

WALTER LIPPMANN (1889- ) has been for a half century one of the nation's most respected writers on public affairs. A close student of foreign affairs, more than half of his score of books deal with that subject. His article in *Life* was the first to advance the thesis that the United States entered World War I to protect its security. Because he wrote this article in spring 1941, when the threat to the country's physical security clearly was important in American policy formulation, Lippmann's critics have accused him of "present-mindedness"—attributing to an earlier generation the concerns of a later one. Is Lippmann's argument merely after-the-fact reasoning, or does he support his thesis with evidence?\*



## Security, Not Sentiment

For the second time in 25 years the American people have intervened in a war towards which they had meant to be neutral. Their second intervention has come much more quickly than did their first one. In February 1917, when the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, the Allies and the Central Powers had been fighting for 30 months; in February 1941, when Congress began to enact the Lend-Lease Bill, the war had been going on only 17 months. Yet, though the second intervention has come so much more quickly, extraordinary measures had been taken to insure American neutrality. Congress had spent years investigating the sup-

posed causes of the first intervention. In 1935 and in 1936 Congress had voted and the President had signed elaborate laws designed to remove the causes which, it was believed, had brought about the intervention of 1917.

Nevertheless, after a full debate in Congress and throughout the country, neutrality has been abandoned for the second time and the United States has again intervened. We have to ask ourselves why this has happened. We must have an explanation which really does explain not only *why* we have intervened in *both* wars but *why* in each case we have intervened *when* we did intervene.

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\* Walter Lippmann, "The Atlantic and America," *Life*, April 7, 1941, pp. 85-92. Reprinted by permission of the author.

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Thus it is not an explanation to say that intervention is due to bankers, munitions makers and capitalists. For while in 1917 the bankers had made loans to the Allies, in 1941 the bankers have made no loans to the Allies. In 1917 there was a great private munitions industry, and it has been said the munitions makers feared that if the Allies lost, they would be unable to keep on selling the munitions that their expanded factories were geared to produce. But in 1941 we find that American munitions makers have more American orders than they can fill and that far from having too much capacity, they have not nearly enough for our own needs alone; if Britain lost, the United States would not only continue with every British contract but would surely vastly increase its own orders as well.

Nor is it an explanation to say that we intervened the first time because Germany torpedoed our ships. For in this second war we have carefully kept our ships out of reach of the German torpedoes. Nor that we became entangled the first time because we failed to uphold our neutral rights equally against Britain and Germany. For in the second war we surrendered equally our neutral rights against Germany and Britain.

Nor is it an explanation to say that in 1917 American policy was determined by hatred of the Kaiser and Prussianism and in 1941 by hatred of Hitler and Nazism. For 30 months before we intervened in February 1917 the Kaiser was the same Kaiser. For the 17 months of this war Hitler has been the same Hitler. Nor is it an explanation to say that our action is determined by sentiment. For in the first World War, though Germany had violated Belgium, we did not intervene for 30 months, and in this war, though

Germany had violated Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, we still believed that we would not intervene. Nor is it an explanation to say that our actions then or now have been determined by sympathy for the oppressed. For in the first World War Germany of the Hohenzollerns was a far more liberal state than was Czarist Russia, and it was by Russia, not by Germany, that Jews and Poles were persecuted. Nor is it an explanation to say that the first time we were incited by Wilson to a crusade to make the world safe for democracy and this time by Roosevelt to a crusade to establish freedom "everywhere." For in the first war we never thought of crusading against the Russian tyranny and this time we have stood aloof from the Soviet tyranny for over 20 years, from the Fascist for nearly 20 years, from the Nazi for eight years.

None of these reasons, nor all of them together, will explain what we have to explain: why, intending to be neutral in 1914, we intervened in 1917; why, intending to be neutral in 1939, we have intervened in 1941. If we are to find the exact and genuine reason, we must explain these precise dates; if we can find the reasons which explain why in both instances we intervened *when* we intervened, we shall be justified in thinking that we know what we did in 1917 and what we are doing in 1941. And if we know that, if we really understand the two interventions, we shall, I believe, see clearly why and how we went so wrong the first time that we now have to do the work all over again a second time.

