

3. Creating War and Peace Aims: The Welles Mission, the Atlantic Charter, and the Origins of Postwar Planning, 1939-1941

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In the autumn of 1939, with the war in Europe only in its first few weeks, Sumner Welles already had his mind focused on planning the peace that would one day follow. Soon after the outbreak of war in Europe he endeavored to promote some means of a peaceful resolution of the war without violating the provisions of the various neutrality acts which bound the U.S. He also moved to the forefront of the administration in expressing his belief in the war's potential to bring about a new American-led global order. Like many of those who recalled President Wilson's efforts to reorder international relations, he believed the very lack of such early planning during the last war had led to the chaos of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. He thus wanted to begin immediately planning for the postwar world.

By embarking upon postwar planning as early as 1939, Welles sought to avoid the confusion that had characterized the effort a generation ago. Yet President Roosevelt remained wary of getting too far ahead of public opinion, and within his own administration he received divided counsel. Several officials, such as Cordell Hull, feared that premature discussion of postwar planning would immediately resurrect the bitter controversies that had surrounded the League of Nations debate. Welles felt otherwise, and sought a way for postwar planning to commence without the interference of Hull.

In an effort to bypass the secretary of state, Welles reached outside the State Department for preliminary work on postwar planning. A few weeks after the outbreak of war, he asked Hamilton Fish Armstrong, the director of the Council on Foreign Relations, to prepare for him a number of detailed studies on postwar planning. Welles worked closely with Armstrong and took a keen interest in the selection of the Council's postwar planning research staff. ¹ He also gradually began to gather allies from within the State Department. In November 1939, State Department planner Harley Notter suggested that Washington immediately embark upon "the planning of a better peace than followed the last war," and he sent Welles proposals outlining postwar plans. Welles and Notter concurred that planning should begin soon and, after a number of discussions with other State Department officials, Welles told Hull that they should at once launch an official postwar planning investigation. The secretary felt powerless to stand in the way. ²

For guidance, Welles looked to the Wilsonian precedent of the so-called "Inquiry," where the president and Colonel Edward House assembled a group of experts to study the war aims of the great powers and formulate American policies. They had excluded Congressional representatives and staff and State Department personnel from the panel and instead looked to the worlds of academia and journalism. ³ Welles and planners such



as Notter believed the absence of formal planning in the State Department had forced President Wilson to rely too strongly on the services of Colonel House. Notter argued that, because the Inquiry had operated outside the

State Department, it had "greatly and unfavorably affected the effectiveness and the prestige of the Department of State, and to varying degrees the whole Executive, in regard to the making of peace." He added that, due to America's potential to tilt the world balance of power, it would be impossible for the United States to stand aloof from the peacemaking process in the current war. "In fact," Notter noted, "it would seem desirable from the standpoint of our national interests that we should participate in that peace construction." [4](#)

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Welles strongly agreed with Notter's assessment that a major flaw of House's investigation had been its exclusion of State Department and Congressional representation, and that the inquiry had not begun early enough to give it sufficient time to look into the complex problems of shaping the postwar world. Furthermore, he believed the participants in House's inquiry and the State Department had often worked at cross-purposes. [5](#)

Welles acted swiftly. A few days before the end of 1939, he established a formal "Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations" to explore the possibility of peace terms and to study postwar recovery. Unlike the Inquiry, this new committee would function squarely within the department and would have three subcommittees: one focusing on political problems, another on limiting arms, and a third studying postwar economic problems. The subcommittees would handle much of the work and present the advisory committee with recommendations.

According to the State Department, the planning committees would seek to "survey the basic principles which should underlie a desirable world order to be evolved after the termination of present hostilities, with primary reference to the best interests of the United States." The planners added that, in "light of the principles indicated above and of past experience, [the committee would] determine policies which should be pursued by the United States in furtherance of the establishment of such a world order, both as a basis of our own action and of our attempts to influence other nations." Thus, roughly two years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, State Department planners, under the leadership of Welles, began to study the prospect of shaping a postwar order consistent with American interests. He planned to use the committees to advise the president and to anticipate any matters of interest to the White House. [6](#)

Meeting for the first time in January 1940, the Welles-chaired Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations had a vague enough title to avoid raising the suspicions of Congress or the public. Concern still existed in the State Department that rumors or leaks about the committee might arouse opposition. The committee thus issued a public statement vaguely explaining its functions. The statement differed significantly from the department's internal discussions, prudently omitting any mention of constructing an American-led "world order." [7](#)

Welles viewed his leadership of postwar planning as an opportunity to realize his neo-Wilsonian vision of a world reordered along lines desired by the

United States. He hoped to use his membership on the newly formed advisory subcommittee on political problems to exert his influence over all aspects of planning. Hull made a futile effort to limit his under secretary's influence by hand-picking a chairman other than Welles, but in reality Welles served as the *de facto* chairman of the subcommittee. He usually chaired its proceedings because its official chairman, New York lawyer George Rublee (whom Welles described to Drew Pearson as "a pompous fathead") was too ill to attend most sessions. He further added to his power when he merged the Subcommittee on Limitation and Reduction of Armaments (which had met only once) with his own subcommittee. Furthermore, he maintained personal responsibility for reporting the activities of the committees to the president and Hull, thus carefully restricting what little information the secretary ultimately received about the planning process. [8](#)

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Initially, the committee dusted off the Welles plan of 1937, as the State Department once again began to focus on the possibility of organizing the other neutral nations to promote peace. The planners considered convening a conference of forty-seven neutral nations, with invitations later extended to the belligerents. Welles also led preliminary discussions on building a new world organization. In light of the failures of the League of Nations and the relative success of the inter-American system, the committee began to consider the prospect of creating a number of smaller, regional leagues. Yet these discussions were merely preliminary, and the plan to organize the neutral nations would soon be overtaken by the events of the war. [9](#)

At the beginning of 1940, Roosevelt and Welles resolved to pursue a number of efforts to promote an American-brokered peace. Roosevelt wanted it made clear that he was prepared to act as a mediator to "reduce and reconcile" the world conflict. He thereby gave further consideration to reviving the Welles plan of 1937, where international arms control and economic stability would be the chief aims of an international conference, and where the neutral nations might consider acting as a mediating body between the belligerents. [10](#)

Yet far and away the most important element of Roosevelt's peace offensive of the winter of 1939-1940 was the decision to send Welles on a mission to Europe to meet with the leaders of the great powers. The president had a number of reasons for choosing him for such a task. His knowledge of the issues, his close relationship with Roosevelt, his leadership of postwar planning, and his willingness to go outside the normal bounds of authority made him the logical choice for the mission. Perhaps most importantly, Roosevelt and Welles shared a desire to establish a claim to participation—and perhaps even leadership—in any future peace settlement. Quite apart from the president's faith in him, Roosevelt was also fond of such bold moves, later telling Breckinridge Long that the idea for the Welles mission "came to him as an impulse." [11](#)

The postwar planning committees had accomplished little in their first few weeks due to Welles's impending mission to Europe. The day-to-day

demands and pressures of the war also made more specific and detailed planning difficult. This was the period of that curious interlude sometimes known as the "phony war." Welles hoped that the current lull in the fighting might offer an opportunity to seek a U.S.-negotiated settlement. Yet his mission was also indelibly linked to postwar concerns. He remained worried that the world powers might achieve an eventual settlement inconsistent with U.S. interests. He would thus discuss with European leaders a series of vague proposals that resembled his 1937 peace program, with its call for disarmament, promotion of free trade, and equitable access to the world's resources. Furthermore, he would emphasize the postwar restructuring of the world, and his classified reports back to the president would underscore the prospects for creating a world order more amenable to Washington's interests. [12](#)

