

How did isolationism shape American foreign policy in the 1930s?

The First World War left a dangerous and deadly legacy. The victors — especially Britain, France, and the United States — sought to avoid future wars at almost any cost. The defeated nation, Germany, aspired to avenge its losses by renewed war. Italy and Japan felt humiliated by the Versailles peace settlement and believed war would increase their global power. Japan invaded the northern Chinese province of Manchuria in 1931, with ambitions to expand throughout Asia. Italy, led by the fascist Benito Mussolini since 1922, hungered for an empire in Africa. In Germany, National Socialist Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933, the first step in his quest to dominate Europe and the world. These aggressive, militaristic, antidemocratic governments seemed a smaller threat to most people in the United States during the 1930s than the economic crisis at home. Shielded from external threats by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, Americans hoped to avoid entanglement in foreign disputes and to concentrate on climbing out of the Great Depression.

Roosevelt and Reluctant Isolation

Like most Americans during the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt believed that the nation's highest priority was to attack the domestic causes and consequences of the depression. But unlike most Americans, Roosevelt had long believed the United States should actively engage in international relations.

The depression forced Roosevelt to retreat from his previous internationalism. He came to believe that foreign affairs threatened to divert resources and political support from New Deal efforts to promote domestic recovery. Once in office, Roosevelt sought to combine domestic economic recovery with a low-profile foreign policy that encouraged free trade and disarmament.

Roosevelt's pursuit of international cooperation was hindered by economic circumstances and American popular opinion. After an opinion poll demonstrated popular support for recognizing the Soviet Union — an international outcast since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 — Roosevelt established formal diplomatic relations in 1933. But when the League of Nations condemned Japanese and German aggression, Roosevelt did not support the league's attempts to keep the peace. He feared isolationists would withdraw support for New Deal measures in Congress. America watched from the sidelines when Japan withdrew from the league and ignored the limitations on its navy imposed after

World War I. The United States also looked the other way when Hitler rearmed Germany and recalled its representative to the league in 1933. Roosevelt worried that German and Japanese actions threatened world peace, but he told Americans that the nation would not “use its armed forces for the settlement of any [international] dispute anywhere.”

The Good Neighbor Policy

In 1933, Roosevelt announced that the United States would pursue “the policy of the good neighbor” in international relations. This policy declared that no nation had the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another. Roosevelt emphasized that the good neighbor policy applied specifically to Latin America, where U.S. military forces had often intervened. The policy did not indicate a U.S. retreat from empire in Latin America, though. Instead, it declared that, unlike in the past, the United States’ influence in the region would not depend on military force.

Roosevelt refrained from sending troops to defend the interests of American corporations when Mexico nationalized American oil properties and revolutions boiled over in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Cuba during the 1930s. In 1934, Roosevelt withdrew American Marines from Haiti, where they had been stationed since 1916. Roosevelt’s

hands-off policy honored the principle of national self-determination, but it also permitted the rise of dictators in Nicaragua, Cuba, and elsewhere who exploited and terrorized their nations with private support from U.S. businesses.

Military nonintervention also did not prevent the United States from exerting its economic influence in Latin America. In 1934, Congress gave the president the power to reduce tariffs on goods imported into the United States from nations that agreed to lower their own tariffs on U.S. goods. By 1940, twenty-two nations had agreed to such reciprocal tariff reductions, helping to double U.S. exports to Latin America, a policy that planted seeds of friendship and hemispheric solidarity while contributing to the New Deal's goal of boosting the domestic economy through free trade.

The Price of Isolation

In Europe, fascist governments in Italy and Germany threatened military aggression. Britain and France made only verbal protests. Encouraged, Hitler plotted to recapture territories with German inhabitants, all the while accusing Jews of polluting the purity of the Aryan master race. The wild-eyed anti-Semitism of Hitler and the Nazi Party unified non-Jewish Germans and attracted sympathizers among many other Europeans, even in France and Britain.

In Japan, a militaristic government planned to follow the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 with conquests extending throughout Southeast Asia. The Manchurian invasion bogged down in a long and vicious war when Chinese Nationalists rallied around their leader, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), to fight against the Japanese. Preparations for new Japanese conquests continued, however. In 1936, Japan openly violated naval limitation treaties and began to build a battle-ready fleet to seek naval superiority in the Pacific.

In the United States, the hostilities in Asia and Europe reinforced isolationist sentiments. Popular disillusionment with the failure of Woodrow Wilson's idealistic goals caused many Americans to question the nation's participation in World War I. In 1933, Gerald Nye, a Republican from North Dakota, chaired a Senate committee that declared greedy "merchants of death" — American weapons makers, bankers, and financiers had dragged the nation into the war to line their own pockets. International tensions and the Nye committee report prompted Congress to pass a series of [neutrality acts](#) between 1935 and 1937 designed to keep the nation out of foreign wars. The neutrality acts prohibited making loans and selling weapons to nations at war.

By 1937, the growing conflicts overseas caused some Americans to call for a total embargo on all trade with warring countries. The Neutrality Act of 1937 imposed a

“cash-and-carry” policy that required nations at war to pay cash for nonmilitary goods and to transport them in their own ships. This policy benefited the nation’s economy, but it also helped foreign aggressors by supplying them with goods and thereby undermining peace.