We shall find the answer, I believe, in the fact that we intervened the first time when, and only when, a victorious Germany was threatening to conquer

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Britain and to become the master of the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean; that we are intervening a second time at a similar point in the war and for exactly the same fundamental reason.

Then as now, as long as the German aggression was confined within Central and Eastern Europe, the war was from the American point of view merely a European war. It was a war which, though American sympathies were aroused, did not engage the vital interests of the United States. But then, as now again, when the German aggression broke through the western defenses of Europe and invaded the Atlantic Ocean, its shores and its waters, the defenses of the United States were threatened and the American people felt that their vital interests were engaged.

In the first World War it took Germany many somewhat more than two years to knock out Russia, to overrun the Balkans with the exception of Greece, to deal with Italy, and to bring France to a point where a military disaster and an internal collapse were an imminent possibility. In the winter of 1917 by its victories in the East the German army had won a free hand for an all-out assault in the West. Had that assault succeeded, it would have knocked out France and destroyed the British army. This would have given to Germany the French channel ports, and at this same period in the first war the German submarine fleet was ready, as now once more it is ready, for an attack which threatened to blockade the British Isles and to starve them into surrender.

In the second World War it took Hitler a little less than one year to reach a point in the West of Europe where he has very nearly achieved what the Kaiser was threatening to achieve

in 1916-1917. The first American intervention came when the Kaiser looked as if he might conquer Great Britain and establish himself as our nearest neighbor on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. It was to prevent this from happening, it was when America saw that this might happen, that America intervened the first time. In this second World War, the movement was much faster, the outlook has seemed more desperate. But again we began to intervene when, and only when, the British control of the Atlantic was threatened; and we have decided for an all-out support of Britain when, and only when, it had been demonstrated by the strength of the British resistance that with sufficient American aid the Atlantic Ocean could be defended by the British.

In all sorts of ways the political, the strategical and the tactical conditions of the two wars are very different. But from the American point of view they have been alike in one fundamental and controlling respect: when it was seen that Britain could not hold the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean without American help, America intervened. That is the reason why in the first war we intervened in 1917 and not in 1915 or 1916. That is why in the second war we have intervened in 1941 and not in 1939.

Though some among us deny it, though many do not clearly realize it, the great majority of Americans know by instinct and by reason that the control of the Atlantic Ocean is vital to the defense of the United States and of the whole Western Hemisphere. They know that for their physical security, for the continuation of the free way of life, it is necessary that the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean should be held by

first American interest the Kaiser looked as for Great Britain and her nearest neighbor of the Atlantic Ocean. This was from happening. We saw that this might have intervened the first time World War, the outlook was brighter. But again we saw when, and only when, the Atlantic was to have decided for an American when, and when it had been demonstrated the British resistance to American aid the Atlantic would be defended by the

Atlantic. It says the political, the tactical conditions of the war were very different. But from a point of view they were one fundamental and when it was seen that the Atlantic would hold the other shore in without American aid. That is the reason we intervened in 1915 or 1916. That is why we have intervened in 1939.

Among us deny it, but clearly realize it, that the Americans know the reason that the control of the Atlantic is vital to the defense of the United States and of the Western Hemisphere. They know that the Atlantic is a free way of life, it is the other shore of the Atlantic that would be held by

### Security, Not Sentiment

friendly and trustworthy powers. The moment it looked as if Britain might fall with France, the Congress voted almost unanimously to build another navy; no one was so pacifist, so isolationist, so little "hysterical" but that he thought that Britain's fall would require us to build the greatest naval defense in all history.

For beneath all the argument we all know that if the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean is controlled by an expanding, a conquering and an untrustworthy power, a terrible struggle to decide the mastery of the Atlantic Ocean is in the end inevitable, and that during this struggle neither the United States nor any other American republic can have peace and security.