Welles and Roosevelt thus aimed to exploit the opportunity presented by the "phony war" to explore the possibilities of a settlement. It is not improbable that, even at this late date, Welles sought a revision of the Versailles settlement that would have appeased several German aims, while at the same time seeking to soothe allied opinion through arms control and the reconstitution of some form of a "rump" Czechoslovakia and Poland. [13](#) He certainly went to Europe seeking to explore the prospects of what might be the basis of a potential settlement (particularly from the Axis powers, whose aims and positions were less clear to Washington), and he would have been elated had he been able to achieve a Wilsonian "peace without victory" in Europe. Failing that, Welles had other, more immediate, goals: namely, to explore the strength of the Rome-Berlin axis and consider what measures might be taken to weaken Mussolini's commitment to Hitler. [14](#)

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At the very least, the mission might cleverly aid the allied powers by delaying a German offensive in the west. Welles and Roosevelt worried that Hitler was preparing a massive spring offensive against the western allies. They hoped the mission might cause a delay in the Führer's war plans, or even avert a German offensive altogether. They assumed that even a brief delay would benefit the Allies by allowing them more time to supply their armies and build up their defenses. [15](#)

Furthermore, Welles feared that the stakes now included more than a mere reshuffling of European boundaries and colonial spoils, and that continuation of the war would increase the potential peril to U.S. interests. Worse still, Berlin's domination of Europe could lead to German economic penetration of the Western Hemisphere, thereby undermining efforts to safeguard the *Pax Americana*. Roosevelt and Welles may have also had fears that Prime Minister Chamberlain might seek an Anglo-German agreement that would, in effect, exclude the United States from trade and commercial opportunities in Europe, Africa, and Latin America. [16](#)

"It will be a very important trip—that is, it may be," Breckinridge Long noted in his diary. "If Sumner can find any willingness on the part of the various responsible officials of any of those Governments to cease hostilities, it will be important, but if he does not find any such situation, it will probably

mean that the war will continue on *ad infinitum*." [17](#)

A notable Wilsonian precedent existed for sending Welles on the mission to Europe. On the eve of the First World War, Wilson had sent Colonel House to Europe to assess the general war situation. House and Wilson sensed an opportunity for the United States to play a leading role in resolving European tensions, and both men labored to convince the great powers to accept American mediation. Opponents of Roosevelt's foreign policy in the press and in Congress exploited this Wilsonian parallel, charging that House had dragged the neutral United States into the war and that Welles would do the same. "The United States will not be minding its own business," lamented California Senator Hiram Johnson, "if it sends [Welles] to Europe as a roving listening post." [18](#)

Preparing for the mission, Welles drafted Roosevelt's letters of introduction to Chamberlain, Hitler, Mussolini, and Daladier, assuring the foreign leaders that as "special envoy" he would report only to Roosevelt while avoiding public pronouncements and leaks to the press. The president confided to Breckinridge Long that the Welles mission "could not do any harm" and would help Washington learn more about the views of Mussolini and Hitler. [19](#)

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Secretary Hull vehemently disagreed. He believed Welles had once again upstaged him by manipulating the president to support the mission. He rightly fretted that Welles would seek to go behind his back and report directly to Roosevelt. Hull also feared the mission would raise undue hopes for a settlement, rekindle fears of American intervention, and run the risk of angering the isolationists. He continued to believe that bilateral trade negotiations remained the best course for Washington to pursue. [20](#)

Prior to his departure from Washington, Welles learned that William Bullitt had been responsible for fueling much of the press criticism of the mission. Bullitt was given to self-deception. He thought himself mandated by the president to report on the general European scene and he deeply resented Welles's intrusion. Breckinridge Long noted that Welles "told me that the stories in the press which were so critical of him and indicated that he and the Secretary had had some dispute on the subject of his mission had all emanated from the vitriolic tongue of Bill Bullitt and that Bullitt had taken the trouble to go to the Capitol and to talk to a number of Senators and that they arranged a story of this nature to go to Chicago and to appear in the Chicago papers so that it would not have the earmarks of a Washington story." [21](#)

Welles departed for Europe with U.S. Steel's Myron Taylor, who was bound for the Vatican as the president's special envoy to the pope, raising speculation that Pius XII might be urged to help broker a Welles-designed peace plan. "[Welles] is off on what looks to me like one of the most difficult and unhappy trips a man ever started on," Adolf Berle confided in his diary. "The *Chicago Tribune* is sending along a man to write him up as unpleasantly as possible and make political capital against the

Administration." [22](#)

Welles arrived in Italy on February 22, 1940. At that point in the war Rome was still a neutral capital and he hoped he could successfully prevent Italy from entering the war on the side of the Germans. He assumed that France would have a greater chance of survival if Hitler could be denied the political and military support of Mussolini. Welles met with Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, who also happened to be Mussolini's son-in-law. Welles explained the need for a free trade regime and disarmament. He interpreted Ciano's open dislike for the Germans as a signal that the Italians might be drawn away from their alliance with Berlin. Sensing the possibility of a diplomatic opening during his subsequent meeting with Mussolini, Welles went so far as to subtly hint at the prospect of Washington's eventual recognition of Italian imperial gains in Africa. He and Mussolini agreed to meet again after the envoy's visits to Berlin, Paris, and London. The warm reception in Rome pleased and surprised him, and it heightened his expectations. He began to imagine that Mussolini might hold the keys to a general settlement. [23](#)

Welles next traveled to Berlin, where he was granted a remarkable opportunity to observe the Nazi hierarchy up close. Upon his arrival he was immediately escorted to a meeting with Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop, where Welles presented his vague outlines for a settlement, such as the promotion of free trade and a commitment to general disarmament. Ribbentrop remained unimpressed and proceeded to lecture for the next two hours. "I have rarely seen a man I disliked more," Welles noted of Ribbentrop. He also had little success in his conversations with Hitler and other senior German officials such as Herman Göring and Rudolf Hess. [24](#)



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In Paris, Welles met with Prime Minister Edouard Daladier, senior cabinet ministers such as Paul Reynaud, and numerous other French officials. He sensed a reluctance on the part of the French to discuss the prospects for peace without consulting London. [25](#) U.S. Ambassador to France William Bullitt, who was highly regarded by the French leadership, did not want it to appear that he approved of the mission, and instead snubbed Welles by leaving Paris prior to the envoy's arrival. Bullitt felt slighted that the president sent Welles to confer with the French leaders when he already had a perfectly capable representative in Paris. Bullitt told the president that the French harbored serious misgivings about the mission, adding that Daladier feared Welles would leave the impression that France and Britain should seek a compromise peace. [26](#)

After arriving in London, Welles had a series of meetings with Chamberlain, Halifax, and a number of other senior British statesmen, including Anthony Eden and David Lloyd George, as well as an audience with King George VI. Chamberlain's anger at the Germans surprised Welles, but



before the end of the visit the prime minister spoke of the possibility of appeasing Berlin with colonial concessions in Africa. [27](#) He also called at the Admiralty to see Winston Churchill, once again the First Lord. He found that Churchill had nothing new or original to say about the war, and he confided to the president that he believed Churchill was incoherent and intoxicated throughout much of their two hours together. [28](#)

Upon his return to Italy, Welles met with Pope Pius XII, and again with Mussolini and Ciano. He still thought Mussolini might prove open to persuasion. In his report to the president, Welles explained that Italian policy was dominated by Mussolini, who desired nothing less than "the re-creation of the Roman Empire." He assumed that Mussolini wanted to pit the French and British against the Germans in the hope that they would engage in competitive bidding for concessions to Italy, but he noted that "there is no doubt in any one's mind that if Mussolini gives the word, the Italian Army will enter the war on the German side." He suggested the United States seek to improve relations between Washington and Rome in an effort to wean Mussolini away from the Germans. "In my considered judgment a close relationship with Italy today is feasible, and the recognition of the Ethiopian conquest is not immediately necessary." [29](#)

