

AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN BERLIN:
OBSERVING HITLER'S GAMBLER'S IN FOREIGN POLICY
1933-1937

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ONE

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM E. DODD: AMERICAN RAPPORTEUR ON THE THIRD REICH, 1933-1937

As William E. Dodd stepped onboard the S.S. Washington, the freshly appointed Ambassador to Germany bade farewell to friends, relatives, and reporters. He remarked optimistically to the large crowd, “Though difficulties lie ahead, one can hardly think that an honest, frank mission to Berlin can fail of good result.”¹ His ship docked at Hamburg on 13 July 1933. The Ambassador and his family were promptly taken to Berlin. So began Dodd’s four-and-one-half year mission to the Third Reich.

The previous ambassador to Germany, Frederic M. Sackett, had retired that March. As President Roosevelt hunted for a successor, he could not, as was often done, merely dole the post out to some large campaign contributor or favored party stalwart. With a radical

¹ *New York Times*, July 5, 1933.

fascist party at the helm of the German government and the wider political stability that blessed Europe in the mid- to late-twenties fading, the ambassadorship in Berlin was of special importance to American diplomacy. Already by this point, Hitler had become chancellor. The Reichstag Fire Decree eliminating freedoms of speech, press, and assembly had been issued in late-February. The Enabling Act passed that March, endowing Hitler with extraordinary powers and laying the foundation for his dictatorship. Moreover, Germans were defaulting on millions of dollars of private American loans, there was great need for improvement in the trade relationship between the United States and Germany, and American travelers—especially Jewish ones—were too often victims of vicious storm trooper attacks. Speaking of the American ambassadorship to Germany, the President had declared, “It is a difficult post and...I want an American liberal in Germany as a standing example.”²

Hence, Roosevelt’s man in Berlin would have to be a political liberal, someone skilled in analysis and reporting, well-versed in Germany’s culture and language, and familiar with its history such that current events might be understood within their proper historical context. For this role, William Dodd was an ideal candidate. A prominent professor of history at the University of Chicago, he was also a graduate of a German university and a self-confessed Germanophile. He spoke the language fluently. Equally as important, he was a loyal member of the Democratic Party. He had played an active part in the 1932 campaign, was a staunch Wilsonian internationalist, and admired Jeffersonian democracy. Furthermore, he was a worthy successor to other American scholars, such as George Bancroft and Andrew D. White, who had served as previous ambassadors to

² William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary, 1933-1938* (New York, 1941) 3 [8 June 8 1933].

Germany. For all of these reasons, Roosevelt was confident in sending Dodd to Berlin as the representative of the United States and as a critical rapporteur on German developments to inform American foreign policy.

This study will examine Ambassador Dodd's changing perception of the threat Nazi Germany posed to world peace over the course of his service to Germany. The topic is central to a critical historiographical question of the pre-war period: How did the international system digest early German efforts to upset the European balance of power? It was a difficult matter for political leaders of the era. In France, Britain, the United States and elsewhere, policymakers had to decide whether they were dealing with the mad, belligerent Hitler of *Mein Kampf* or the public, more cautious Hitler, the one who constantly praised the merits of peace, sought no more than equality for his nation, and cursed the useless strife of war. Europe and as some historians have argued, the United States, interpreted Hitler as the latter and followed a policy of appeasement.³ Hitler was treated as a traditional politician with limited goals; accordingly, the British and French in particular sought to provide the Chancellor with adequate concessions to satisfy his ambitions and avoid a European war. Their appeasement policy reached its height with the Munich Conference in 1938, when Great Britain, France, and Italy permitted the German annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. Appeasement was dealt its deathblow in September 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland.

³ On the topic of American foreign policy towards Germany during this era, see Arnold Offner, *American Appeasement*, (Cambridge, MA, 1969).

Between 1933 and 1937, Dodd wrote heavily on the nature of Hitler's foreign policy, the threat it posed to world peace, and what should be done about it. His views evolved in a complex manner over this time. This study will argue that his experiences over the period of his service converted a man once conservatively optimistic about the Hitler regime to one deathly afraid of it, convinced that united action by foreign powers was the only avenue to stop Germany's march towards war. He had come to this conclusion by 1936. At this time, few within the ranks of world diplomats shared his beliefs. To build this argument, this study will focus primarily on three key events in the history of Nazi foreign policy. These events are the withdrawal from the World Disarmament Conference and League of Nations in October 1933, the announcement of conscription in March 1935, and the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936. Each episode will form one chapter of the study. This approach has the advantage of consolidating each phase in the evolution of Dodd's views on the Third Reich into one coherent unit.