To the generation who are too young to have known the first World War except through the cynical histories that were written after that war, it must sound strange to hear that in 1917 as in 1941 the determining cause of the American intervention was the need to defend America by preventing the conquest of the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean. They have been told about the idealism of Wilson and the hysteria of the war propaganda, and they will find it hard to believe that we intervened in 1917 as we are intervening in 1941 to support the strategic defense of the Western Hemisphere.

Yet, believe it or not, this strategic necessity was the determining cause then as now. The military and diplomatic advisers of President Wilson knew then and were moved then by the same essential estimate of America's vital interests as are Secretaries Hull, Stimson, and Knox, the advisers of President Roosevelt. If today most of us do not realize what caused the decision of 1917, the main

reason is that we have been misled about the first World War by Wilson's speeches and by historians who have never understood the war, and by politicians and propagandists who did not wish to understand it.

Yet it is the fact that we intervened in 1917 in order to defend America by aiding the Allies to defend the Atlantic Ocean against an untrustworthy and powerful conqueror. This can be proved. As proof I venture to submit excerpts from some articles which were published in February 1917 by the editors of the *New Republic*. They may be used as evidence because the journalists who wrote them had made it their business to know what was in the minds of President Wilson and of his Administration.

One of these articles, published February 17, 1917, is called "The Defense of the Atlantic World" and it states that "if the Allied fleet were in danger of destruction, if Germany had a chance of securing command of the seas, our navy ought to be joined to the British in order to prevent it. The safety of the Atlantic highway is something for which America should fight. Why? Because on the two shores of the Atlantic Ocean there has grown up a profound web of interest which joins together the western world. Britain, France, Italy, even Spain, Belgium, Holland, the Scandinavian nations, and Pan America are in the main one community in their deepest needs and their deepest purposes. They have a common interest in the ocean which unites them. They are today more inextricably bound together than most even as yet realize. But if that community were destroyed we should know what we had lost. We should understand then the meaning of the unfortified Canadian

frontier, of the common protection given Latin-America by the British and American fleets.

"It is the crime of Germany that she is trying to make hideous the highways by which the Atlantic Powers live. That is what has raised us against her in this war. . . . When she carried this war to the Atlantic by violating Belgium, by invading France, by striking against Britain, and by attempting to disrupt us, neutrality of spirit or action was out of the question. And now that she is seeking to cut the vital highways of our world we can no longer stand by. . . . A victory on the high seas would be a triumph of that class which aims to make Germany the leader of the East against the West, the leader ultimately of a German-Russian-Japanese coalition against the Atlantic world."

Let the reader remember that this was written 24 years ago. Let him remember that Russia and Japan were then still the allies of Britain and France. In the light of this prophecy as to the combination which a victorious Germany would create, let him remember what has in fact happened in respect to Germany, Japan and Russia in this war. Let him then ask himself whether the men of Wilson's generation were the deluded, starry-eyed, hysterical fools that our cynical historians have taught us to think they were.

For 20 years after the Allied victory had averted the danger which Wilson foresaw, it was very easy indeed to sneer at Woodrow Wilson's demand that the world must be made safe for democracy, and sneering at it, not to understand that he saw then, as we see now, what a victory of German militarism over the sea power of the West would mean. It has taken this country 25 years to realize again what Wilson and his advisers saw

then, that "with Germany established in the position of mistress of the seas, our trade would encounter closed doors on every hand. . . . The sooner we should cancel the Monroe Doctrine the safer for us. The passing of the power of England would be calamitous to the American national interest. It is as much our concern that England should not be beaten into surrender as it was England's concern that Belgium should not be brutally trampled under. . . . (America) will be morally and politically isolated. . . . As a consequence of its isolation it will become alarmed as never before. In its fear it will arm until its territory is spotted with camps and its shores bristle with guns and battleships. . . ."

There was plenty of emotion, and even of hysteria, in 1917. But beneath it was a reasoned and statesmanlike judgment of what was vital to the defense of America, and it was this reasoning, and not the emotion and the hysteria, that moved President Wilson, the most determined pacifist that has occupied the White House since Thomas Jefferson. He did not invent this conviction of what is vital to America. The knowledge that the survival of Britain is necessary to the sure defense of America is as old as the American republic itself. Whenever Britain's survival against a continental conqueror has been in doubt, American statesmen have realized that a fundamental American interest was at stake.