The desire for peace in France, Britain, and the United States led Germany, Italy, and Japan to launch military offensives because they believed that Western democracies lacked the will to oppose them. In March 1936, Nazi troops marched into the industry-rich Rhineland on Germany’s western border, a blatant violation of the Versailles peace treaty. A month later, Italian armies completed their conquest of Ethiopia, projecting fascist power into Africa. In December 1937, Japanese invaders captured Nanjing (Nanking) and celebrated their triumph in the “Rape of Nanking,” a deadly rampage that killed two hundred thousand Chinese civilians.

In Spain, a bitter civil war broke out in July 1936 when the Nationalists — who were fascist rebels led by General Francisco Franco — attacked the democratically elected Republicans — who were called Loyalists. Both Germany and Italy reinforced Franco, while the Soviet Union provided much less aid to the Republican Loyalists. The Loyalists did not receive help from European democracies or the U.S. government. But more than three thousand individual

Americans fought alongside Republican Loyalists in the Russian-sponsored Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Abandoned by the Western democracies, the Republican Loyalists were defeated in 1939, and Franco built a fascist bulwark in Spain.

Hostilities in Europe, Africa, and Asia alarmed Roosevelt and some Americans. The president sought to persuade most Americans to moderate their isolationism and find a way to support the victims of fascist aggression. He warned that an “epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading” and pointed out that “mere isolation or neutrality” offered no remedy. The popularity of isolationist sentiment caused Roosevelt to remark, “It’s a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead and find no one there.” Roosevelt knew he needed to maneuver carefully to help prevent fascist aggressors from conquering Europe and Asia, which would leave the United States an isolated island of democracy.

REVIEW

Why did isolationism during the 1930s concern Roosevelt?

How did war in Europe and Asia influence U.S. foreign policy?

Between 1939 and 1941, fascist victories overseas slowly eroded American isolationism. At first, U.S. involvement in the war was limited to providing material support to Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, the principal enemies of Germany and Japan. But Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor caused the nation to declare war and mobilize for an all-out assault on its European and Asian enemies.

Nazi Aggression and War in Europe

Under the spell of isolationism, Americans watched Hitler's campaign to dominate Europe ([Map 25.1](#)). In 1938, Hitler incorporated Austria into Germany and turned his attention to the Sudetenland, which had been granted to Czechoslovakia by the World War I peace settlement. Hoping to avoid war, British prime minister Neville Chamberlain offered Hitler terms of appeasement that would give the Sudetenland to Germany if Hitler agreed to leave the rest of Czechoslovakia alone. Hitler accepted the terms but did not keep his promise.



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MAP 25.1 Axis Aggression through 1941

Through a series of surprise strikes before 1942, Mussolini sought to re-create the Roman empire in the Mediterranean while Hitler aimed to annex

Austria and reclaim German territories occupied by France after World War I. World War II broke out when the German dictator attacked Poland.

Description

"The map shows the Axis powers, Allied powers, Neutral nations, extent of Axis control in December 1941, limit of German advances in December 1941, and the course of Italian and German aggression as follows:

The Allied powers highlighted on the map include Great Britain; Northern Ireland; the eastern part of Soviet Union including Leningrad and Moscow; Iraq; Syria (French); Lebanon (French); Transjordan (Britain); Palestine (Britain); Egypt; and Iceland while the Axis Powers shown on the map include Germany; East Prussia; Italy including Sicily and Sardinia; and Libya (Italy).

The extent of Axis control, December, 1941 covered France; Belgium; Netherlands; Denmark; Norway; Finland; Estonia; Latvia Lithuania; Poland; Czechoslovakia; Austria; Hungary; Yugoslavia; Romania; Bulgaria; Greece; Soviet Union extending from Sevastopol in the south across Ukraine to the south of Leningrad; Morocco (France); Spanish Morocco; Algeria (Vichy France); Tunisia (Vichy France); Corsica; and Crete. The Neutral nations comprised of Spain (fall of the Spanish Republic, March 1939); Portugal; Switzerland; Ireland; Sweden; Turkey; and Saudi Arabia.

The Axis powers Germany, East Prussia (Germany), and Italy set forth on offensives from 1936 through 1941 predominantly to strengthen their control of Europe. In March 1936, the German forces marched to Rhineland in Western Germany. In 1938, they moved eastward to Austria in March and to Sudetenland in September followed by their attack on Czechoslovakia later in March 1939 and on Warsaw, Poland in September 1939. From East Prussia, Germany invaded Latvia in March 1939. 1940 had German forces push through Ardennes in France to Dunkirk, Paris and eastern France to Vichy besides their advancement on Luxembourg, Belgium, and further north. Germany invaded Norway

through the North Sea and headed to Finland from where they attacked Estonia. The German invasion of Denmark and Norway also took place via a different sea route in 1940, while on the west they also advanced to London in Britain. The advancements widened throughout Europe in 1941 as they headed from Lithuania to Leningrad; from Poland to the Soviet Union and Ukraine; from Romania along the southern region of Ukraine to the east; from Austria to Yugoslavia; and from Bulgaria to Greece. The limit of German advances extended until Vichy France in Western Europe; from Leningrad southward along Moscow to Ukraine in Eastern Europe; and Bulgaria-Turkey border on the southeast. On the other hand, Italy made advances to Ethiopia navigating the Mediterranean Sea in 1935 and to Albania via the Adriatic Sea in 1939. The Maginot Line ran from the Swiss-French border on the south and to Saar on the north.”