Welles told the president that Europe might not be capable of making peace. "What is imperatively required is statesmanship of the highest character, marked by vision, courage and daring," he wrote. "I saw no signs of statesmanship of that kind in any of the countries I visited, nor do I know of any of that character in any other European country. ... The Pope, I fear, is discouraged and, in a sense, confused. Mussolini is too closely associated with Hitler." Nevertheless, he was not completely discouraged, but he had clearly misread trends and events in great power politics. He thus endeavored to combine two concepts which had focused his attention for the past seven years: he returned to the original concept for his October 1937 plan of organizing the neutral powers, and he also placed particular emphasis on the role the New World would play coming to the aid of the Old World. "There remains only the United States, supported by the other neutral states, particularly those of the New World," he wrote. "If the moment arrived when the Government of the United States felt it possible to move, I am confident that both the Vatican and Mussolini would support such an initiative." [30](#)

Welles's mission made newspaper headlines for a month, but yielded little of substance in the way of a diplomatic opening. All of the principals with whom he had met, including Chamberlain and Daladier, remained committed to their positions. There seemed to be very little the United States could do to forestall an expanded war. [31](#) The mission also deepened his rift with Hull. "Welles is reporting in cipher to the President," Berle noted in his diary, "and the Secretary does not have the cipher: he learns what the President tells him." [32](#) While he was in the midst of his conversations with Ciano and Mussolini, Hull complained to Breckinridge Long that "Welles

thinks so fast and moves so rapidly that he gets way out in front and leaves no trace of the positions he has taken or the commitments he has made, and the Department is sometimes left in the dark as to his meanings and actions." Hull further charged that Welles always acted independently of him and refused to keep him apprised of his actions. Hull thought he met with the president too frequently and that Welles, while no longer assistant secretary for Latin America, insisted upon maintaining his power in the area of Latin American policy through his confidant, Laurence Duggan. Hull also feared that Berle was too close to Welles and that there were other officials "in key positions whose presence is due to Welles and who act as if they were part of his organization as opposed to the regular establishment." [33](#)

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Criticism of the Welles mission also came from Roosevelt's political opposition. Only a few days after the envoy's return, Ohio Senator Robert Taft, seeking the Republican nomination for president in 1940, publicly charged that the mission demonstrated Roosevelt's callous disregard for America's desire to remain out of the war. Another presidential hopeful, Manhattan District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey, asked: "What faith can we place in any promise by this Administration to keep this nation out of war?" Warning of an ominous parallel between the Welles mission and that of Colonel House during the last war, North Carolina's "Tobacco Senator," the isolationist Democrat Robert Reynolds, accused Welles, in a speech before the full Senate, of practicing "secret diplomacy" and seeking to drag the United States into another European war, just as House did a generation ago. Representative Roy Woodruff of Michigan warned that the Welles mission would be used to "entangle us in Europe's quarrels," and added that the "citizens were not reassured by the secrecy surrounding" the mission by "Mr. Roosevelt's Colonel House." [34](#)

Before anyone in the administration could act upon Welles's recommendations, the "phony war" came to an abrupt end when on April 9 Hitler launched an attack on Denmark and Norway. [35](#) On May 5, British Ambassador Lord Lothian warned Welles that the collapse of Chamberlain's government could be imminent. Some in Washington speculated that Lloyd George might replace Chamberlain, but Welles grew increasingly alarmed that Chamberlain's departure might mean a new government led by Winston Churchill, and Roosevelt remarked that he "supposed Churchill was the best man England had, even if he was drunk half of the time." [36](#)

As Welles had feared, Churchill became prime minister on May 10, the very day Hitler launched his western offensive. But by the end of May, Welles's fears now focused on the prospect that Hitler's stunning triumphs would appeal to pro-Fascist elements in Latin America. To Welles, the possible defeat of France, the Netherlands, and perhaps even Britain opened up perilous possibilities for the Americas. The Axis might threaten the New World through the French colonial empire in West Africa, or through European colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere. As Welles became increasingly worried about German propaganda efforts in Latin America, the planners embarked upon an urgent reassessment of regional defense needs. He warned that the Nazi threat to the Americas was very real and that the "majority of the American Republics would run helter-skelter to Hitler just as

so many of the remaining small neutral nations of Europe are doing today." [37](#)

The crisis in Europe also divided Welles and Hull like never before. By mid-June, when the French situation had become desperate, Welles and Roosevelt supported sending aid to France, but Hull feared that such a move would draw America into the conflict. Welles opposed Hull and backed the president's desire to, at the very least, send a message vaguely pledging future support to the current French Premier Paul Reynaud. "The Secretary was not happy about Welles having over-ruled him in the White House on the message," Berle noted in his diary. "He likes to mull things over, whereas Welles likes to act fast. But I think in this particular case there is a difference of principle. Welles and the President are emotionally much more engaged than the Secretary." [38](#)

In the midst of the crisis on the Western Front, the State Department planning committees revived Welles's old proposal to organize a peace conference, but German military successes undermined any such efforts. Why would Hitler listen to peace overtures, the planners concluded, when victory came with such ease? [39](#)

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On May 28 the Belgians surrendered, and on June 3 the British completed their evacuation from Dunkirk. The prospect of a German victory in the west suddenly transformed the nature of postwar planning in Washington. Welles and the planners suspended broad discussions of peace and war and limited their efforts to the security of the Americas. The term "postwar planning" suddenly had a new meaning, as American officials began to consider the possibility of German control of the French, Dutch, and British empires, and, most urgently, the possibility of German control of European possessions in the New World. Welles and the other planners feared Germany might seek to establish stronger economic and political relationships with the American republics. He warned that the administration's policy of neutrality might soon break down and that the United States might find itself drawn into the conflict by attempting to defend its interests in the Western Hemisphere. [40](#)

The immediate prospects for building a new world order faded completely when France surrendered in late June. With the war on the continent seemingly decided in favor of the Axis, Welles devoted less of his time to matters of postwar planning, and the work of the subcommittees was suspended. With France defeated and Britain under siege, the events of the summer of 1940 provoked a complete reassessment of postwar planning. For now, there would be no talk of creating a new world order and recasting the League of Nations. [41](#)

But in a series of meetings throughout the winter of 1940-1941, Welles considered the possibility of launching a research division within the department to examine postwar matters, and throughout 1941 support for postwar planning continued to gather strength. During the first half of the year incremental research had begun into the question of building a new postwar order, and postwar planning took on a new urgency and sense of

purpose. In February 1941, Welles and senior officials in the state department established a "Division of Special Research" to study the desired nature of the postwar world. The division had a full-time staff consisting of economists, political scientists, and State Department officials. [42](#)

The June 1941 German attack on the Soviet Union had important consequences for postwar planning. A perceptible change of mood occurred within the State Department, and a consensus began to emerge that further discussions on postwar problems should begin anew. By the summer of 1941, anticipating a revival of the postwar planning committees, the division began reexamining the work of Colonel House's inquiry. [43](#) Furthermore, Welles continued to make public statements on the possibility of creating a new world order, putting into practice Woodrow Wilson's emphasis on the importance of public diplomacy in influencing national opinion. Through the use of speeches, press conferences, and timely interviews with reporters, he intensified his efforts to promote American leadership in recasting the world order. [44](#)

Welles resolved to use his public pronouncements to offer a more definitive statement of America's war and peace aims. A month after Hitler launched his attack against the Soviet Union, he delivered his most detailed vision to date of what a postwar world might look like. On July 22, 1941, with the ailing Hull once again out of Washington, Welles spoke for the administration as "Acting Secretary" at a dedication for a new wing of the Norwegian Legation. He sought to offer a pledge that Norwegian independence, as well as the independence of other nations engulfed by the war, would one day be restored. [45](#)

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His address, broadcast nationwide and throughout occupied Europe in twenty-six languages, called for the creation of a world organization that would restore law and order and ensure peace at the close of hostilities. He also paid homage to Wilson, and added that a lasting peace would have to include military, political, and economic planning on a global scale. He called for an "open door" approach to the world's resources, which he assumed would remove the need for future wars of territorial conquest and undermine the imperial impulse, and pledged the restoration of independence and sovereignty for the subjugated nations of the world. Most importantly, he concluded his remarks with a call for the creation of a new league of nations: "I cannot believe that peoples of good will will not once more strive to realize the great ideal of an association of nations through which the freedom, happiness, and the security of all peoples may be achieved. That is the objective before us all today—to try and find the means of bringing that to pass." [46](#)