This study will rely primarily on Dodd's official correspondence with Secretary of State Hull. As United States Ambassador to the Third Reich, Dodd produced hundreds of reports on Germany covering political, social, and economic issues related to current events.⁴ All of these analyses were transmitted to Secretary Hull in Washington. The Ambassador's regular reporting formed an important information source for the State Department, which it used to adjust its policies accordingly. While it cannot be said that

⁴ This collection is located in the State Department records in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, primarily in three subseries of the State Department's decimal system: 862 (*Confidential United States State Department Central Files: Internal Affairs. Germany, 1930-41*), 762 and 711.62 (both in *Confidential United States State Department Central Files: Foreign Affairs. Germany, 1930-1939*).

Dodd played a central role in the actual creation of his nation's foreign policy towards Germany or Europe, the men who did have such roles, such as President Roosevelt, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Undersecretary of State William Phillips, and Jay Pierrepont Moffat, the State Department's chief of its western European affairs division, all used Dodd's reports in their decision-making processes.

To compile these analyses, Ambassador Dodd utilized numerous sources of information. Most useful to him was the extensive network of American consulates located throughout the country. The consuls at these ten offices transmitted their own reports to the embassy at Berlin.⁵ This reporting was critical to Dodd's work, for it allowed him to piece together a bottom-up review of the German situation utilizing the regional perspective of each consulate. The Ambassador also held formal interviews with government officials (including important ministers and the Chancellor), utilized German newspapers and official reports, and gathered information informally through personal contacts, confidential letters, and observations on the spot. The content and quality of Dodd's reports varies widely, from short notes on some current happening to twenty to thirty-page expositions on the Ambassador's evaluation of broader trends in German politics and society.

For the historian, these missives represent an important collection of information on and analysis of the Third Reich. As with any source collection, though, there are methodological challenges involved in its use that must be acknowledged. Dodd's reports are in essence his own perceptions. They are subject to his selectivity, conscious and unconscious, and many other hidden factors; the institutional setting of the reports, the

⁵ The consular reports themselves form an interesting and informative collection; however, due to the loss of most of the reports from the consulates after their closing on short notice in July 1941, the loss of any internal documents from the Berlin embassy due to a fire in the early forties, and the scarcity of supplementary documents such as private papers, memoirs, etc. from consular figures, significant source gaps exist.

limitations of Dodd's network of contacts, his own personal interests, his varying levels of acquaintance with a particular topic, and his pre-established views of Germany all present elements of distortion with which the historian must grapple. All of these issues must be recognized if one is to undertake a study of the Ambassador's work. To circumnavigate some of these issues and present the most accurate depiction of Dodd's views on Germany, this study will also utilize Dodd's private diary and his personal letters.

Significant room exists in the historiography for a more comprehensive review of this source collection and Dodd's views on the German situation. Only a handful of authors have written of Dodd's views on the Nazi threat and none have given it the full depth that it deserves. Furthermore, much of this research has mischaracterized the evolution of Dodd's thinking.

Research on the Ambassador's writings is confined primarily to two biographical works. The most important is Robert Dallek's *Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William E. Dodd*, published in 1968.⁶ Dallek's study covers Dodd's life from his rural upbringing in North Carolina to his death in 1940, giving significant attention to his time in Berlin. For these years, it covers not only his diplomatic reporting that appraised the situation in Germany, but also the effort Dodd led to reform the United States Foreign Service in Germany. The work excels in its comprehensive coverage and use of the available sources, but is often disappointing in the quality of its analysis. Often times, it is apparent that Dallek has either misread the source material or manipulated its context to make it fit with his broader argument. From the outset of Dodd's mission in Berlin, Dallek overplays the

⁶ Robert Dallek, *Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William E. Dodd*, (New York, 1968).

internationalist tone of the Ambassador's actions and analyses. He also occasionally misreads Dodd's attitude towards Hitler and his foreign policy.⁷ While Dallek's analysis paints an interesting story of Dodd as an active champion of Wilsonian ideals, it does not remain entirely true to reality.

The second study to consider Dodd's work is Fred Arthur Bailey's more recent *William Edward Dodd: The South's Yeoman Scholar*, published in 1997.⁸ Though far more adept and accurate in analysis than Dallek's *Democrat and Diplomat*, the work pays comparatively little attention to the years 1933-1937. Moreover, the single chapter of this book that does cover this era focuses on Dodd's attempts at foreign service reform and the relationships he maintained with other diplomats.

