underestimated the threat from Japan. He justified his earlier position in regard to Japan by commenting:

When I consider the question of whether we should have gone to war, I leave out the whole question of Japan, because frankly I was not advised at the time. The people were not told of the conditions of Japan, the people were not told that the Japanese might do what they did do. It may well be—in fact, I myself think—that we could not have avoided a war with Japan.9

Taft, whose intellectual processes were dominated by a strict reliance on facts, could thus explain why he had discounted the possibility of an attack by Japan by pleading a lack of information.

Many Republicans and isolationists would later use the Pearl Harbor episode to claim there had been a deliberate plot on the part of President Roosevelt to bring the United States into war. Taft himself was critical of the investigating committee headed by Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts appointed by President Roosevelt early in 1942. Taft commented that the investigation should not be left entirely to the Executive, since "perhaps the fault at Hawaii was not entirely on the admirals and generals."10 In particular, Taft questioned whether Secretary of State Cordell Hull had kept Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox adequately informed regarding the diplomatic correspondence with Japan.11
Not until the end of the war, when there could no longer be any question of affecting the war effort, did Congress move to investigate the Pearl Harbor attack. The majority report of the Congressional investigating committee cleared Roosevelt and his top aides from the charges that they had been derelict in their duty or had deliberately provoked the attack. A minority continued to believe the opposite. The use of the revisionist argument in postwar politics is outside the scope of this paper. However, it can be noted that Senator Taft was among those who desired a Congressional investigation.

In mid-1944 Congress debated whether to extend the time in which the investigation might be reopened. Under federal law the case would have been closed in June 1944 otherwise. Near the end of the Senate debate, Taft read into the Congressional Record a list of questions from the New York Times which were pertinent to determining the true facts about Pearl Harbor. Included among the questions were:

Why was a fleet concentrated in the harbor in the presence of a crisis? Why was the Pacific fleet based on Hawaii instead of on the west coast of the United States? In general, what is the share the Washington administration should have in culpability for the success of the Japanese attack?

The evidence indicates that Taft had doubts about the true story of Pearl Harbor.
The role of the opposition party in wartime is always a difficult one. Although Taft had pledged the Republicans to enthusiastic support of the war effort, he also made clear that he reserved the right "to criticize the conduct of the war when it deserves to be criticized." He realized that such a position would bring denunciation in the newspapers, but he averred that "criticism in time of war is essential to the maintenance of any kind of democratic government." Being a very unmilitary man as well as an intensely patriotic one, he had few criticisms regarding the military tactics of the war, but he was determined to do everything in his power to prevent any infringement upon individual liberties or any unnecessary growth of federal power during the war. He continued his attacks on many economic measures related to the war effort. Interestingly enough, however, he did not argue against the most significant violation of civil liberties of the war years. He regretted, but approved, the removal of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast and their internment in the interior.

A few illustrations of his targets for criticism will indicate his determination to avoid permitting the war to be used as "the excuse for a complete socialization of the country." He called for reducing non-defense expenditures and for "sound fiscal policies." He was
a strong opponent of the government's price-fixing policies and made the Office of Price Administration the subject of intense scrutiny. He complained that the O.P.A. often acted without legal authority and that, instead of asking for the voluntary cooperation of the people in conserving scarce items, the agency, in the "spirit of the New Deal," preferred to rely upon "threats of crack-downs, shortages and rationing." As late as June 1944, he stated that many of the policies of the O.P.A. deliberately exaggerated the dangers of excessive inflation "as a justification for demands for arbitrary power," and that some O.P.A. agents showed a "hostility to business."

Another organization which often felt the lash of Taft's criticism was the Office of War Information. He claimed that the O.W.I. in its homefront campaign used leaflets and programs ostensibly to assist the war effort, but actually to promote a Democratic Party victory at the polls. He called for the submitting of all types of government propaganda to the Secretary of State so that there would be a permanent record of government activity in this field. Fearful that literature distributed by the government to soldiers overseas might also contain pro-Democratic overtones, he asked for, and secured, an amendment to the Hatch Act which would require any
government literature sent overseas to be non-partisan. Taft was concerned that the President might use his extensive wartime powers as a justification to enforce New Deal policies. As a result, he stressed that Congress had important wartime responsibilities also, especially the "right and duty to determine how the burden of this war shall be distributed among the civilian population." Wage and price policies, draft rules, and tax levels were among the responsibilities of Congress, even in wartime.