Welles had announced his belief that American war aims should seek to forever change the global status quo. He desired a postwar settlement based not on great-power politics and the balance of power but on a universal vision of a new world order where disputes between nations would be resolved by regional and worldwide councils. He recognized that a great

power such as the United States would naturally wield vast influence in such councils. His emerging vision of the postwar world resembled a combination of the old League of Nations and the Good Neighbor Policy writ large, a system that would grant regional hegemony to the great powers while operating within a framework of international laws, buttressed by the joint pillars of free markets and free trade. [47](#)

Much of the press hailed Welles for offering the most thorough explanation of the administration's war aims while simultaneously articulating the war's larger meaning. *The New York Times* quoted liberally from his address, and its editorial page called the speech as "the most specific declaration of peace aims that has been made by the spokesman of any Government since the war began. ... It is certainly 'not premature' as Mr. Welles asserted, to publish the specifications of the order we stand for when the war is over." [48](#)

Henry Luce's *Time* magazine called the speech the "heaviest brickbat any high official of the United States had yet thrown at Adolf Hitler," describing it as a "trial balloon" for a new League of Nations. Somewhat surprisingly, *Time* noted approvingly that Welles had called for a worldwide New Deal at the end of the war, and described him as the administration's leading spokesman on foreign policy. [49](#) Not everyone in the press was so enthused. William Randolph Hearst's isolationist newspapers charged Welles with advocating the "abolition of our navy, free trade and our entry into a new league of nations. As a postwar program nothing more completely ruinous to the people of this country could be thought out." [50](#)

Welles's statement of war aims, made less than three weeks before the Atlantic Conference and more than five months before Pearl Harbor, was almost certainly approved by Roosevelt. They had been discussing war and peace aims in early July 1941, and the president had remarked "that nothing would be more valuable from the standpoint of keeping alive some principles of international law, some principles of moral and human decency, than for [Welles] to make some kind of public statement of the objectives in international relations in which the Government of the United States believed." Welles's speech at the Norwegian Legation was certainly a step in that direction, but it seemed to go beyond what the president was prepared to support publicly at the time and may have been part of a larger strategy of having him issue a series of "trial balloons" to gauge the public mood. [51](#)

Welles's address anticipated by three weeks the major political points to be debated at the upcoming Atlantic Conference, where the United States would clarify its war aims in the Atlantic Charter and would for the first time seriously reveal the nature of its vision of the postwar order. A few days before he departed for the historic first meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill, Welles spoke of his postwar vision in an interview with James Reston of the *New York Times*. He expressed the aims he would emphasize throughout the war: a more activist foreign policy on the part of the United States, the need for a world organization to promote collective security, and the promotion of free markets and the elimination of global trade barriers. The prescient Reston sensed that Welles's focus was not so much on

American entry into the war—for that seemed an ever-increasing likelihood—but on the question of the peace that would follow. "This is the heart of the philosophy he is propounding in his almost daily conversations with the President," Reston concluded. "It is a hard-headed, pragmatic, professional diplomat's philosophy, aimed not so much at 'winning the war' as at 'winning the peace.'" [52](#) Coincidentally, as he departed for his rendezvous with Roosevelt and Churchill, *Time* featured Welles in a cover story alleging that he, as the chief instigator of U.S. diplomacy, actually ran the State Department and that his elevation to secretary of state would soon follow. [53](#)

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As the United States edged closer to war, Welles and other senior officials remained concerned about the specter of a reprise of the troublesome secret treaties of the Great War. They particularly feared that London might seek agreements that would bind the great powers after the war. After the German attack on the Soviet Union, disturbing reports had arrived in Washington that London was discussing with Soviet officials territorial concessions involving eastern Poland and the Baltic Republics. The British were reported to be offering inducements to prevent the Russians from signing a separate peace. Furthermore, in July it was rumored that British officials had discussed territorial questions with the governments-in-exile in London. "It is now evident," Adolf Berle warned the president, "that preliminary commitments for the post-war settlement of Europe are being made, chiefly in London. Perhaps you are being kept informed of these. I am not clear that the State Department is being kept informed of all of them by the parties. ... You will recall that at Versailles President Wilson was seriously handicapped by commitments made to which he was not a party and of which he was not always informed. I have suggested to Sumner that we enter a general caveat, indicating that we could not be bound by any commitments to which we had not definitely assented." [54](#)

Shortly thereafter, the president asked Welles to meet with British Ambassador Lord Halifax to underscore Washington's desire that no secret treaties be reached between Moscow and London. [55](#) Not satisfied with the results of this meeting, Welles urged the president to formally warn Churchill against territorial settlements prior to the conclusion of the war. Roosevelt agreed with him and they considered issuing some sort of statement about self-determination, which was of growing importance to the Americans, as well as to many of the subjugated nations and neutrals of Europe. [56](#) Welles believed that Woodrow Wilson should have urged the allies to agree to American war aims at an earlier juncture in the last war. Why not act now, despite the fact that America had not yet entered the war, to take advantage of British desperation? If Wilson had approached the allies with his war aims when they most needed him, Welles reasoned, the United States might have had more success in achieving its aims at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. [57](#)

In anticipation of his meeting with Churchill, the president had dispatched Harry Hopkins to meet with the prime minister in London, where Hopkins warned British senior officials about Washington's fear of secret treaties, telling them that the United States did not want to enter the war and find

London had commitments of which Washington knew nothing. [58](#) Hopkins suggested to Washington that he should next sound out Stalin in Moscow prior to the upcoming Churchill-Roosevelt meeting. The President agreed: "Welles and I highly approve Moscow trip and assume you would go in a few days." [59](#)

The much-anticipated meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill took place aboard the U.S.S. *Augusta* and the H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* on Placentia Bay off the coast of Newfoundland, and is remembered chiefly for producing the Atlantic Charter, the joint declaration of Anglo-American war aims. It is remarkable that officials from Washington, still technically a neutral capital, would even dare to meet with officials from the United Kingdom, a belligerent power, to enunciate a declaration of common war aims. What may be even more remarkable is that Roosevelt not only brought along his under secretary of state (and not Secretary of State Cordell Hull), but that he delegated almost all of the responsibility to Welles for formulating and promoting America's war and peace aims. [60](#)

Roosevelt and Churchill also discussed the course of the war, aid to Russia, and the possibility of jointly taking a harder line toward Japan. In fact, both the American and British delegations came to Newfoundland more concerned with immediate war-related matters than about vague ideals for a far-off peace. Although British and American officials had been consulting for a number of months, they had not broached common war and peace aims. Thus, no sooner had Churchill arrived aboard the *Augusta* on August 9 than the Americans suggested laying down a set of broad principles guiding their foreign policies.