Alexander Hamilton knew it in 1797 when Napoleon began his conquest of Europe: "Twere therefore contrary," he wrote, "to our true interest to assist in building up this colossus to the enormous size at which she aims. Twere a policy as short-sighted as mean to seek safety in a subservency to her view as the

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victorious, it did not know how to pre-serve what had been won at such cost of blood and treasure. We lost the peace because we did not really remember

why we had gone to war, and we shall lose this peace as well if we do not fully understand that twice we have had to intervene in Europe in order to save the British-American control of the Atlantic Ocean.

At the end of the first World War our Atlantic world had been made so safe for democracy that both here and in Great Britain the people and their politicians thought there was no need to do anything more to keep it safe for democracy. The German navy had been captured and had then scuttled itself at Scapa Flow. There were left in the Atlantic only the two great navies of Britain and the United States. The French, the Italian, and the Japanese navies were allied with the British. The English-speaking people had mastered the threat which in 1917 had compelled the United States to intervene.

Then almost immediately the English-speaking peoples, the British and ourselves, proceeded to undo what they had sacrificed so much to achieve. The British government insisted upon for herself, and assented, so far as France was concerned, to a settlement with Germany which violated the solemn contract made by President Wilson in the Armistice. The United States, partly in disgust and partly in weariness and ignorance, made a separate peace with Germany. The unworkable financial penalties imposed by the British upon Germany were matched in the United States by an unworkable debt settlement and by a tariff policy which made a sound reconstruction impossible.

price of her clemency. This at best would be but a temporary respite from the rod."

Thomas Jefferson knew it and in 1803, when Napoleon was threatening to invade England, he said: "We see with great concern the position in which Great Britain is placed, and should be sincerely afflicted were any disaster to deprive mankind of the benefit of such a bulwark against the torrent which has for some time been bearing down all before it."

We forgot these truths in the long century from 1814 to 1914 when British sea power stood unchallenged. But when it was challenged again in 1917 and 1941, Wilson and Roosevelt responded with the same fundamental conviction of American interest as had Hamilton and Jefferson before them. For the security of the Atlantic Ocean is and always has been the most fundamental American interest and those who think this idea was invented by propagandists simply do not know American history.

But now that we are compelled for the second time in one generation to defend this vital American interest, it is indispensable that we should understand this vital interest. For the reason we have to defend it again, having won a decisive victory in 1918, is that Wilson in his public addresses became so fascinated by his vision of the future peace that he neglected to explain why America had intervened in the war. He talked of American ideals to the exclusion of American interests and thus led the country to regard as a philanthropic crusade what was in fact a defensive intervention for the preservation of American security.

Thus the nation was prevented from understanding why it had done what it did, and therefore, when the nation was

The two English-speaking peoples, after they had joined together to defend their common security, broke apart. They refused to collaborate in making a tolerable peace. They refused to collaborate in revising the peace in order to make it tolerable. Each went his own separate way to the disaster which in 1928 wrecked the post-war economy. And both were so overcome by materialism and lazy shortsightedness that they let their alliances crumble and their own defenses—their own naval power—be grossly neglected.

Having separated politically, the English-speaking peoples—inspired by the good intentions which are the pavement of hell—proceeded in the name of disarmament to take the following measures:

1. The United States insisted on the rupture of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the isolation of Japan. This was accompanied by a policy of opposing Japanese expansion on the one hand and of dismantling our naval power on the other hand. Thus we created the situation in which the English-speaking peoples, without supreme naval power, became aligned against an isolated but expanding Japan. Instead of remaining joined with the British so that jointly we could come to terms with Japan, or jointly could oppose Japan, we separated ourselves from the British and forced them to separate themselves from Japan.

2. Insisting upon the reduction of the British and the American navies, we pushed the British into insisting, in order to maintain their relative superiority in Europe, upon a limitation of the French navy in relation to the Italian. This planted the seeds of that Anglo-French naval rivalry which produced its hideous fruits in the battle of Oran and in the menacing attitude of Admiral Darlan.