Dodd has received more cursory attention within several other works, but just two stand out for their contributions: Arnold Offner's *American Appeasement* (1969) and an essay by Franklin L. Ford entitled "Three Observers in Berlin: Rumbold, Dodd, and François-Poncet" (1953).⁹ Offner's work covers German-American relations from the time of Hitler's seizure of power to the Munich Conference. The study argues that between 1933 and 1938, American diplomats acted immorally by passively accepting German aggression. Offner presents Ambassador Dodd as one of two exceptions to this pattern (the other being George Messersmith, Consul-General at Berlin and later Minister to Austria). Dodd's

⁷ As three examples, see: the bleak attitude with which Dallek describes Dodd's attitude before leaving for Berlin in June 1933 (p. 194), arguing that he believed his mission would be cut short by the intractability of the Nazi regime, when in reality Dodd felt his job would be cut short by the prompt moderation and likely disappearance of the Hitler regime; Dallek's assertion that in March 1935, Dodd believed American isolationism would soon give the nation "something to reckon with" when the truly belligerent face of Nazism showed itself. While Dodd did argue at this time that the Nazis aimed for war, he did not argue that this was necessarily a direct threat to the United States (p. 260); the inaccurate portrayal of Dodd's attitude following the remilitarization of the Rhineland as one of optimism and hope in Hitler's possible commitment to peace, when in reality Dodd clearly indicated that he placed no faith in the peace proposals (p. 277).

⁸ Fred Arthur Bailey, *William Edward Dodd: The South's Yeoman Scholar*, (Charlottesville, 1997).

⁹ Arnold Offner, *American Appeasement*, (Cambridge, MA, 1969); Franklin L. Ford, "Three Observers in Berlin: Rumbold, Dodd, and Francois-Poncet" in *The Diplomats: 1919-1939*, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, (New York, 1953).

views are addressed regarding a number of different events in Nazi history, but in a study focusing broadly on American diplomacy, Offner only scratches the surface of the massive collection of Dodd's reports.

Franklin L. Ford's "Three Observers in Berlin" covers the experiences of the British, American, and French ambassadors to Germany. Writing in 1953, Ford did not have access to Dodd's as-yet-unpublished reporting from 1936 or 1937. Thus the portion devoted to Dodd can only lightly cover his reporting on German events. Ford's work focuses instead on an appraisal of his effectiveness as a diplomat. It concludes that Dodd was a failure as an ambassador. Though Ford acknowledges the accuracy of Dodd's reporting (for the years 1933-1935), he complains that Dodd's strong moral distaste for the Nazi regime cut him off from many opportunities to better understand the German situation and improve German-American relations. For example, Ford argues that after 1934, as Dodd became increasingly uncomfortable with speaking to party chiefs, he fell back on his contacts with German scholars, aristocrats, and the "decent" government officials: Konstantin von Neurath (Foreign Minister), Bernhard von Bülow (State Secretary), Hans Dieckhoff (German Ambassador to the United States, Hjalmar Schacht (the Minister of Economics), and Franz von Papen (former chancellor and vice chancellor through 1934). Because of his attitude, Ford argues, Dodd had little chance of being taken seriously by the Nazi regime in representing the American position to the German government. Ford presents an interesting argument, but his piece does not (and logistically speaking, could not) do justice to Dodd's reporting or his analysis of contemporary events.

Thus the historiography on Dodd's views of Nazi Germany is riddled with holes and misjudgments. This study seeks to fill in that gap and provide a comprehensive review of Dodd's views on Nazi foreign policy ambitions and the threat they posed to world peace. While each of the three chapters in this work will focus on one specific moment in time, these individual episodes will act as a nexus around which a more thorough examination of German events will be presented. The German withdrawal at Geneva in 1933, the announcement of conscription in 1935, and the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936 all relate to the larger issue of the German rearmament effort. The buildup of the German military and the remilitarization of the Rhineland buffer zone between France and Germany were first and indispensable steps towards Hitler's larger military plans. The Chancellor's ambitious designs to abolish the Treaty of Versailles, expand Germany's borders at the expense of its neighbors, and create a racially pure Greater German Empire were impossible until the Nazi leader had the backing of military power.

Especially during the earliest years of rearmament, between 1933 and 1937, this was a time of considerable danger for Germany. The nation would have been far too weak to protect itself from any preventive action taken by France or another power—action for which the Treaty of Versailles provided ample legal justification. Accordingly, it was during these early years that foreign powers could have most easily extinguished any nascent German belligerence, had they recognized the inherent threat of Nazi foreign policy. Hitler understood this and took great care to convince the world that his aims were wholly benevolent.