There is no need to retell here the story of the Atlantic Conference. This account will merely limit itself to Welles's role at the conference and how it related to his ideas for postwar planning. [61](#) Welles, whose chief concerns at the conference would be postwar aims, desired to take advantage of Britain's precarious position by inducing London to commit to pledges of self-determination and the open door policy regarding resources. Welles and his British counterpart, Sir Alexander Cadogan, the permanent under secretary at the Foreign Office, immediately embarked upon the first of their lengthy discussions on political matters. [62](#)

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They began by discussing the Far East. Welles told Cadogan that he thought war between Japan and the United States "inevitable" but that Washington should delay a showdown with Tokyo until the timing was more advantageous for the United States. They also discussed the war situation in North Africa and the status of Spain and Portugal. More important to Welles was the question of secret treaties and territorial matters. He feared that any British commitments to territorial reconfigurations after the war would severely limit Washington's ability to shape the postwar world. He described his unease that Washington had not yet received a reply to its July warning urging the British to make no secret commitments without the agreement of the United States. Cadogan offered his assurance that the British had reached no agreements on frontiers or territorial readjustments, with the

minor exception of an oral commitment that had been made to Yugoslavia concerning Istria. This alleviated some of Welles's fears, but he sternly reminded the British diplomat of the damage that had been done by secret treaties in the last war. [62](#)

The discussion then turned to the question of foreign economic policy. [64](#) Welles and the state department had long pursued a revision of the Ottawa agreements of 1932, which had established a system of imperial preference. [65](#) Welles had been greatly alarmed by the comments of the noted British economist John Maynard Keynes who, during a recent mission to Washington, commented that the British desired closed economies at the end of the war. To Welles, abolishing imperial preference would contribute to the establishment of global political and economic stability, and he stressed to Cadogan the importance U.S. officials placed on the question of trade discrimination. Cadogan replied that he personally had been bitterly opposed to the Ottawa agreements and added that he agreed that the events of the past decade had demonstrated the futility of restrictive trade practices, but he suggested that the matter might be better taken up by Churchill and Roosevelt. [66](#)

Cadogan began the second day of their discussions by presenting Welles with a series of draft statements. The first proposed simultaneous declarations by the United States, Britain, and the Dutch government-in-exile on the situation in the Far East. It stated that any further encroachment by Japan in the southwestern Pacific would compel the three governments to go to war. Cadogan then gave him a draft of a joint Anglo-American declaration of principles. In anticipation of the conference, Welles had prepared his own statement of war aims, but the president, concerned that his under secretary's draft might provoke a dispute over colonialism or free trade, initially preferred something from Churchill's pen. [67](#)

The British draft featured several points. Borrowing heavily from Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, the first few points condemned aggression, promoted self-determination for all territorial changes after the war, and pledged to promote fairer economic and trade practices. The last point pledged that the United States and Britain would seek "by effective international organization" to build a postwar world based on collective security. [68](#)



Roosevelt and Welles discussed the British draft in private. Welles made substantial revisions, including the insertion of a statement calling for more radical liberalization of trade practices. On Monday, August 11, Roosevelt, Welles, and Hopkins received Churchill and Cadogan aboard the *Augusta*. Welles began by suggesting that the American statement to the Japanese be based on a broader policy covering the entire Pacific region, thereby including any Japanese moves north, such as an invasion of the Soviet Union. The president and Churchill agreed.

Welles then circulated copies of his redraft of the declaration of



principles. It generally followed the lines laid out earlier, with a few notable exceptions. Like Cadogan's draft, the first article declared that neither Britain nor the United States desired any kind of territorial aggrandizement, while article two proclaimed that no territorial changes would be made without the consent of the peoples involved. Welles's article three aimed to extend the call for the restoration of self-government to the colonial question. Churchill and Cadogan no doubt grasped the true intent of Welles's revisions. In Washington a few days before the conference, Welles had suggested that the president discuss the possibility of independence for India "in a very personal and confidential way directly with Mr. Churchill." [69](#)

During discussions on board the *Augusta*, Churchill proposed amending Welles's third point, suggesting the phrase "sovereign rights and" be inserted prior to the words "self-government." Churchill's insertion of the phrase "sovereign rights" was clearly designed to make the third point less applicable to the British Empire. [70](#) Churchill also raised an objection to Welles's changes to the fourth point on economic policy, which in Cadogan's draft had mildly stated that the United States and Britain would strive to bring about a fair and equitable distribution of essential resources. Welles changed this passage into a more specific challenge to the imperial preference system. [71](#)

Churchill pointedly asked Welles if this passage would apply to the terms of the Ottawa agreements, and Welles replied that it would, announcing that he sought the removal of all trade barriers "which had created such tragic havoc to the world economy during the past generation." He told Churchill that he understood the problems such a revision might pose for the British, but he added that the insertion of certain qualifiers could imply that any changes did not mean an immediate or absolute obligation. Roosevelt added that he believed Welles's argument to be "of very great importance as a measure of assurance to the German and Italian peoples that the British and the United States Governments desired to offer them, after the war, fair and equal opportunity of an economic character." [72](#) Churchill begged off, saying he was uncomfortable making such momentous decisions without first consulting the dominions, which might take some time. [73](#)

To resolve the impasse, Harry Hopkins suggested that Welles and Cadogan come up with a compromise to avoid further delays. Welles immediately recognized this as a threat to his aim to produce a joint declaration that would include a stinging rebuke of imperial preference. He bluntly replied that he thought further modification of the article would "destroy completely" its meaning. He defiantly added that the problem was not one of phraseology, but one of "vital principle." He argued that if the United States and Britain did not fight for free and liberal trade practices "they might as well throw in the sponge and realize that one of the greatest factors in creating the present tragic situation in the world was going to be permitted to continue unchecked in the postwar world." He said they must pursue a policy of "constructive sanity" in world economics as a "fundamental factor in the creation of a new and better world."

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Churchill and Cadogan conceded Welles's point that the question was not a mere matter of phraseology, but they reiterated the need for consultation with the dominions. Churchill then suggested that the impasse could be eased by the inclusion of the passage "with due regard for our present obligations," which could be inserted prior to Welles's phrase about economic liberalization. Roosevelt thought this might resolve the impasse and suggested that Churchill and Cadogan hash out the wording, and then have Welles review it with them later. If Welles realized that he had suffered a defeat on this matter of such importance to him, he did not show it, and said nothing more about the subject. The group then turned to points five and six, dealing respectively with economic collaboration and the establishment of a lasting peace. Churchill voiced no objections to these articles. Welles and Roosevelt came up with an extra point—to be known as article seven—calling for freedom of the seas, with which the British also concurred. 75

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Welles left the eighth point, regarding U.S. and British participation in an international organization, virtually intact, and Churchill asked the president if he would be amenable to including support for some kind of "effective international organization." On this matter, Welles and the prime minister were on the same side, as Welles had merely taken Churchill's earlier



passage on a world organization and made it more explicit. But the president, concerned about domestic opposition, wanted to eliminate any reference to international organizations. In the face of urgings from Welles, Hopkins, and Churchill for a stronger and more definitive endorsement of an international organization, Roosevelt merely offered a new passage vaguely calling for disarmament of the aggressors. As Welles looked on in dismay, Roosevelt emphasized his opposition to further discussions of a new league because it might run the risk of stirring up domestic political opposition. The others present eventually persuaded Roosevelt to agree to, at the very least, mention some form of international organization as a distant goal. 76

The president's stated opposition to a new league left Welles "surprised and somewhat discouraged." He told the president that if he thought Britain and the United States should police the world in the short term, it might also be desirable for the smaller powers to have some sort of assembly where they could voice their opinions. "It seemed to me that an organization of that kind would be the most effective safety valve that could be devised," Welles said. Roosevelt attempted to mollify him, but the president also refused to budge on the question of support for an international organization. 77

The meeting then broke up, and Welles conferred with Churchill and Cadogan before returning to the president. As anticipated, and with Roosevelt's concurrence, the prime minister had weakened Welles's economic clause by inserting the qualifying phrase "with due regard for our present obligations," therefore, for all practical purposes, exempting the British Empire. Welles still vigorously opposed Churchill's insertion, which the under



secretary thought would render the economic clause virtually meaningless. Churchill would go so far as to agree to a statement calling for equal access to raw materials, but the qualifying passages remained, and Welles had no choice but to settle for them. [78](#)

When the Atlantic Conference came to an end on August 12, the participants felt that much had been accomplished. Welles had aimed to weaken the British system of imperial preferences, to loosen London's hold on the British Empire, and to move Washington closer to a commitment to join a postwar international organization. By his own criteria he had not nearly achieved an unambiguous success. [79](#) The final version of the declaration did, however, conclude that neither nation would seek territorial gains during the war, nor would they make territorial changes without the agreement of the peoples concerned. The right of all peoples to choose their own governments—self determination—was endorsed on the basis that self-government be returned to all nations deprived of it by the war, although—with important consequences down the road—American and British representatives seemed to have differing interpretations of precisely where that clause would be applied. Welles had hoped for a more forceful declaration in this area, one that would more explicitly cover the entire colonial world, whereas the British seemed satisfied that the charter's wording would give the European colonial empires some rhetorical "wiggle room."