Taft was also quick to emphasize that the Senate retained important powers during wartime in the field of international relations. He particularly criticized the executive agreements signed by the President without Senate approval. Among those to which he objected were the pre-war Atlantic Charter, in which, he claimed, Section 4 promised certain trade revisions which only Congress had the right to grant. He also included any extension of lend-lease agreements with postwar implications and the Declaration of the United Nations signed in 1942 on his list of targets for censure. He believed that the Declaration of the United Nations contained a pledge to wage war which only Congress had the right to make.

To understand Taft's critical stand during the war, it is necessary to recall the fervor with which he
defended the constitutional division of powers between the executive and legislative branches and to recall his faith in the free enterprise system and in decentralized, limited government. The defense of these ideas was his main concern even in the midst of war.

Taft's views in regard to postwar planning are the most significant in understanding how the war affected his isolationism and altered his foreign policy views. As early as April 1942, there was a split in the Republican ranks over the party's future foreign policy platform. Wendell Willkie, eager to erase the "isolationist" label from the Republicans, called for the National Committee to pledge the party to the position that the United States should take any necessary international responsibilities after the war needed to preserve liberty and the reoccurrence of aggression. Plainly, Willkie wanted the party to endorse American participation in a world organization to keep the peace. With characteristic caution, Taft disagreed, saying that such a policy statement was premature; no one knew what postwar conditions might be like.

Willkie won this skirmish over party policy, but those casual observers who regarded Taft as still betraying isolationist sympathies by his stand must have been amazed to learn that Senator Taft was very much in favor
of the participation of the United States in a world organization.

In speeches and interviews in 1943 and 1944, Taft began to explain that he had never been a true isolationist; he had merely followed the 150 year-old American policy "of the free hand." This policy he defined as "insisting that we do not commit ourselves in advance to any action, that we keep the right to determine our national policy when the crisis arises, to deal with the particular crisis." He admitted, however, that his views had been changed by the war and that he now favored going beyond that traditional policy. The development of air power and the expense and destructiveness of modern war had changed conditions to the extent that now he believed that even agreements which bound the United States in advance were justified. Traditional foreign policy was no longer possible for America. As proof that he had never been a true isolationist and that his views were not entirely new ones, he pointed to the fact that he had supported the League of Nations in 1919.

The world organization which Taft promised to support and which he described in articles and speeches during the war years had certain definite characteristics. The key to his league was that "it rest on the firm
foundation of organized justice in a free world." He advised as a first step in any league the writing of "international law by which the nations shall agree to be governed." This international law he wished to be written clearly and to have the backing of world opinion. He believed that after such a body of law had been defined and agreed to, all nations should promise to use economic sanctions and force, if necessary, to stop aggression. A necessary corollary was, of course, the setting up of a World Court to interpret the law.

A second oft-repeated injunction in regard to his postwar structure was Taft's insistence that the organization should not interfere with any internal domestic policies. To prescribe law dealing with internal affairs would be "more likely to cause wars than to prevent them." The one exception would be that all nations would be required to accept limitations on armaments. He was particularly vehement on this point, remarking:

The very purpose of peace is to assure freedom to the people of this country. We know how our people would resent it if some foreign majority told us what we could import and what we could export, how we should handle our Japanese problem or our difficult Negro problem ... If we aren't willing to permit foreign interference, we can be sure that every other people will harbor the same resentment .... If we wish peace, we must learn to treat with tolerance conditions and ideologies which we may not understand or sympathize with.
Taft also favored setting up subordinate organizations such as a council of Europe, a council of America, and a council of the Far East with courts to consider questions involving these areas alone. This arrangement would make it possible, he believed, to keep a nation in one area from having to furnish troops for another until every effort had been made to settle the problem. "We certainly should not go into Europe unless we are invited to do so by a substantial majority of the people of that continent, who have shown their willingness to cooperate with us when we do so," he remarked on one occasion.\textsuperscript{40}

Finally, Taft maintained that to make a world organization workable a certain definite peace program must precede it. He cautioned against a hasty move to set up a world organization, offering three years as a suitable period in which to convince world opinion to accept its various features.\textsuperscript{41} He included among the essential items in the peace program the need to draw boundaries so that no country had to remain poverty-stricken; each nation must be assured a supply of the necessary raw materials. A second "fertile cause for war"\textsuperscript{42} was lack of self-determination for nations. Therefore, he noted that the peace terms should include some provision for revising the colonial system. While he opposed imposing democracy on the entire world as being "impossible" and "more likely to
cause war than prevent it," he did recommend reconstructing government in occupied countries with constitutionally elected majorities on the grounds that a democracy was less likely to be an aggressor than an autocracy. 43

Taft was equally adamant on the subject of postwar plans which he opposed. He included among these the Federal Union Plan proposed by Henry Streit and sanctioned by Harold Stassen. This plan, Taft maintained, would incorporate the United States into an international state and would result in the establishment of an international police force to which the United States would be subject. A second plan which he criticized was the policy of a British-American alliance, perhaps to include Russia, to keep the peace after the war. 44 This idea had been discussed by Walter Lippman in his U.S. Foreign Policy: The Shield of the Republic.