By 1939, Hitler had annexed Czechoslovakia and demanded that Poland return the German territory it had gained after World War I. Recognizing that [appeasement](#) of Hitler had failed, Britain and France promised Poland that they would go to war with Germany if Hitler attacked. In turn, Hitler tried to prevent the Soviet Union from joining Britain and France in support of Poland. Despite the enduring hatred between fascist Germany and the Communist Soviet Union, the two nations signed the Nazi-Soviet treaty of nonaggression in August 1939, exposing Poland to an onslaught by both the German and Soviet armies.

At dawn on September 1, 1939, Hitler unleashed his *blitzkrieg* (literally, “lightning war”) on Poland. “Act brutally!” Hitler exhorted his generals. “Send [every] man,

woman, and child of Polish descent and language to their deaths, pitilessly and remorselessly.” The attack triggered Soviet attacks on eastern Poland and declarations of war from France and Britain two days later, igniting a conflict that raced around the globe. In September 1939, Germany seemed invincible, causing many people to fear that all of Europe would soon share Poland’s fate.

After the Nazis overran Poland, Hitler soon launched a westward blitzkrieg. In the first six months of 1940, German forces smashed through Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. The speed of the German attack trapped more than 300,000 British and French soldiers, who retreated to the port of Dunkirk, where an improvised armada of British vessels ferried them to safety across the English Channel. One observer noted that the British rescued “hardly enough tanks to fight a regiment of well armed Boy Scouts.”

By mid-June 1940, France had surrendered the largest army in the world, signed an armistice that gave Germany control of nearly two-thirds of the countryside, and installed a collaborationist government at Vichy. With an empire that stretched across Europe from Poland to France, Hitler was poised to attack Britain.

The new British prime minister, Winston Churchill, vowed that Britain, unlike France, would never surrender to Hitler. “We shall fight on the seas and oceans [and] ... in the air,” he proclaimed, “whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, ... and in the fields and in the streets.” Churchill’s defiance stiffened British resolve against Hitler’s attack, which began in mid-June 1940, when wave after wave of German bombers targeted British military installations and cities, killing tens of thousands of civilians. The outgunned Royal Air Force fought as doggedly as Churchill had predicted and finally won the Battle of Britain by November, clearing German bombers from British skies and handing Hitler his first defeat. Churchill praised the valiant British pilots, declaring that “never ... was so much owed by so many to so few.” Advance knowledge of German plans aided British pilots, who had access to the new technology of radar and to decoded top-secret German military communications. Battered and exhausted by German attacks, Britain needed American help to continue to fight, as Churchill repeatedly wrote Roosevelt in private.

From Neutrality to the Arsenal of Democracy

Most Americans condemned German aggression and favored Britain and France, but isolationism remained powerful. Roosevelt feared that if Congress did not repeal

the arms embargo required by the Neutrality Act of 1937, France and Britain would soon fall to the Nazi onslaught. "What worries me," Roosevelt wrote a friend, "is that public opinion ... is patting itself on the back every morning and thanking God for the Atlantic Ocean (and the Pacific Ocean)," and ignoring "the serious implications" of the European war "for our own future." Congress agreed in November 1939 to allow warring nations to buy arms and nonmilitary supplies on a cash-and-carry basis.

In practice, the revised neutrality law permitted Britain and France to purchase American war supplies and carry them across the Atlantic in their own ships, thereby shielding American vessels from attack by German submarines. Roosevelt searched for a way to aid Britain short of a formal alliance or declaring war against Germany. Churchill pleaded for American destroyers, aircraft, and munitions, but he had no money to buy them under the prevailing cash-and-carry neutrality law. As the Battle of Britain raged late in the summer of 1940, Roosevelt agreed to deliver fifty old destroyers to Britain in exchange for American access to British bases in the Western Hemisphere, the first step toward building a firm Anglo-American alliance against Hitler.

The Anglo-American allies quickly cooperated to advance radar technology. The British had invented a top-secret

radio-wave transmitter that allowed radar to identify an object as small as a few inches. British leaders desperately needed to use the new radar to attack German bombers and submarines, but they lacked the resources to develop the technology quickly and make it widely available to the military. In September 1940, the British shared their technology with American scientists, who soon received the support of Roosevelt to organize a top-secret group of physicists and engineers in universities and corporate research labs to learn how to adapt the new radar to help fight the war.

One American scientist explained the significance of the new radar technology by saying, "If automobiles had been similarly improved, modern cars would cost about a dollar and go a thousand miles on a gallon of gas." With headquarters at the Radiation Lab of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, American scientists across the nation worked feverishly to improve radar. Eventually their efforts helped airplanes and ships to navigate and identify enemy aircraft and targets on land and sea, directed antiaircraft fire against enemy planes, and made possible the radar-based proximity fuse which caused antiaircraft and artillery shells to explode when they got near a target. For example, a proximity fuse caused the atomic bomb used at Hiroshima to detonate at an altitude that created maximum destruction. These and many other military uses

of radar technology contributed greatly to Allied military campaigns.

While German Luftwaffe (air force) pilots bombed Britain, Roosevelt decided to run for an unprecedented third term as president in 1940. Roosevelt was reelected, and the voters sent a message of support for American involvement in the European war. The Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie, who was ridiculed by New Dealers as a “simple, barefoot Wall Street lawyer,” attacked Roosevelt as a warmonger. Willkie’s accusations caused the president to promise voters, “Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars,” a pledge counterbalanced by his repeated warnings during the campaign about the threats to America posed by Nazi aggression.