The first chapter of this study, addressing the German withdrawal from the World Disarmament Conference and League of Nations in October 1933, illustrates from Dodd's

point of view how Hitler was able to successfully pull off this masquerade. The action at Geneva was a major step towards rearmament. However, Ambassador Dodd, as well as the large majority of American and European diplomats, viewed the action as a relatively innocuous event. Dodd's reporting on the developments attached little significance to the possibility of German rearmament, and if anything, the Ambassador believed it a reasonable response to the harsh treaty obligations imposed on Germany at Versailles.

By the time of Hitler's announcement of conscription in March 1935, where the second chapter begins, Dodd had already undergone a major shift in his perception of the Nazi threat. Most American officials, including President Roosevelt, barely reacted to the developments that March. Dodd, however, took them with all seriousness. In his writings on this event, he predicted imminent war in Europe and characterized Hitler as a dictator bent on territorial conquest. This chapter will not only analyze Dodd's reaction to Hitler's announcements that month, but also trace the development of the Ambassador's outlook into one that was radically different from the hope he had expressed twenty-one months earlier after the withdrawal at Geneva.

The third chapter of this study will cover the most daring of Hitler's foreign policy moves during Dodd's ambassadorship: the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936. Dodd immediately realized the military implications of this move. He understood that the critical buffer zone between Germany and France, which had earlier made German aggression towards either the West or East nearly impossible, was now erased; the keystone to European peace set up after the First World War was obliterated. And unlike the political leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and France, Dodd was committed to the belief that concerted action was needed to halt Hitler in his tracks before he made bigger and

ultimately more aggressive moves. He wrote that it was essential for European leaders to enter into negotiations with Hitler, determine his true aims, and take action. This never occurred, and the march towards the Second World War continued unabated.

Dodd left Berlin on 28 December 1937, having been recalled by the State Department over a series of public relations disasters. His four years of service and countless admonitions of the danger the Hitler regime posed to the world had registered little impact in Washington or elsewhere. He left office little respected by his colleagues in the State Department, who viewed him as a scare-mongering liberal, part of a messianic camp aiming to save Europe from fascism when most Americans were anti-interventionist and focused on their country's own problems. It would not be until 1939, when Dodd's warnings of Hitler's insatiable territorial ambitions became reality, that American policymakers began to share, and act on, Dodd's ominous views.

Two

THE FINAL DAYS OF DISARMAMENT: GERMAN WITHDRAWAL AT GENEVA

When Hitler announced that his nation would quit an international conference committed to reducing worldwide armament stockpiles as well as give up his nation's membership in an international organization devoted to maintaining global peace and stability, Ambassador Dodd's reaction was not to warn his Washington superiors of some impending world cataclysm brought on by a ruthless and militaristic dictator. In October 1933, after Germany had left the World Disarmament Conference and League of Nations, the Ambassador did not even indicate there to be any threat to world peace. Instead, he argued that the German action was primarily a sop to nationalist sentiment in Germany and an effort to consolidate Hitler's leadership. Utilizing Dodd's reporting to the State Department after 14 October 1933, this chapter will establish the Ambassador's

interpretation of the German withdrawal at Geneva. At first glance, the Ambassador's interpretation does not square with either the rhetorical belligerency of the Hitler regime or the frightening aspects of the Chancellor's long-term military goals (which would have been available to Dodd through Hitler's writings, especially in *Mein Kampf*, and his numerous speeches). In order to make sense of the Ambassador's somewhat puzzling misjudgments, it will be necessary to place Dodd's argument within its historical context and discover the specific analytical filters he employed as a rapporteur.

The World Disarmament Conference had brought together the member states of the League of Nations, as well as the United States and Soviet Union, to realize in practice the disarmament rhetoric preached since the closing days of the First World War. For Germany, the conference presented a critical opportunity to demand the parity denied to it under the Treaty of Versailles; disarmed and surrounded by armed neighbors, the nation was in an uneasy position. The conference, through the negotiation of arms limitations across Europe, gave Germany a chance to rectify this situation. Moreover, the nation could look forward to support from others at the conference, particularly the United States. Henry L. Stimson, who would head the American delegation to the conference, described Germany's case as "absolutely unimpeachable" to Chancellor Heinrich Brüning.¹⁰ Norman Davis, another future American delegate to the conference, insisted to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives: "Germany cannot be kept indefinitely waiting under an implied moral obligation without maintaining a constant atmosphere of

¹⁰ "Memorandum by the Secretary of State of a Conversation With the German Chancellor (Bruening)" [23 July 1931] in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1931. Vol. 1*, (Washington, 1931) 548.

nervousness and instability which is today affecting the credit and financial structure of the world.”¹¹ The conference opened at Geneva in February 1932. The aspirations of the conference participants were high.