Britain and the United States also committed themselves to improving the world's labor standards while promoting economic justice and advancement and providing "social security." They also endorsed the effort to establish a lasting peace that would provide nations with freedom from fear and want. [80](#) If nothing else, the British and American delegations succeeded in better articulating their collective war and peace aims. [81](#) Furthermore, as David Reynolds has explained, the charter served as a foundation for successive declarations of allied war aims, from the United Nations Declaration of January 1942 to the United Nations Charter of April 1945. [82](#)

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Welles must have had mixed emotions as he returned from the conference with the president. Yet, having been frustrated in his efforts to compel the British to accept his more specific aims at the conference, he would instead seek to expand the meaning of the charter by other means, such as public diplomacy and postwar planning. Nonetheless, without Welles's presence at the conference, the Atlantic Charter might have been formulated quite differently. "It ought to be set down," recalled the president's son, Elliott, who attended the conference, "that Sumner Welles was the man who worked hardest on the Charter, and who contributed the most. It was his baby, from the time it was first considered, back in Washington." [83](#)

The charter's debt to Wilsonianism and the Fourteen Points is also immediately apparent. The first point of the charter, pledging that the allies would seek no aggrandizement, territorial or otherwise, had its antecedents in Wilsonian pronouncements. Similarly, the second point, dealing with territorial changes, had a Wilsonian precedent, as did the declaration's third point about the restoration of independence and sovereignty and self-

determination, the fourth point calling for equal access to the world's raw materials, and the eighth point calling for the establishment of a wider and more permanent system of general security and disarmament. The charter, incorporating elements of Wilson's Fourteen Points and Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, served Welles's aim of preventing the British from proposing overly specific war aims or making secret territorial concessions. Yet it also signaled a new tone on the part of the United States since the Welles mission of the previous year. No longer did Washington seem committed to a negotiated peace, for, as Welles understood, in order to secure the aims of the charter the Axis powers would have to be defeated militarily. [84](#)

The Atlantic Charter was essentially a proclamation rather than a formal diplomatic document or treaty, since Welles and Roosevelt wanted to avoid anything that might look like a formal Anglo-American alliance. But in some respects the charter marked an even greater effort to capture world opinion than Wilson's Fourteen Points because it hinted at a more intensified American commitment to shape the postwar order. The charter hinted that restoration of the European balance of power was not sufficient reason to enter the war. Welles had for the past few months sought to provide more expansive war aims by resurrecting a Wilsonian vision and by proceeding, while the war still raged, to lay the foundations for postwar peace and reconstruction. [85](#)

The charter thus offered a glimpse of American war aims and envisioned the establishment of a more elaborate system of general security. Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December would destroy most of the lingering doubts of mass opinion and open the door to another crusade in which Americans would attempt to make world affairs an extension of their domestic values. "The United States did not enter the war in order to reshape the world," wrote Warren F. Kimball, "but once in the war, that conception of world reform was the assumption that guided Roosevelt's actions." [86](#)

With the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States had resolved to prevent the reimposition or extension of European influence in the Americas. With the Atlantic Charter of 1941, Welles foresaw an opportunity to globalize the Monroe Doctrine by giving notice that those liberated by the war would achieve self-determination. He immediately understood and anticipated the impact the Atlantic Charter would have on domestic and world opinion. This helps to explain why he put up such a vigorous fight with the British over certain provisions of the charter. And why, when he returned to the United States he quickly strove to use his public addresses, his discussions with foreign diplomatic representatives in Washington, and later, his leadership of the postwar planning process, to further expand and define the meaning and interpretation of the Atlantic Charter. [87](#)

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Despite the earlier failure of Wilson's Fourteen Points, the Atlantic Charter made a significant impression throughout the world. It heightened the already high expectations about the postwar world and thus perhaps contributed to some of the disillusionment that followed, particularly over

matters in Eastern Europe and the colonial world. While Welles and other administration officials would later argue that the charter was merely a statement of general war aims and not a guarantee of specific action, the high expectations raised by the charter were not necessarily met at the conclusion of the war. As the war progressed and Welles was confronted with the hard realities of alliance relations with both Moscow *and* London, he would find that he could not always be true to the ideals of the Atlantic Charter. Not only would America's high-sounding principles do little for Eastern Europeans and Baltic peoples who fell within the Soviet sphere of influence, but such principles also had little effect on European colonial powers seeking to retrieve their possessions at the end of the war. In fact, by the late 1940s the United States would instead find itself backing colonial powers in numerous faraway places Welles had once aimed to liberate. [88](#)

Welles understood that grand pronouncements such as the Atlantic Charter were often necessary to express broader goals important for public support in wartime. While he spearheaded the effort to commit America to an internationalist course, his actions and public pronouncements simultaneously helped raise expectations so high that they were almost destined to be shattered by the political and military realities of the postwar era. When reality intruded, such grand rhetoric became a liability. After all, part of the disillusionment with the eventual postwar outcome stemmed from the fact that declarations like the Atlantic Charter had pledged the United States to guarantee a better world for millions of people for whom, in reality, the United States could do very little. [89](#)

Notes:

Note 1: Sumner Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History* (New York: Harper, 1950), 180; Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945* (Washington: U.S. Department of State, 1949), 19. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Harley Notter, "Memorandum on United States Participation in Peacemaking at the End of the War," November 13, 1939, box 54, folder 14, Welles papers, FDRL; Notter, "Division for the Study of Problems of Peace and Reconstruction," December 12, 1939, Appendix 1, in Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 453-454. [Back.](#)

Note 3: "Memorandum on the House Inquiry," July 15, 1941, box 8, Notter files, RG 59, National Archives. Colonel House enlisted Isaiah Bowman, head of the American Geographical Society, Archibald Carey Coolidge, a professor of history at Harvard, and the journalist, Walter Lippmann. [Back.](#)

Note 4: Harley Notter, "Memorandum on United States Participation in Peacemaking at the End of the War," November 13, 1939, box 54, folder 14, Welles papers, FDRL; Stanley Hornbeck memorandum to Welles, November 22, 1939, box 54, folder 14, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 5: "Division for the Study of Problems of Peace and Reconstruction," December 12, 1939, in Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 453-54;

"Memorandum on the House Inquiry," July 15, 1941, box 8, Notter files, National Archives, RG 59, National Archives; Sumner Welles, *Where Are We Heading?* (New York: Harper, 1946), 20. [Back.](#)

Note 6: "Subcommittee on Economic Problems of the Intradepartmental Committee on Peace and Reconstruction: Program of Work," January 3, 1940, Appendix 2, in Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 454-455. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 20-21; "Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations: Department of State Announcement, January 8, 1940," *Department of State Bulletin II*, 19. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Welles to Pearson, June 8, 1933, box 146, Welles papers, FDRL; *Department of State Bulletin II*, (January 13, 1940), 19; "Committee on Peace and Reconstruction," box 191, Postwar Foreign Policy file, 1940-41, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL; "Subcommittee: Organization of Peace," January 3, 1940, box 191, Postwar Foreign Policy files, 1940-41, Welles papers, FDRL; Hugh Wilson, "Memorandum on World Order," January 22, 1940, box 191, Postwar Foreign Policy files, 1940-41, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Pasvolsky to Welles, January 29, 1940, box 155, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL; Leo Pasvolsky, "The Bases of an International Economic Program in Connection with a Possible Conference of Neutrals," January 29, 1940, box 155, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL; "Memorandum by Hugh R. Wilson Arising From Conversation in Mr. Welles's Office, April 19 and April 26," May 1, 1940, box 191, postwar files, 1940-41, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL; "Subcommittee: Organization of Peace," January 3, 1940, box 191, postwar files, 1940-41, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Welles to Roosevelt, January 12, 1940, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, February 1, 1940, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 11: "Mission to Europe," Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, Record Group 59, National Archives, 44; Breckinridge Long Diary, March 12, 1940, box 5, Long Papers, Library of Congress. Roosevelt may also have been seeking a bold move to aid him in his efforts to secure an unprecedented third presidential term. See, for example, Herbert S. Parmet and Marie B. Hecht, *Never Again: A President Runs For a Third Term* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 31-34, as well as Bernard F. Donahoe, *Private Plans and Public Dangers: The Story of FDR's Third Nomination* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965). [Back.](#)