Once reelected, Roosevelt maneuvered to support Britain in every way short of a declaration of war against Germany. In a fireside chat shortly after Christmas 1940, Roosevelt proclaimed that the United States had to become “the great arsenal of democracy” and send “every ounce and every ton of munitions and supplies that we can possibly spare to help the defenders who are in the front lines.”

In January 1941, Roosevelt proposed the [Lend-Lease Act](#), which allowed the British to obtain weapons from the United States without paying cash, but with the promise to

reimburse the United States when the war ended. The purpose of Lend-Lease, Roosevelt proclaimed, was to defend democracy and human rights throughout the world, specifically the Four Freedoms: “freedom of speech and expression ... freedom of every person to worship God in his own way ... freedom from want ... [and] freedom from fear.” Isolationist opponents accused Roosevelt of concocting a “Triple A foreign policy” that would lead to war and “plow under every fourth American boy.” After fierce debates, Congress approved Lend-Lease, starting a flow of support to Britain that totaled more than \$50 billion during the war, far more than all federal expenditures combined since Roosevelt had become president in 1933.

Hindered in his plans to invade Britain, Hitler turned his massive army eastward and on June 22, 1941, began a surprise attack on the Soviet Union, his ally in the 1939 Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact. Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill had any love for Joseph Stalin or communism, but they both welcomed the Soviet Union to the anti-Nazi cause. Both Western leaders understood that Hitler’s attack on Russia would provide relief for the hard-pressed British. Roosevelt quickly persuaded Congress to extend Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union, beginning the shipment of millions of tons of trucks, jeeps, and other equipment that in all supplied about 10 percent of Russian war materiel.

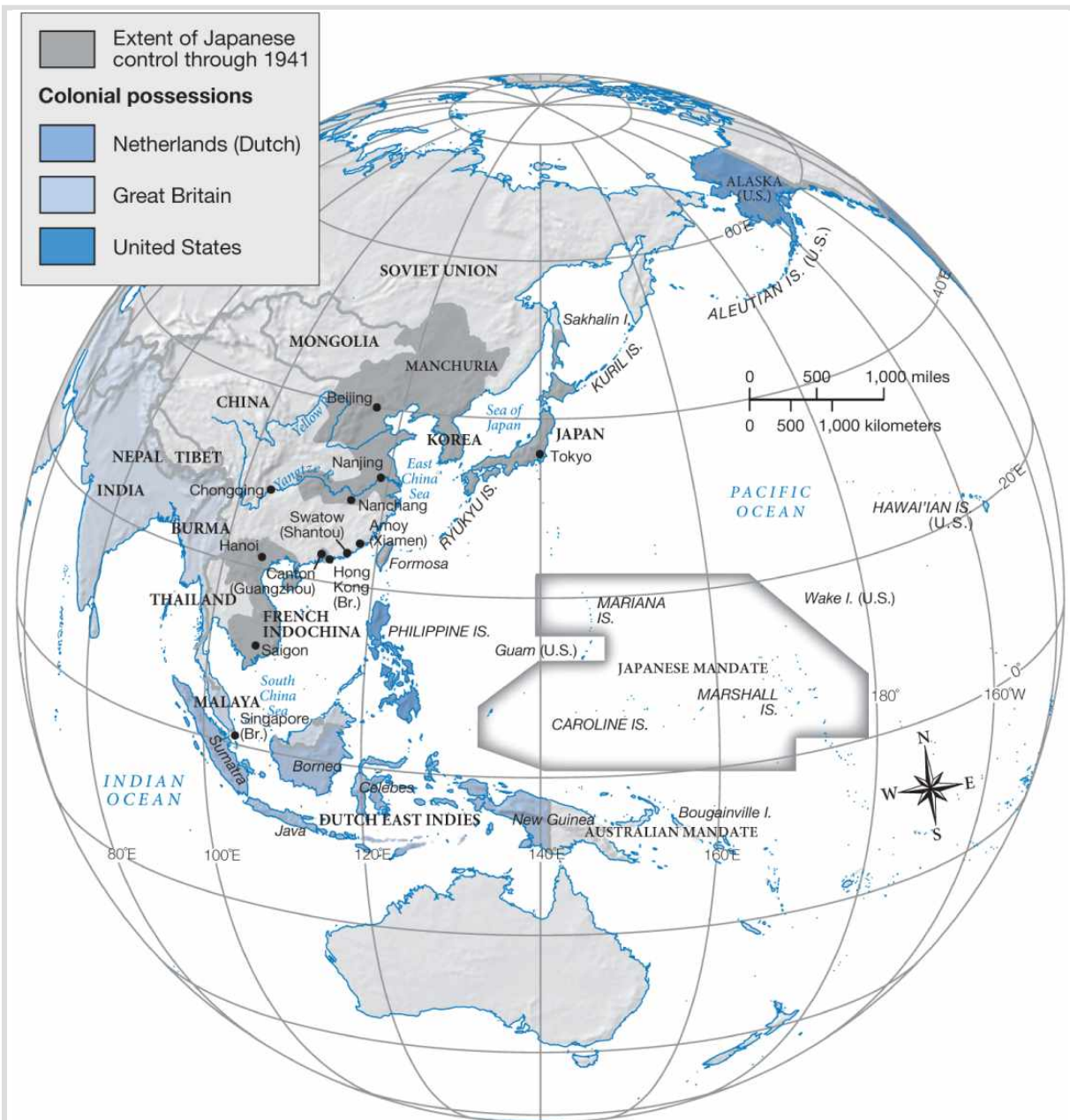
As Hitler's army raced across the Russian plains and Nazi U-boats tried to choke off supplies to Britain and the Soviet Union, Roosevelt met with Churchill aboard a ship near Newfoundland to cement the Anglo-American alliance. In August 1941, the two leaders issued the Atlantic Charter, pledging the two nations to freedom of the seas and free trade as well as the right of national self-determination.