Unfortunately, from the very start, national self-interest—not a higher commitment to world peace—dictated the course of events at the conference. Through the beginning of 1933, incessant clashes between the French delegation, which refused to consider disarmament without guarantees of support in the event of an attack, and the German delegation, which pressed continually for reductions in French armaments and “equal rights” (*Gleichberechtigung*) in their own ability to arm, had blocked all progress. The nature of this stalemate was not surprising considering the deep historical roots of the tensions between France and Germany; France feared the fate she was dealt in 1870, and again in 1914, as German armies had pressed toward Paris; Germany, on the other hand, craved a return to her old position of continental predominance in international affairs.

But by March 1933, the opportunity to smooth over these differences appeared when British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald proposed a new five-part agreement that would accommodate all parties. Part I dictated that in the event of a breach of the peace, any signatory could summon a conference to determine responsibility for the violation. Part II standardized European armies at 200,000 men each on the Continent, with a further 200,000 men allowed in colonial realms. Additionally, it provided for the scaling down of French forces over a five-year period, so as to allow time to see whether Germany would behave. Part III related to exchanges of information. Part IV dealt with prohibitions on chemical, incendiary, and bacterial warfare. Part V established a Permanent Disarmament

¹¹ House Foreign Affairs Committee, *General Disarmament Conference: Hearings*, 72d Cong., 1st sess., January 6 1932, 32.

Commission to investigate and report on treaty infractions.¹² The first two parts of this proposal garnered great enthusiasm among the negotiators. With prospects brightening, optimism was manifest at the conference. Referring to the negotiations, on 16 May 1933 President Roosevelt mused idealistically that "if all nations will agree wholly to eliminate from possession and use the weapons which make possible a successful attack, defenses automatically will become impregnable and the frontiers and independence of every nation will become secure."¹³ Hitler also expressed satisfaction with the developments in the negotiations. On May 17, he remarked in a speech to the Reichstag that he welcomed American participation in the conference and Roosevelt's "magnanimous proposal of bringing the United States into European relations as a guarantor of peace."¹⁴ The conference adjourned that month to reconvene the following October.

Beneath all of the ostensible optimism and progress, the reality was that the conference was doomed to failure after Hitler's appointment as chancellor. Hitler had no intention of keeping Germany disarmed. However, in the early months of 1933, the Third Reich was still both politically and militarily weak; at this juncture, the Chancellor had little choice but to feign cooperation and avoid conflict abroad if he were to cement a strong position at home. It is apparent from the historical record that Hitler quite begrudgingly accepted this necessity: Rudolf Nadolny, head of the German delegation to the conference, recounts that after congratulating Hitler on his May 17 speech, the Chancellor dispassionately muttered a quick "thanks" and promptly turned away.¹⁵ Indeed, far from being sincere in the peaceful countenance he turned to the world, Hitler had already set into

¹² Arnold Offner, *American Appeasement*, 22-23.

¹³ President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Congress, May 16, 1933.

¹⁴ Adolf Hitler, speech of May 17, 1933, in Norman H. Baynes, ed., *Hitler's Speeches, April 1922—August 1939*, 2 vols. (London, 1942), II, 1050.

¹⁵ Rudolf Nadolny, *Mein Beitrag*, (Wiesbaden, 1955) 134.

motion detailed plans for his country's rearmament. It was as early as a February 3 cabinet meeting—just a few days after he became chancellor—that he had given rearmament the highest priority among his policy goals. Hitler stated plainly at that meeting that he aimed for no less than the “conquest of new *Lebensraum* in the east, and its ruthless Germanization.”¹⁶ By May 1933, moves had already been made to increase the size of German police and paramilitary units.¹⁷

As the conference was to reconvene in October, Hitler had to decide how he would achieve German rearmament and avoid the possible establishment of cumbersome new arms restrictions while still appearing to the world as committed to disarmament. His plan would be to introduce demands at the conference so controversial that his negotiators would be quickly snubbed, providing Germany an opportunity to leave Geneva in protest. Upon returning to the conference in October, the German delegation requested the immediate right to build weapons formerly prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles, the right to increase their 100,000-man army, and to forgo any further inspections. Predictably, the French and British promptly rebuffed Hitler's demands. Germany's reaction to this rejection marked the first of many dark days in the deterioration of international relations with that country. On 14 October 1933, Hitler announced Germany would not only withdraw from the disarmament conference, but also abandon the League of Nations. While the Conference would linger on into the spring of 1934, after Germany's withdrawal, Secretary of State Hull would later write, “disarmament was dead.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Adolf Hitler quoted in Wilhelm Deist, et. al., *The Build-up of German Aggression*, (Oxford, 1990) 104.