Taft could not have been more scornful than he was in attacking the federal union plan, which he described as "fantastic, dangerous, and impractical." 45 He believed that such a union could not remain democratic since true democracy depended upon local self-government and the effective access of people to their central government. He suggested that perhaps even the United States had grown beyond this point. Nor did he think England and Russia would agree to an international state and an international
police force. He commented:

If you can see Winston Churchill liquidating the British fleet, or Joe Stalin dismissing the Russian army, or either of them turning over their forces to President Whoozis of Worldtania, you are more clairvoyant than I.46

Finally—and most important to Taft—a world state would mean scrapping the American Constitution and destroying "the very purpose of our foreign policy, the freedom of the United States."47 Obviously, the United States would be at a disadvantage since Americans constituted a minority of the population but a majority of the wealth of the world.48 One can only assume that Taft devoted so many words to what was obviously a scheme unlikely to be seriously considered because he was so outraged that such an idea to barter away American freedom of action had even been suggested—and by a Republican at that.

Taft dismissed the idea of a collective alliance of Great Britain, the United States, and Russia to keep the peace by saying it overlooked the fact that all alliances have the weakness of falling apart at crucial moments.49 Fundamentally, he said, an alliance system is "imperialism," and a defensive military alliance "arouses the antagonism of the world," thus leading to the division of the world into armed camps.50 The idea of a permanent alliance with Russia was, on its own merits, unthinkable to Taft.
As proof of his desire to support an international organization, he voted for the Moscow Agreement and the Connally Resolution, both of which pledged the United States to a world peace-keeping plan. At Mackinac Island in 1944, the Republicans wrote a statement of party principles which, among other things, pledged the party to support a world organization. Taft was a member of the group which met at Mackinac.

In analyzing Taft's concept of an effective and ideal world organization, several facts become apparent. First, the world organization he proposed would accord with his ideas of law; secondly, it would be fairly inexpensive to maintain and to be a member of; lastly, it would not interfere in any way with carrying out the American dream. He had not come as far down the road of internationalism as might be assumed. His world organization was not a crusade, but an inexpensive—and, he hoped, effective—means of preserving the peace the United States required in order to work out its destiny. In comparison with other internationalists, Taft was still conservative in his thinking. He was also unrealistic in his demands. Law and justice are admirable goals, but expecting a fledging world organization to promote these ideas in a world of varying ideologies was to expect the impossible. For him to recognize already the threat of Russian communism
and still propose a world organization based on law and justice was a supreme inconsistency.53

He still believed that the United States must maintain its strong defensive posture, and he still had faith that the United States could defend itself, no matter what the conditions in the rest of the world. In one speech he remarked:

A force could not prevent air raids or other attacks, but there is nothing to suggest that modern technology has removed the ability of North America to defend itself against any nation or combination of nations.54

In fairness to Taft, it should be noted that this speech was made before the advent of the atomic age.

The United Nations which evolved from the San Francisco Conference in 1945 was naturally not the world organization that Taft had envisioned. To him, the existence of the veto power changed the whole character of the organization, and the United Nations seemed now only an "agreement between the powers holding most of the armament of the world to use that armament if they all decide at some future time that it is in accord with the national policy of all of them to do so."55 He complained that the Charter was not based on a system of law and the administration of justice. Instead, he pointed out that the Security Council was to "make decisions on the basis of maintaining peace and security, not necessarily in
accordance with justice. Again, his attitude is puzzling. He wanted the United Nations both to maintain peace and promote justice, although these two goals might not always be compatible. He placed American welfare first and still suspected that the veto power—power which the United States could also use—was an unwise feature of the Charter. He somewhat weakened his position on this score, however, by concluding that the United States could use the veto power to enforce ideas of justice which had not been written into the Charter.

Overcoming the doubts he entertained about the United Nations, Taft voted in favor of American participation.