Japan Attacks America

Although Roosevelt worried about war with Germany, Hitler avoided directly provoking the United States. Japanese ambitions in Asia clashed more openly with American interests and commitments, especially in China and the Philippines. Unlike Hitler, the Japanese high command planned to attack the United States in order to allow Japan to rule an Asian empire it termed the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The Japanese appealed to widespread Asian bitterness toward white colonial powers such as the British in India and Burma, the French in Indochina (now Vietnam), and the Dutch in the East Indies (now Indonesia). The Japanese claimed that they would preserve "Asia for the Asians." However, Japan's invasion of China — which had lasted for ten years by 1941 — proved that its true goal was Asia for the Japanese ([Map 25.2](#)). Japan coveted the raw materials

available from China and Southeast Asia, and it ignored American demands to stop its campaign of aggression.



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MAP 25.2 Japanese Aggression through 1941

Beginning with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Japan sought to extend its imperialist control over most of East Asia. Japanese aggression was

driven by the need for raw materials for the country's expanding industries and by the government's devotion to militaristic values.

Description

"The map highlights the islands Sumatra, Java, Celebes, southern Borneo, Western New Guinea as Dutch East Indies; India, present-day Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Malaya, and northern Borneo as British Colonies; and Alaska and Philippines as American colonies.

The extent of Japanese control through 1941 ran from French Indochina with its prominent cities of Hanoi and Saigon; the cities along the eastern coastal belt of China comprising Swatow (Shantou), Canton (Guangzhou), Hong Kong, and Amoy (Xiamen); Formosa; the eastern and northeastern part of China along the banks of the Yangtze River and the Yellow River comprising of the cities Nanchang, Nanjing, and Beijing; Manchuria; Korea; the southern half of Sakhalin Island and Kuril Island on the North Pacific Ocean; Japan; and a quadrilateral comprising of the Mariana island; Caroline Island, and Marshall Island in the southern Pacific Ocean.

The map identifies the islands of Guam, Wake, Hawaii, and Aleutian on the Pacific Ocean as U. S. colonies and the Bougainville Island and eastern New Guinea as Australian Mandate."

In 1940, Japan entered a defensive alliance with Germany and Italy — the Tripartite Pact. To obstruct Japanese plans to invade the Dutch East Indies, in July 1941 Roosevelt announced a trade embargo that denied Japan access to oil, scrap iron, and other goods essential for its war machine. Roosevelt hoped the embargo would strengthen factions within Japan that opposed the militarists.

Instead, the American embargo played into the hands of Japanese militarists headed by General Hideki Tojo, who seized control of the government in October 1941 and persuaded other leaders, including Emperor Hirohito, that swift destruction of American naval bases in the Pacific would leave Japan free to achieve its war aims. On December 7, 1941, 183 aircraft lifted off from six Japanese carriers and attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on the Hawai'ian island of Oahu. The devastating surprise attack sank all of the fleet's battleships, killed more than 2,400 Americans, and almost crippled U.S. war-making capacity in the Pacific. Luckily for the United States, Japanese pilots failed to destroy oil storage facilities at Pearl Harbor and the nation's aircraft carriers, which happened to be at sea during the attack.

The Japanese scored a stunning tactical victory at Pearl Harbor. In the long run, however, the attack proved a colossal blunder. The victory made many Japanese commanders overconfident about their military strength. Worse for the Japanese, Americans instantly united in their desire to fight and avenge the attack. Roosevelt vowed that "this form of treachery shall never endanger us again." On December 8, Congress endorsed the president's call for a declaration of war. Both Hitler and Mussolini declared war against America three days later, bringing the United States

into all-out war with the Axis powers in both Europe and Asia.

REVIEW

How did American isolationism influence Roosevelt's policies toward military aggression by Germany and Japan?

How did the United States mobilize for war?

The time had come, Roosevelt announced, for the prescriptions of “Dr. New Deal” to be replaced by the stronger medicines of “Dr. Win-the-War.” Military and civilian leaders rushed to protect the nation against possible attacks, causing Americans with Japanese ancestry to be stigmatized and sent to internment camps. Roosevelt and his advisers lost no time enlisting millions of Americans in the armed forces to bring the isolationist-era military to fighting strength for a two-front war. The war emergency also required economic mobilization unparalleled in the nation’s history. As Dr. Win-the-War, Roosevelt set aside the New Deal goal of reform and plunged headlong into transforming the American economy into the world’s greatest military machine. Wartime mobilization achieved full employment and economic recovery, goals the New Deal had never reached.