¹⁷ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History*, (Ithaca, 1984) 208.

¹⁸ Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Volume I, (New York, 1948) 231.

At the State Department, it became necessary to make sense of what had just transpired at Geneva. A key resource in this attempt was Ambassador Dodd in Berlin, one of the department's most intimately connected sources for understanding German intentions and motivations. Three days following Germany's departure from the conference and League, Secretary Hull requested Dodd to produce an "analysis of the situation in Germany from both internal and international angles."¹⁹

In his report, the Ambassador gave domestic concerns the limelight in the attempt to explain Hitler's sudden departure from the conference. Three days after Germany withdrew from Geneva, Dodd wrote to Hull:

All of the foregoing tends to indicate that the path of the Chancellor has been more thorny than ever this last month, and it at least must be taken into consideration that a contributory factor in the decision to leave Geneva may have been the desire to compose internal dissensions by means of an adventure in the field of foreign affairs on which all could wholeheartedly unite.²⁰

The thorniness Dodd referred to was threefold. Firstly, in recent months there had been frequent disagreement within the upper strata of the Nazi Party. Dodd indicated that "deep-seated jealousies, heart-burnings and back bitings which—as, moreover, in the case of all thoroughgoing revolutions—exist under the surface of patriotic solidarity in the higher Nazi ranks."²¹ More specifically, rumors had been circulating that Minister for Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Economics Kurt Schmitt, and Prussian Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior, and Reich Minister for Aviation Herman Göring had fallen out of Hitler's favor. Secondly, the Party had been having trouble keeping the "turbulent party rank and file" of the *Sturmabteilung* (the paramilitary organization of the Nazi party) in line.

¹⁹ Hull to Dodd, October 17, 1933, Confidential United States State Department Central Files (hereafter DS), 500.A15A4/2244.

²⁰ Dodd to Hull, October 17, 1933, DS, 862.00/3113.

²¹ Ibid.

Dodd mentions a recent account he heard wherein Hitler had issued an order which the SA flatly refused to obey. Finally, Dodd perceived that a certain amount of dissatisfaction existed within the German populace as a whole. First, this owed to the farce of the Reichstag Fire Trial, which labeled the act of arson a Communist conspiracy committed by the Dutchman Marinus van der Lubbe, when many Germans believed the Nazis had done it themselves. Second, Hitler's promises to drag Germany out of its depression had failed to materialize as unemployment continued to rise and economic conditions worsened.

In the final analysis, Dodd understood Hitler's foray into the international scene as an attempt to divert German political and public attention away from the less savory matters, "arousing as it does the sense of honor and nationalistic sentiment of the people, making possible an appeal by the Government to the people to rally to the support of the Fatherland... this step provides an excellent opportunity for the Government to consolidate its domestic position."²² This analysis was not far from the mark; Hitler accomplished these very goals. A November 12 plebiscite, calling on German voters to approve or disapprove Germany's withdrawal, overwhelmingly approved the Chancellor's action. Even President Hindenburg, who earlier despised Hitler, began to treat the Chancellor with real deference, even in private, and made a nationwide broadcast the night before the plebiscite to praise the action that took a step towards restoring German national honor.²³

As for Dodd's forecast of what might happen going forward, the Ambassador provided no intimation that he believed any additional crises in international politics were on the horizon. He emphasized that Germany was likely still committed to disarmament negotiations, even in the aftermath of her withdrawal at Geneva. This impression was based

²² Dodd to Hull, October 17, 1933, DS, 500.A15A4/2299.

²³ Andreas Dorpalen, *Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic*, (Princeton, 1964) 474-475.

on conciliatory remarks Hitler made towards France in the aftermath of the affair.²⁴ Dodd believed that, having failed to achieve his objectives through multilateral negotiations, “Herr Hitler considers direct negotiations with France to offer more possibilities of success than continued negotiations at Geneva. After the return of the Saar Basin to Germany—which the Chancellor coolly treats as no longer even open to question—the latter is prepared to turn a peaceful countenance to the West.”²⁵ Hence, Dodd interpreted Germany’s withdrawal as her giving up on disarmament by means of the conference at Geneva, but not disarmament itself.