3. Throughout the 1920's the British, under the governments of MacDonald and Baldwin, ourselves in the administrations of Harding, Coolidge and Hoover, allowed our separate navies to languish. When the post-war settlement collapsed in 1929, neither country realized that a new era of world-wide disturbance had begun, and even when the disturbance produced the Nazi revolution, neither country understood how necessary it was to rebuild at once the power on which their ultimate security depends.

Thus, it was separatism, isolationism, disarmament, a blind pacifism and a mean cynicism, which in the 20 years from the Armistice to the outbreak of war reduced the English-speaking nations from a position of invincible security to that of the desperate defense. This disintegration of Anglo-American power was the real cause of our failure to preserve the security which our first intervention achieved. It is the real cause of our having to intervene again: we are not, as some argue, repeating the error of 1917. For the defense of the security of the Atlantic world is an inexorable necessity. We are repairing the error of 1919-1920 when, having won security, we separated from Britain and thereby destroyed the means by which security had been won, by which security could alone be maintained.

This, and not the mistakes and injustices of the peace treaties, is the real reason why we are where we are today. For though the Versailles treaties were in many respect unjust, unworkable, and even dishonorable, a peaceable revision was entirely possible. By 1932, on the eve of Hitler's rise to power, German soil had already been liberated and the reparations penalties abandoned. Other revisions, even territorial revisions, were

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not excluded. What was lacking was power—strong enough to suppress a possible rebellion against the process of peaceable revision and adjustment and strong enough to be unafraid and, therefore, magnanimous in conciliating the vanquished.

The disintegration of the power of the English-speaking peoples destroyed the guaranties of law and order which had been created in 1918. The disintegration destroyed the will to reform the peace settlement and the capacity to enforce decisions in the post-war era. Separatism, isolationism, disarmament, pacifism and cynicism produced anarchy. They are the constituents of anarchy—of an anarchy which produced rivalry where there was need of unity, the demagogic fears of politicians where there was need of statesmanship, weakness where there had once been unchallenged power, and faint hearts where resolution was necessary. The victorious democracies of 1918 would not hang together, and so a great many of them today have already been hanged separately.

This is what has ruined the world that in 1918 we had made safe for democracy. In the 20 years between the two wars we threw away the sword and the shield which had made us victorious and secure. We forgot why we had fought. We no longer knew how we had won. We sneered at the faith that had saved us once and must be humbly reconstituted if we are to be saved again.

When we have understood why we intervened the first time, how we failed to maintain our victory, and why we are compelled to intervene again, there will be no mystery as to what must be the war aims of the English-speaking peoples or what must be the plan of the next peace. We intervened the first time in

order to preserve for the English-speaking peoples the command of the Atlantic Ocean: for a century the nations, from Scandinavia to the Argentine, which face the Atlantic Ocean have had an unparalleled opportunity to develop in freedom. Under the protection of sea power in the hands of free governments the shores and the waters of the Atlantic have been the geographical center of human liberty. We lost the peace because we let the protecting and regulating sea power of the English-speaking peoples disintegrate. We are compelled to intervene a second time in order to stop this disintegration from producing an irremediable catastrophe.

The basic war aim of the English-speaking peoples must, therefore, be to vindicate their sea power against the assault which is launched against it. Had they preserved the collaboration which won the other war, had they maintained their joint power, the assault would probably never have been launched. Had they been more nearly ready to resist when the attack was launched, they would have defended the Atlantic world on the Rhine and not, as today, over England and Scotland and Wales and in the ocean from Ireland to Brazil. What war aim can they have except to repel and defeat the assault, to raise up again the French, the Belgians, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Czechs who stood in the first line of their defense, and then to achieve an armistice in which the free peoples—led and supported by the British and the Americans—will again be free to shape the future of the world?

And what can be our basic aim in the peace settlement except to establish firmly this time what we should never have lost the last time: a firm, enduring partnership in world affairs among the English-speaking peoples. . . .