Home-Front Security

Shortly after declaring war against the United States, Hitler sent German submarines to hunt American ships along the Atlantic coast, where Paul Tibbets and other American pilots tried to destroy them. The U-boats had devastating success for about eight months, sinking hundreds of U.S. ships and

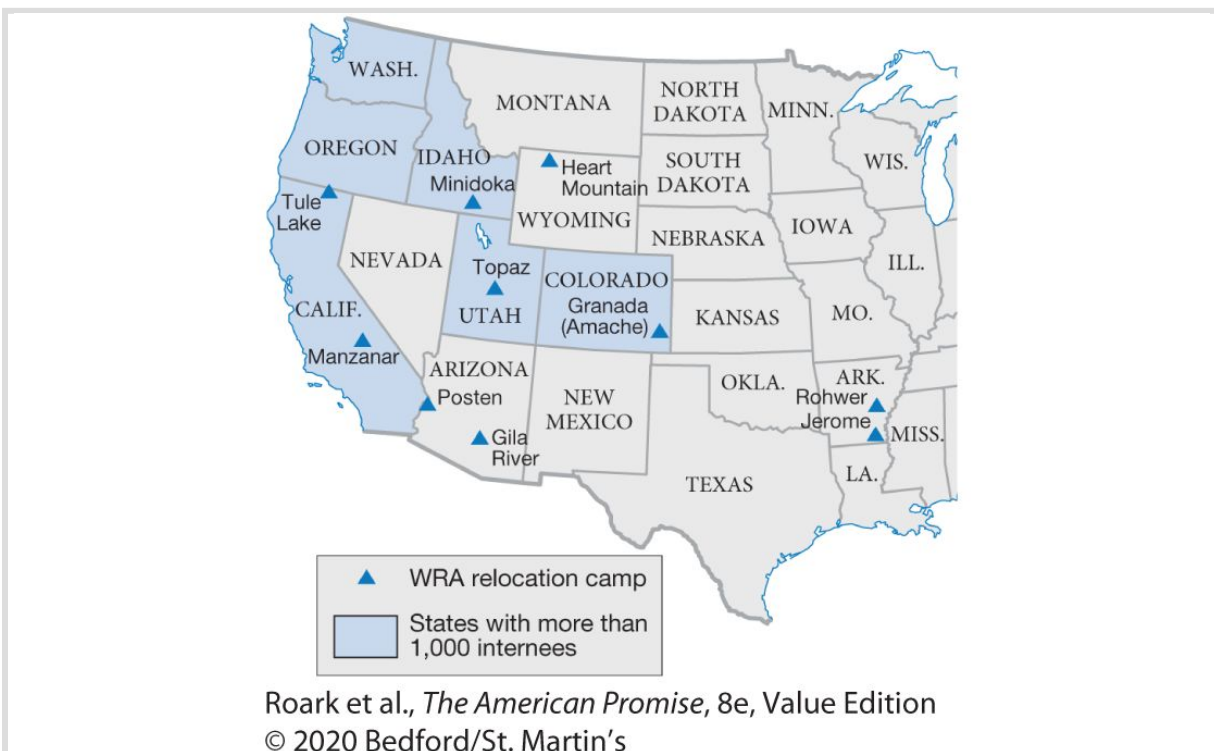
threatening to disrupt the Lend-Lease lifeline to Britain and the Soviet Union. By mid-1942, the U.S. Navy protected the U.S. coast and chased German submarines into the mid-Atlantic.

Within the continental United States, Americans remained sheltered from the chaos and destruction the war brought to hundreds of millions in Europe and Asia. The government worried constantly about espionage and internal subversion. Posters warned Americans that “Loose lips sink ships” and “Enemy agents are always near; if you don’t talk, they won’t hear.” The campaign for patriotic vigilance focused on German and Japanese foes, but Americans of Japanese descent became targets of persecution because of Pearl Harbor and long-standing racial prejudice against people of Asian descent.

About 320,000 people of Japanese ancestry lived in U.S. territory in 1941, two-thirds of them in Hawai’i, where they largely escaped wartime persecution because they were essential and valued members of society. On the mainland, however, Japanese Americans were a tiny minority — even along the West Coast, where most of them worked on farms and in small businesses. Although an official military survey concluded that Japanese Americans posed no danger, popular hostility fueled a campaign to round up all mainland Japanese Americans — two-thirds of them U.S. citizens. “A

Jap's a Jap.... It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not," one official declared.

On February 19, 1942, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which sent all Americans of Japanese descent to ten makeshift **internment camps** located in remote areas of the West and South (**Map 25.3**). Allowed little time to sell or protect their property, Japanese Americans lost homes and businesses worth about \$400 million and lived out the war penned in by barbed wire and armed guards.



MAP 25.3 Western Relocation Authority Centers

Responding to prejudice and fear of sabotage, President Roosevelt authorized the relocation of all Americans of Japanese descent in 1942. Taken from their homes in the cities and farmland of the far West, more

than 120,000 Japanese Americans were confined in camps scattered as far east as the Mississippi River.

Description

“The map shows the following:

W R A relocation camp: Rohwer and Jerome in Arkansas; Granada (Amache) in Colorado; Topaz in Utah; Minidoka in Idaho; Manzanar and Tule Lake in California; Heart Mountain in Wyoming; Poston and Gila River in Arizona.

States with more than 1,000 internees: Colorado; Utah; California; Idaho; Oregon; and Washington.”

Several thousand Japanese Americans served with distinction in the U.S. armed forces, and no case of subversion by a Japanese American was ever uncovered. Still, the Supreme Court’s 1944 *Korematsu* decision upheld Executive Order 9066’s clear violation of Japanese Americans’ constitutional rights as justified by “military necessity.”