The Ambassador had little to say of the potential threat of rearmament or possible military conflict stemming from the fallout of October 14. Passing remarks to this scenario were in fact made, but not much weight given to their significance. His report to Hull included just one sentence on rearmament, noting that comments from Hitler’s speeches after October 14 seemed to indicate that he did indeed intend to rearm. To state definitively that Dodd did not see this as a threat to world peace is not possible without an explicit statement on his part (which does not exist). However, his matter-of-fact reporting of this detail as well as its lack of any wider coverage indicate the low level of priority the Ambassador ascribed to the issue of German rearmament.

Dodd was not alone in arriving at these judgments on the significance of the recent German action. The chairman of the American delegation at the Disarmament Conference, Norman Davis, told President Roosevelt that he also felt Germany’s withdrawal was “primarily an internal political move.” Like Dodd, he cited domestic opposition, adding

²⁴ Dodd to Hull, October 17, 1933, DS, 500.A15A4/2299.

²⁵ Ibid. It should be noted that both in Germany and abroad it was widely held that at the end of the Saar region’s fifteen year term as a protectorate of the League of Nations (as established by the Treaty of Versailles) a plebiscite was highly likely to return the land to Germany.

that as of late Hitler had lost “a certain amount of prestige” among certain sections of the Reichswehr. The withdrawal served as a sop to these elements. The Chairman went on to tell the President that he was “not hopeless at all,” and that going forward, Hitler “certainly wants to make peace with France.”²⁶ George C. Messersmith, the Consul General at Berlin, also held similar views. Like the Ambassador, he did not see the threat of a renewed rearmament emerging from the debacle; while he acknowledged some pressure for rearmament within the National Socialist Party, he argued that “it has come from a very small group within the party.” Moreover, this pressure did not derive from some radical and belligerent faction, but instead from “certain of the industrialists of the country...[who wished] to stimulate the groups of industry which they control.”²⁷

Why was it that the issue that seems to be of greatest importance to the contemporary historian—German rearmament—in 1933 appeared not to be of significant consequence to Ambassador Dodd or his contemporaries? Understanding why this was so sheds light on the historical perspective of the Ambassador at this juncture, revealing how his pre-established views of Germany influenced his work as a rapporteur.

For Ambassador Dodd, with just three months on the job, 1933 was still a time of first impressions and hope. Moreover, strong currents of continuity that bridged the Weimar Republic and Third Reich obscured the dramatic shift in Germany’s political course that had taken place. Though certainly abrupt and revolutionary in hindsight, to

²⁶ “Memorandum of Trans-Atlantic Telephone Conversation,” [October 16, 1933] in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1933*, Vol. I, 272-276.

²⁷ “The Consul General at Berlin (Messersmith) to the Secretary of State,” [November 3, 1933] in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1933*, Vol. I, 302

contemporary observers, the arrival of the Third Reich did not immediately signal the beginning of a new path towards German belligerence. Looking at Dodd's analysis from a longer-term historical perspective elucidates this claim.

Consider first the lens through which Dodd viewed Hitler and his increasingly dictatorial regime at this time. Genuinely democratic government had disappeared from Germany by 1930. Hitler's practice of ruling by decree was merely an extension of precedents set in the years before his appointment. In this vein, it was still possible for the Ambassador to see opportunity in this young regime. Writing to President Roosevelt, he expressed great alarm at rumors that European states might respond to Germany's new nationalist regime with a preventive war. His stance was not a "defense of German armament and anti-Semitic attitudes (both contrary to liberal philosophy)," but instead a statement of his belief that things in Germany might soon improve—that "a people has a right to govern itself and that other peoples must exercise patience even when cruelties and injustices are done. Give men a chance to try their schemes."²⁸ Moreover, many Americans in the political circles Dodd was a part of believed that Hitler was not necessarily there to stay.²⁹ His predecessor as chancellor, Kurt von Schleicher, had served just 57 days. Von Scheicher's predecessor, Franz von Papen, served only five-and-a-half months. Especially before the strength and stability of his position was demonstrated after the Röhm putsch—Hitler's purge of the Nazi Party—many in the State Department understood Hitler to be strongly subject to the pressures of the conservative coalition that supported him. As a result, many officials believed that either the Chancellor would

²⁸ Dodd to F.D.R., August 12, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Official File 523.