Note 12: Pasvolsky to Welles, February 14, 1940, box 155, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL; "The Bases of the Economic Foreign Policy of the United States," February 1940, box 155, folder 4, Welles papers, FDRL; Hull to Welles, February 15, 1940, box 155, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 13: See, for example, Frederick W. Marks, *Wind Over Sand: The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988),

153-160; Arnold A. Offner, "Appeasement Revisited: The United States, Great Britain, and Germany, 1933-1940," *Journal of American History* 64:2 (September 1977): 384-393; William Langer and S. E. Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation: The World Crisis of 1937-1940 and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1952), 363-370. [Back.](#)

Note 14: See Stanley E. Hilton, "The Welles Mission to Europe, February-March 1940: Illusion or Realism?" *Journal of American History* 58:1 (June 1971): 93-120. For more on the hope that the Italians might still have been wooed over to the Allied side, even as late as the phony war, see James J. Sadkovich, "Understanding Defeat: Reappraising Italy's Role in World War II," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24:1 (January 1989): 30. [Back.](#)

Note 15: See Welles's introduction in the English-language edition of Ciano's diaries, Hugh Gibson, ed., *Ciano's Diaries, 1939-1943* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1946); as well as Hilton, "The Welles Mission," 115, 120, and Frederick Marks, *Wind Over Sand*, 155. [Back.](#)

Note 16: "Relations with the President," Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, Record Group 59, National Archives; Roosevelt statement to press on Welles Mission, February 9, 1940, *Department of State Bulletin* II, 155; Sumner Welles, *The Time For Decision* (New York: Harper, 1944), 73-74. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Breckinridge Long Diary, January 4, 1940, March 12, 1940, box 5, Long Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [Back.](#)

Note 18: Roosevelt Statement, February 9, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; *Life*, February 19, 1940; *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 1940. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Welles draft of Roosevelt letter to Chamberlain, February 14, 1940, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL; Breckinridge Long Diary, March 12, 1940, box 5, Long Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. [Back.](#)

Note 20: Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 737-739; *Newsweek*, February 19, 1940. [Back.](#)

Note 21: *Time*, February 19, 1940; Breckinridge Long Diary, February 17, 1940, box 5, Breckinridge Long Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. [Back.](#)

Note 22: *Newsweek*, February 19, 1940, 16; Berle Diary, February 17, 1940, box 211, Berle Papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Memorandum of Conversation with Mussolini, by Welles, February 26, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part I, PSF 6, FDRL; Hugh Gibson, ed., *The Ciano Diaries: 1939-1943*, entry for February 26, 1940, 212. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Before leaving Germany, Welles had a remarkable interview with Hjalmar Schacht, president of the Reichsbank, who told the envoy of a plot

by a number of leading German generals to overthrow Hitler. Schacht also warned Welles that the atrocities being committed in Poland were "far worse than what was imagined, as to beggar description." Memorandum of Conversation with Schacht, by Welles, March 3, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part I, PSF 6, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 25: Memorandum of Conversation with Chautemps and Bonnet, by Welles, March 8, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL; Memorandum of Conversation with Reynaud, by Welles, March 9, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL; Memorandum of Conversation with Sikorski, by Welles, March 9, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 26: See Orville H. Bullitt, ed., *For the President, Personal and Secret: Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 402-403. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Memorandum of Conversation with Chamberlain, by Welles, March 13, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL. While dining at Number Ten, Welles took note that the only photograph in one room was of Mussolini. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Churchill's alleged charms remained a mystery to Welles. See the unedited version of Welles's report to the president in Welles, "Memorandum of Conversation with Churchill," March 12, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Sumner Welles, "Italy and the Peace in Europe," March 19, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Conclusion of Welles Report, March 19, 1940, Welles Report, 1940, Part II, PSF 6, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 31: *New York Times*, March 23, 1940, 1; *New York Times*, March 29, 1940, 1. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Berle Diary, March 18, 1940, Berle Papers, box 211, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Breckinridge Long Diary, March 15, 1940, box 5, Long Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. [Back.](#)

Note 34: *Life*, April 8, 1940, 32; *Congressional Record - Senate*, April 1, 1940 and April 2, 1940, (3748, 3821); *Congressional Record - House of Representatives*, 1940, (3969). [Back.](#)

Note 35: Reporting to Roosevelt from Paris, Bullitt used the occasion to step up his criticism of Welles: "There are, of course, a lot of defeatists in this country, including Bonnet, who attempt to make great use of Sumner's praise of Mussolini, but their campaign was cut short by Mussolini's approval of the German invasion of Denmark and Norway." See Mario Rossi, *Roosevelt and the French* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 37. [Back.](#)

Note 36: David Reynolds, in Douglas Brinkley and David Facey-Crowther,

eds. *The Atlantic Charter* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 134; Berle Diaries, May 8, 1940, box 211, Berle Papers, FDRL; *Life*, April 8, 1940, 32. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Roosevelt to Welles, May 20, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, May 24, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, May 25, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 505. Welles underscored this concern in a letter to the President at the height of the battle of France, and he included a translation of a Uruguayan newspaper editorial titled "Welles the Ruffian," which began with the sentence, "Sumner Welles, the ruffian, was sent by Roosevelt, the Jew, to Europe to interview the chiefs of state of the nations included directly or indirectly in this great conflict." Welles to Roosevelt, May 24, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, May 25, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL [Back.](#)

Note 38: Welles to Roosevelt, June 18, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; Berle Diary, June 13, 1940, box 212, Berle papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 29-31. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Harley Notter, "Menace to the United States Through the Other American Republics of a German Victory," January 24, 1941, box 8, Notter files; Hugh Wilson to Welles, May 31, 1940, with Wilson memorandum, box 191, postwar file, 1940-41, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Roosevelt to Welles, July 16, 1940, Welles to Roosevelt, July 19, 1940, PSF 76, FDRL; "Division for the Study of Problems of Peace and Reconstruction," December 12, 1939, in Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 453-54; "Memorandum of Conversation in Welles's office, by Wilson," April 19 and 26, 1940, in Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 458. [Back.](#)

Note 42: "Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy: Preliminaries," no date, 1941, box 54, Notter files; "Memorandum, Pasvolsky to Welles," April 11, 1941, Appendix 7, in Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy*, 462; Hamilton Fish Armstrong to Welles, July 14, 1941, box 67, folder 3, Welles papers, FDRL; "Post-War Reconstruction Political Problems of Study: Assuming the Defeat of Germany," June 12, 1941, box 8, Notter files. [Back.](#)

Note 43: "Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy: Preliminaries," no date, 1941, box 54, Notter files; "Memorandum on the House Inquiry," July 15, 1941, box 8, Notter files. [Back.](#)

Note 44: "Public Relations," Undersecretary of State Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Harold F. Gosnell, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, Record Group 59, National Archives; Sumner Welles, "An Association of Nations," July 22, 1941, speech files, box 195, Welles papers, FDRL; "Commercial Policy After the War," October 7, 1941, speech files, box 195, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles, "Wilson and the Atlantic Charter," November 11, 1941, speech files, box 195, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 45: *New York Times*, July 23, 1941. [Back.](#)