Building a Citizen Army

As war raged in Europe and Asia, “the U.S. Army looked like a few nice boys with BB guns,” according to one observer. In 1940, Roosevelt urged Congress to prepare for war by passing the [Selective Service Act](#), which registered men of military age who could be drafted if the need arose. More than six thousand local draft boards registered more than

thirty million men. When the war came, more than sixteen million men and women served in uniform, two-thirds of them draftees and most of them young men. Women were barred from combat duty, but they worked at nearly every noncombat task, eroding barriers to women's military service.

The Selective Service Act prohibited discrimination "on account of race or color." Almost one million African American men and women donned uniforms, as did half a million Mexican Americans, 25,000 Native Americans, and 13,000 Chinese Americans. The racial insults and discrimination suffered by all people of color made some soldiers ask, as a Mexican American GI did on his way to the European front, "Why fight for America when you have not been treated as an American?"



The Granger Collection, New York.

African American Machine Gunners Soldiers William Adam Leak and Adam Parham, shown here in May 1944, were among the first African American combat troops in the Pacific theater. They and thousands of other black soldiers fought in the Bougainville campaign, which continued until August 1945, to retake the Japanese-occupied portions of the Solomon Islands, just north of Australia.

Black Americans were trained in segregated camps, confined in segregated barracks, and assigned to segregated units. Most black soldiers were assigned to manual labor. Few served in combat until late in 1944, when the need for military manpower in Europe increased. Then,

as General George Patton told black soldiers in a tank unit in Normandy, “I don’t care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches.”

Homosexuals also served in the armed forces, although in much smaller numbers than black Americans. Allowed to serve as long as their sexual preferences remained covert, gay Americans, like other minorities, sought to demonstrate their worth under fire. “I was superpatriotic,” a gay combat veteran recalled. Another gay GI remarked, “Who in the hell is going to worry about [homosexuality]” in the midst of the life-or-death realities of war?

Conversion to a War Economy

In 1940, the American economy remained mired in the depression. Nearly one worker in seven was still unemployed, factories operated far below their productive capacity, and the total federal budget was less than \$10 billion. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt announced the goal of converting the economy to produce “overwhelming ..., crushing superiority of equipment in any theater of the world war.” Factories were converted to assembling tanks and airplanes, and production soared to record levels. By the end of the war, jobs exceeded workers,

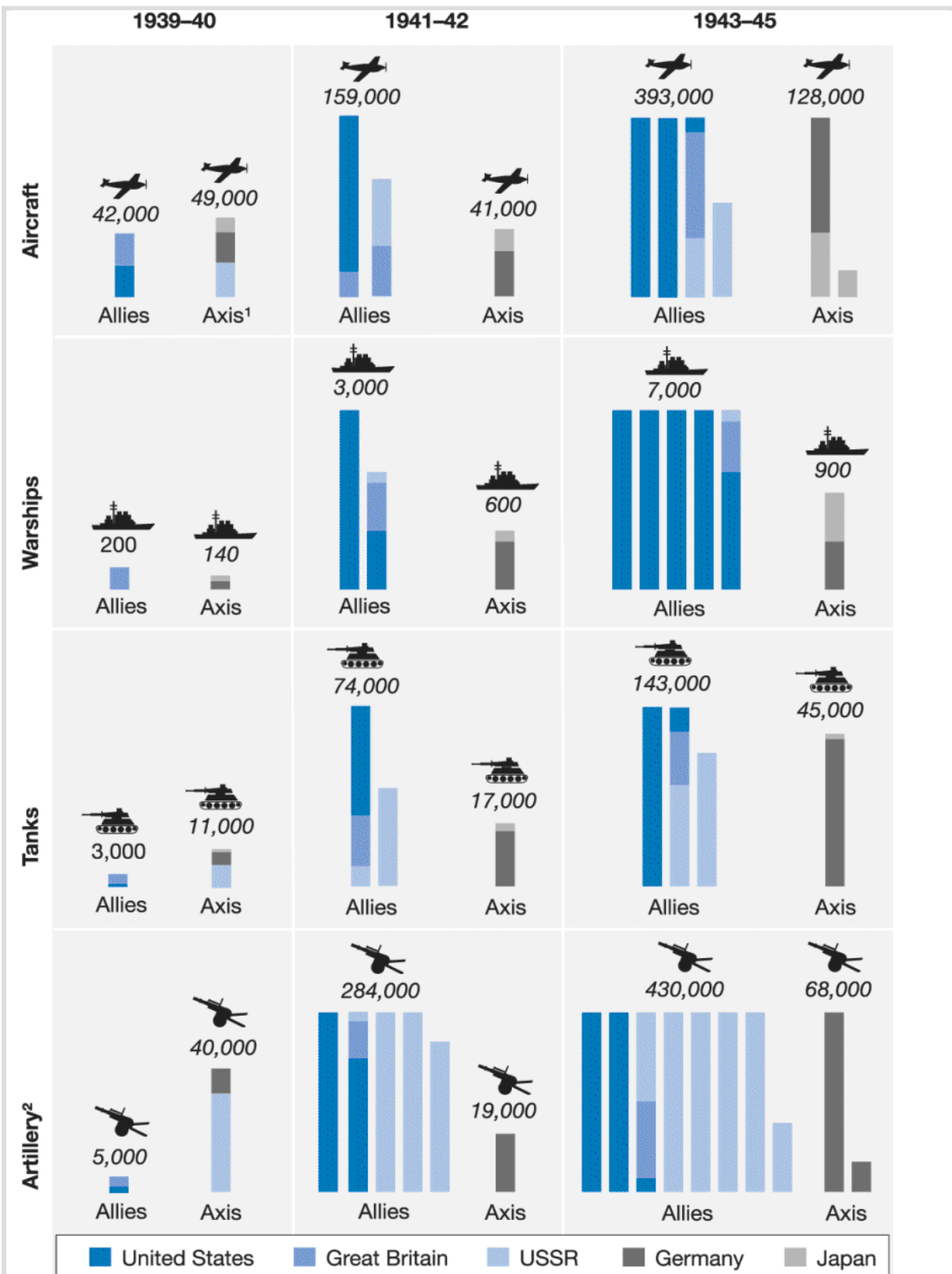
plants operated at full capacity, and the federal budget topped \$100 billion.