He was concerned about other developments in foreign affairs as the war drew to a close. He pointed out that the peace program which he had deemed essential to the success of a world organization was not being established. Great Britain needed to be urged to follow a more liberal policy in the Far East. Finland was being forced to transfer large blocks of territory to Russia, and Taft commented that "our Government has not raised its voice at all in behalf of the freedom of Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania." He was especially critical that Roosevelt was not restraining Stalin and scornfully remarked:
it is clear that our policy is based on the delightful theory that Mr. Stalin in the end will turn out to have an angelic nature and do of his own accord those things which we should have insisted upon at the beginning before supplying $4,000,000,000 worth of lend-lease supplies. 60

As he had before the war, Taft regarded the communist menace as the greatest threat to the United States.

He also was worried that the United States, dominated by "New Deal philosophy" was preparing to undertake the task of "ruling the world." 61 The occupation plans for Germany seemed very much like the development of an alliance to him, and he began to fear that a world of force dominated by a three- or four-power alliance was developing. 62 To accept the idea that the American people had a duty to help police the world, even in the interest of maintaining freedom and democracy, was not any more possible for Taft in 1945 than the idea of a crusading war had been in 1939. To accept such a foreign policy idea would also mean accepting a crushing economic burden and universal military training—two ideas completely incompatible with his political philosophy.

He was equally concerned about developments in the field of world economics as the war drew to a close. He had insisted upon the need to eliminate economic sore spots from the world, but he began to suspect that the Roosevelt administration's solution was "that American money and American charity shall solve every problem." 63
On this basis, he criticized and voted against the Bretton Woods Agreement and setting up an International Monetary Fund and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.64

He did not envision or approve of any long-range economic aid to foreign countries after the war. Not an unkind man, he realized the need to help the war-torn nations of Europe to rebuild. However, he believed that long-range economic aid to foreign countries would delay the time when these nations might be able to support themselves; such a plan would also involve a spending policy on the part of the United States which would be such a burden that it would "undermine the moral character" of America.65 He estimated that postwar assistance might be held to "five or six billion dollars during the next two or three years,"66 and complained about Roosevelt's policy:

the real difficulty in Washington is the philosophy of spending which dominates our Government. The only policy we can see clearly is one of loaning money, directly and indirectly... with the idea that it will create a tremendous demand for our exportable goods.67

Using much the same arguments, Taft also opposed widening the authority of the President to negotiate reciprocal trade agreements. He replied to the idea that lowering tariffs built up a demand for American exports
by replying that withdrawing protection from one American industry and ruining it in order to negotiate a trade agreement which would benefit another American businessman was both foolish and illogical. 68

Many of Taft's statements during the war years had a tendency to earn him the reputation of being totally unconcerned about the rest of the world. In fairness, the facts are that during these same years he also spoke of the need to supply food and essentials to the small democracies of Europe, deplored the fate of the east Europeans under Russian domination, and waged a fight to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. 69 He was not cold and unkind; he merely clung to his philosophy of economy to the point that offering the amount from American bounty that others wished to offer in order to sell democracy was unthinkable to him. He disagreed with the idea of "selling" democracy, in any event. As has been indicated, he warned that the United States could not afford to accept the task of imposing democracy on the rest of the world, either through force or through a policy of spending.

In reviewing Taft's position during the war years, his policies can be summarized as follows. He abandoned his ideas of the pre-war years to the extent of accepting the participation of the United States in a world
organization. Retaining his fear of communism and having some reservations about the United Nations as finally established, he continued to demand that the United States remain strong defensively. To many fervent internationals, Taft seemed essentially still a conservative in that he voted against reciprocal trade, the Bretton Woods Agreement, and opposed long-range economic aid to foreign countries. He continued to look with disfavor upon any prior commitment to a military alliance. He also argued against crusading for democracy either through war, an alliance system, economic aid, or a world organization, just as he had refused to accept the idea of crusading for the four freedoms before American entry into World War II.

In the midst of his acceptance of moderate internationalism, the basic core of his faith remained strong. Foreign policy remained to him merely the tool to preserve American liberty and traditions. His foreign policy opinions between 1942 and 1945 were the predictable expression of this belief, just as his isolationism had been the predictable result of such a belief before Pearl Harbor.
NOTES


18 Ibid., Part 10, Appendix 2267-2268.
19 Ibid., Part 9, Appendix 33.
21 Ibid., 5622.
23 Ibid., Part 8, 10178, 10218.
24 Ibid., Part 9, Appendix 34.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 11.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
34 Ibid., Appendix 1808; Part 8, Appendix 265.
38 Ibid.


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 3784, 3785.