Note 46: "An Association of Nations," July 22, 1941, speech files, box 195, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 47: "An Association of Nations," July 22, 1941, speech files, box 195, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 48: *New York Times*, July 23, 1941. [Back.](#)

Note 49: *Time*, August 8, 1941. [Back.](#)

Note 50: *New York Journal and American*, August 2, 1941; *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 1941. [Back.](#)

Note 51: Langer and Gleason believed Welles's speech deliberately foreshadowed the Atlantic Conference. See William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War, 1940-41* (New York: Harper, 1953), 680-81; "Atlantic Conference and Charter," Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, RG 59, National Archives. [Back.](#)

Note 52: *New York Times Magazine*, August 2, 1941. [Back.](#)

Note 53: *Time*, August 8, 1941. [Back.](#)

Note 54: Berle Diary, July 8, 1941, Berle papers, box 213, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 55: Welles memorandum of conversation with Halifax, July 10, 1941, box 163, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 56: The question of self-determination in American foreign policy is discussed in William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3-4, 79, 81, 121-133. [Back.](#)

Note 57: Welles to Winant, July 14, 1941 (containing text of Roosevelt message to Churchill), FRUS, 1941, vol. I, 342; Welles, *The Time For Decision*, 174. [Back.](#)

Note 58: Robert Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947-48), I:237; Eden confided in his diary that, "the spectacle of an American President talking at large on European frontiers chilled me with Wilsonian memories." Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965), 273. [Back.](#)

Note 59: Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York: Harper, 1948), 318, 321-322. [Back.](#)

Note 60: "Welles's presence and Hull's absence was another demonstration of Roosevelt's preference for his Undersecretary over his Secretary of State," according to Robert Dallek. See Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy: 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford, 1979), 282. Theodore Wilson, the author of the most authoritative study of the Atlantic Conference, added: "Despite a persistent whispering campaign about Welles's

homosexuality and the urgings of William C. Bullitt that the president fire him, FDR continued to deal with Welles and to bypass his secretary of state—as was demonstrated by the secret invitation to the Under Secretary to go to Argentina...." See Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay, 1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 31-32. In addition to Welles, Roosevelt's aides at the conference included his military chiefs; Harry Hopkins, who came with Churchill; and Averell Harriman, who was serving as Lend-Lease expediter. [Back.](#)

Note 61: For more exhaustive accounts see Theodore Wilson, *The First Summit*; Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1991), 53-55, 132-139; David Reynolds, "The Atlantic 'Flop': British Foreign Policy and the Churchill-Roosevelt Meeting of August 1941," in Brinkley and Facey-Crowther, eds., *The Atlantic Charter*, 129-146; and Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 144-161 [Back.](#)

Note 62: Memorandum by Welles of conversation with Cadogan, August 9, 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. I, 345; Cadogan had attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and had held Foreign Office responsibilities for League of Nations affairs in the 1920s and early 1930s. He was somewhat unusual in the Foreign Office in that he thought the League, despite its limitations, to be a worthwhile attempt at world government. Like Welles, Cadogan had a reputation for being cold and aloof. The assessment by Churchill's bodyguard that Cadogan was "the coldest [man] I ever encountered—a real oyster," could equally have applied to Welles. Cadogan himself seemed not to have recognized this similarity. "I have hobnobbed with [Welles] a lot and have tried to get through his reserve," Cadogan told his colleagues. "It is a pity that he swallowed a ramrod in his youth." Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit*, 81. [Back.](#)

Note 63: Memorandum by Welles of conversation with Cadogan, August 9, 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. I, 351-352. [Back.](#)

Note 64: Welles had brought with him the most recent draft of the Lend-Lease Consideration Agreement, and hoped to discuss with Cadogan Article VII of the agreement, which sought to commit the British to the open door. See Alan P. Dobson, "Economic Diplomacy at the Atlantic Conference," *Review of International Studies* 10, (1984): 147-149. [Back.](#)

Note 65: After the war, Welles summarized his views on the Ottawa agreements when he wrote that "by the Ottawa Agreements, the United Kingdom had placed the final stone upon the grave of those liberal trade policies—first advocated by Cobden and the Manchester School—which had done so much to increase the power and wealth of the British people, and, by freely opening the British Empire to the commerce of all nations, had contributed so notably to the maintenance of world peace during the two generations prior to the First World War." Sumner Welles, *Where Are We Heading?* (New York: Harper, 1946), 8. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Acheson to Welles, memorandum of conversation with John

Maynard Keynes, July 15, 1941, PSF 77, FDRL; Sumner Welles, "Commercial Policy After the War," October 7, 1941, speech files, Welles papers, box 195, file 2, FDRL; memorandum by Welles of conversation with Cadogan, August 9, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 353-354. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 355-358. [Back.](#)

Note 68: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 355-358. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 355-358; Welles to Hull, August 6, 1941, *FRUS*, vol. III, 181. [Back.](#)

Note 70: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 356-358. See Louis, Imperialism at Bay, 123. [Back.](#)

Note 71: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 356-358. [Back.](#)

Note 72: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 361; Notter and Rothwell, "History of Negotiations with Respect to Point Four of the Atlantic Charter," September 11, 1941, box 13, Atlantic Charter file, Notter files. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 362-363; Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. II, 200. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 362. [Back.](#)

Note 75: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 363; for the British record of discussions with Welles over the Ottawa Agreements see CAB 66/18 WP(41) 202, August 20, 1941, memorandum by Churchill on discussions at Atlantic Conference; and CAB 66/18 WP(41) 203, August 18, 1941, "Conference Between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and President of the United States," Public Record Office. [Back.](#)

Note 76: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 363. [Back.](#)

Note 77: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 10, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 365-366. [Back.](#)

Note 78: Memorandum of conversation by Welles, August 11, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, vol. I, 364-365; Notter and Rothwell, "History of Negotiations with Respect to Point Four of the Atlantic Charter," September 11, 1941, Atlantic Charter file, box 13, Notter files. [Back.](#)

Note 79: This may have been as the president intended, believing all along

that American aims would ultimately be realized without the kind of pressure Welles sought to apply to the British. See Lloyd C. Gardner, "The Atlantic Charter: Idea and Reality, 1942-1945," in *The Atlantic Charter*, ed. Douglas Brinkley and David Facey-Crowther (London: Macmillan, 1994), 50-51. Some have interpreted the Atlantic Conference as a complete failure for American aims. See Alan Dobson, "Economic Diplomacy at the Atlantic Conference," in Brinkley and Facey-Crowther, 143-163. [Back.](#)

Note 80: "Joint Statement by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, August 14, 1941," *FRUS*, 1941, I, 367-368. [Back.](#)

Note 81: For an account of the meaning of the Atlantic Charter from London's perspective, see David Reynolds, "The Atlantic 'Flop,'" 130. [Back.](#)

Note 82: See Reynolds, "The Atlantic 'Flop,'" 146. [Back.](#)

Note 83: Elliott Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 39. Although Elliott Roosevelt assumed Welles had created a draft of the charter in Washington, this was not the case. [Back.](#)

Note 84: Sumner Welles, "Wilson and the Atlantic Charter," November 11, 1941, speech files, box 195, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 85: Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 122; Welles, "Wilson and the Atlantic Charter," November 11, 1941, speech files, box 195, folder 2, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

Note 86: Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler*, 17. [Back.](#)

Note 87: For the contrary view that the Atlantic Charter "quickly took on a life of its own, unanticipated by those who drafted it," see David Reynolds, "The Atlantic 'Flop,'" 130. [Back.](#)

Note 88: "The Atlantic Charter and National Independence," November 13, 1942, Atlantic Charter file, box 13, Notter files; "Memorandum on Official Statements of Post-War Policy," January 3, 1942, Division of Special Research, Department of State, box 8, Notter files. [Back.](#)

Note 89: See, for example, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "What New World Order?" *Foreign Affairs* 71:2 (Spring 1992), 83. [Back.](#)

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