To organize and oversee this tidal wave of military production, Roosevelt called upon business leaders to come to Washington and accept a token payment of a dollar a year to head new government agencies, such as the War Production Board, which set production priorities and pushed for maximum output. Contracts flowed to large corporations, often on a basis that guaranteed their profits. During the first half of 1942, the government issued contracts worth more than the entire gross national product in 1941.

Booming wartime employment swelled union membership. To speed production, the government asked unions to pledge not to strike. Despite the relentless pace of work, union members mostly kept their no-strike pledge. An important exception was the United Mine Workers, who walked out of the coal mines in 1943, demanding a pay hike and earning hostility from many Americans.

Overall, conversion to war production achieved Roosevelt's ambitious goal of "crushing superiority" in military goods. At a total cost of \$304 billion (equivalent to about \$4 trillion today) during the war, the nation produced an avalanche of military equipment, more than double the combined

production of Germany, Japan, and Italy ([Figure 25.1](#)). This outpouring of military goods supplied not only U.S. forces but also America's allies, giving tangible meaning to Roosevelt's pledge to make America the "arsenal of democracy."



¹ The USSR was allied with Germany 1939–1940.

² No reliable data exist for Japan.

FIGURE 25.1 Global Comparison: Weapons Production by the Axis and Allied Powers during World War II

U.S. weapons dominated the air and the sea during World War II. Together, the three Allied powers produced about three times as many aircraft and five to eight times as many warships as the two Axis powers. The Soviet Union led the other Allies in the production of tanks and artillery. What does the chronology of weapons production suggest about the kind of warfare emphasized by each belligerent nation and the course of the war?

Description

“The data compares the type of production of Artillery, Tanks, Warships, and Aircraft from 1939 to 1940, 1941 to 1942, and 1943 to 1945.

1939 to 1940

During this period, the Allies produced 42,000 aircraft of which the U. S. and Great Britain made an almost equal amount while the Axis powers produced 49,000 aircraft of which Germany and the U S S R contributed almost equally and Japan produced 12,000. All of the 200 warships produced by the Allies were solely from Great Britain while the 140 warships produced by the Axis powers had Japan as the major producer followed by Germany and the U S S R. The Allies produced a total of 3,000 tanks; more than two-thirds were from Great Britain and the remaining from the United States whereas the Axis powers produced 11,000 warships with the U S S R accounting for almost 7,000, Germany accounting for almost 2,800, and Japan for 1,200. The artillery production of the Allies amounted to 5,000. 2,900 belonged to Great Britain and 2,100 to the United States. The Axis powers, on the other hand, produced 40,000 with the U S S R contributing the majority and Germany the rest of it.

The U S S R was allied with Germany between 1939 and 1940 and no reliable data existed for Japan concerning its Artillery production.

1941 to 1942

The Allies produced 159,000 aircraft of which over 100,000 were produced by the United States, and nearly 29,500 were produced each by Great Britain and the U S S R. On the other hand, the Axis powers accounted for 41,000 aircraft with over 26,000 were from Germany and 15,000 from Japan. As for warships, 1,800 were made by the United States, 900 by Great Britain and 300 by the U S S R, a total of 3,000. Germany produced over 400 warships; less than 200 were produced by Japan, amounting to a total of 600. The U S S R and the United States produced almost 35,000 tanks each and Great Britain accounted for the remaining 6,000. The Axis powers produced 17,000 tanks with Germany contributing nearly 15,000 and Japan 2,000. The U S S R was a major producer of artillery of almost 144,000 followed by the United States which produced 100,000 and Great Britain producing 40,000. The Axis powers, on the other hand, produced 19,000 with Germany as the sole contributor.

1943 to 1945

The United States produced almost two-thirds of the total 393,000 aircraft followed by the U S S R and Great Britain who were almost equal contributors while the combined production of Germany and Japan was 128,000. While Japan and Germany contributed more or less equally to the total of 900 warships of the Axis powers, of the 7,000 warships produced by the Allies, the United States was yet again the major producer with Great Britain and the U S S R accounting for less than one-quarter of the total production. The Allies produced 143,000 tanks with the U S S R and the U. S. being the major contributors followed by Great Britain. Germany produced over 44,700 tanks and Japan accounted for the remaining 300. The total production of artillery was 430,000 by the Allies in that the U S S R was the major producer followed by the United States and Great Britain being a minor producer. Germany was the sole power engaged in artillery production accounting for 68,000.

All data are approximate.”

REVIEW

How did the Roosevelt administration mobilize the human and industrial resources necessary to fight a two-front war?