47 Ibid., 3785.


50 Ibid.


52 Ibid.


56 Ibid., Part 6, 8153.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.; Professor Armstrong also stresses this point.
60 Ibid., Appendix 2900.
61 Ibid., Part 9, Appendix 2293.
62 Ibid.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As a young man, Senator Taft approved of the League of Nations; as a senator before World War II, he retreated to isolationism and opposed any aid to the Allies which might involve the United States in war with the Axis powers; during World War II, as a Republican leader he endorsed the plan for a world organization to keep the peace. This shift of position from a moderate internationalism to one of isolation to one of internationalism might seem to be inconsistent. Actually, throughout his life he remained steadfast to certain fundamental beliefs. His changes of policy were merely reflections of his views about how these beliefs could best be implemented at different times in American history.

Most important of the fundamental principles upon which he built his concept of American foreign policy was the conviction that nothing must be allowed to destroy the "American way of life." Nothing must be permitted to undermine traditional American democracy, which he believed to include such features as free enterprise,
economy in government, individual liberty, and local self-government.

Modern war would require large expenditures. Modern war would increase the powers of the federal government, especially the executive branch. Modern war would mean the conscription of property and men and regulations in the form of price controls, wage controls, and arbitrary demands by the government. Therefore, although he was able to sympathize with the British before World War II, he was also able to stand firm against more than token aid because he did not believe that the Nazi menace directly threatened the United States. There could be no justification for risking a war which would destroy the American way of life. To this principle there was no exception.

The idea of a league of nations was acceptable to Taft during World War II because he dared to hope that such an organization, if built upon the firm foundation of law and justice, might be of aid in helping the United States to avoid the scourge of war—a war to be avoided at any cost of consistency. He realized, as all Americans were forced to do, that modern technology made the policy of the "free hand" outdated. But he would never accept the idea that this world organization would interfere in any way with the internal affairs of the United
States nor would he ever countenance the idea that in such an organization the United States should undertake the responsibility of policing the world.

Although he detested militarism and large-scale government expenditures, he was wary enough of developments during and before the war to insist that the United States must also be strong enough to defend itself against attack. He was firmly convinced that the country could do so—alone, if necessary. Therefore, he was forced to compromise his hatred of militarism and government spending to permit the building of an effective army and navy and air force. To mitigate the bad features of an army, he hoped before World War II that, instead of compulsory selective service, a voluntary enlistment program might suffice. He approved of a large air force and navy as being best able to defend the country without the corresponding need for interference in American lives and with the expenditure of the least amount consistent with security.¹

A third fundamental belief was a negative one. He recognized that the United States should guard against the Nazi and Communist threats to her liberty, but he preached that the rest of the world should be free to accept its own ideologies. The United States must not embark upon a crusade, nor did the country have the responsibility to spread democracy throughout the world. To do so would
require the large expenditures which he deplored and would also perhaps involve the United States in war. He was not unsympathetic to other nations and their plight. He favored giving aid to small democracies before and during World War II; he approved moderate aid to the English before World War II; he campaigned for a Palestine homeland for the Jews; he would vote for limited aid to help reconstruct Europe after the war. Yet there were strict limits to what the United States should undertake, in his view. Never must the country endanger its own safety or economic welfare.

He contended, with some truth, that he had never been an isolationist. If isolationism is defined as remaining completely aloof from the world, his contention is correct. He was always willing to include the Western Hemisphere in the scope of American defense. He commented favorably on collective security throughout the pre-war years, although always remarking that the American people had rejected it in 1920.² He approved of some aid to Europe. Just as he became a moderate internationalist during World War II, he had been a moderate isolationist before the war.

Taft's foreign policy views were a drawback to him in his political career. His isolationism and the fact that he seemed to have underestimated the Nazi and Japanese threat before World War II made him unpopular.
To his credit, this man who desperately wanted to be President was not willing to compromise his beliefs in order to take the popular stance.

In foreign policy, Robert A. Taft was guided by what he conceived to be the national interest. He could never accept the argument that any ideal or any nation's predicament was more important than protecting the United States and its traditional values.
NOTES

1 This point is also a major conclusion in William S. White's *The Taft Story*. Mr. White also believes that Taft hated a large army because he had never been drafted or been allowed to serve in the army; Taft disliked having to ask a young man to do what he had never had to do.

2 In a speech called "Let Us Stay Out of the War," delivered in 1939, for example, Taft remarks that there is something to be said for collective security such as was proposed in the League of Nations, but when the American people rejected the League they also affirmed their belief that the traditional American policy of neutrality should be followed.
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