²⁹ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany*, 213.

disappear from the leadership circle, or at the very least be compelled to moderate his more strident views.

Furthermore, though Hitler's appointment represented a change in the German Government, it could not have immediately implied to Dodd a dramatic change in German foreign policy. During the first few months of the regime's existence, foreign policy matters were still handled by the foreign ministry, staffed largely by the same officials of the previous era. Since the 1920s, the men of this institution put forth a doctrine of conservative revisionism—the desire to throw off the chains of Versailles and restore a powerful role for Germany in Europe. The apparent similarity between these goals and those announced by Hitler early in his chancellorship provided a cover for the dramatic transformation that was to take place in Germany's foreign policy. In particular, the retention of Konstantin von Neurath and Bernhard Wilhelm von Bülow, as minister and secretary respectively, was seen to indicate that, whatever internal adjustments Hitler might bring about, relations with the outside world would not be significantly altered.³⁰ These men had expressed to Dodd that they believed Hitler would be inclined to share their point of view and that he would prove to be a “reasonable, and a manageable, man.” Whatever Dodd's reservations, then, it was his “hope” that “Hitler will fall into line with these wiser men.”³¹

Thus, Nazi demands for ending the military restrictions of Versailles and for revisions to German borders could be interpreted by men like Dodd as a continuation of Weimar policies. In fact, these particular political platforms of the NSDAP did not even represent a dramatic deviation from those of other competing parties. Even the Social

³⁰ Wilhelm Deist, et. al., *The Build-up of German Aggression*, (Oxford, 1990) 563.

³¹ Dodd to F.D.R., July 30, 1933, FDRL, O.F. 523.

Democrats (who were soon eliminated as a party in the Nazi *Gleichschaltung*, the Nazification of German politics and society begun in 1933) expressed no opposition in the Reichstag to Hitler's foreign policy as outlined in 1933. In a speech on Hitler's Enabling Bill, Otto Wels, the spokesman of the Social Democratic Party had declared: "As to the Chancellor's demand for equal rights in foreign affairs, we social democrats support it all the more firmly since we have at all times fought for it as a matter of principle."³² Yet another sign that the nation's foreign policy would not change dramatically came from the editorial support of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* for the Hitler regime's policy line. This publication was the foremost liberal newspaper of the Weimar era and one of the few still taken seriously in foreign countries after Hitler came to power.³³

All this said, one cannot overlook the fact that the NSDAP expressed their demands with far more vigor and with far less concern for the sensibilities of other nations than other parties had. However, the near theatrical displays of rhetorical belligerence were often interpreted as just that by American diplomats: theatrical displays. Comments from Dodd's fellow diplomat at the Berlin Embassy, commercial attaché Douglas Miller, help to elucidate the manner in which some Americans in Germany understood the belligerency of Nazi rhetoric:

Are these statements really complete evidence of National Socialist aggressiveness in foreign affairs or do they merely strike an attitude which is designed to attract patriotic Germans to the movement and give it a popular hold on conservative opinion, which might otherwise be alienated by the radical character of the movement? I think there is some justification for believing that a great deal of the

³² Wilhelm Deist, et. al., *The Build-up of German Aggression*, (Oxford, 1990) 103.

³³ Importantly, this was one of the few papers left largely untouched by Nazi regimentation. See Ernst K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945*, (East Lansing MI, 1965) Ch. 5, "The Strange Case of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*."

Nazis' war talk, superman talk and posing is simply designed to impress their own followers and should be heavily discounted.³⁴

The unique forcefulness of Nazi rhetoric thus did not signal any immediate change in Germany's external relations. Indeed, in Dodd's report on the withdrawal at Geneva, he had described Hitler's foreign policy move as a rallying call, a political tool to consolidate his power rather than some step towards Hitler's designs as penned in *Mein Kampf*. Six months after the Geneva withdrawal, Dodd presented yet another possible explanation for the belligerence of many Nazi statements: oratorical compensation for Germany's military weakness. Rather than portending actual plans for war, he wrote "it is probably safe...to ascribe a considerable portion of this rather aggressive demeanor to a sense of inferiority caused by Germany's relative lack of defence."³⁵

But Dodd's disregard of the possible threat to international security and stability stemming from Hitler's withdrawal at Geneva owed to more than just political elements of continuity between the Weimar Republic and Third Reich. Equally as important, rearmament itself had been a key German political issue well before the Nazis came to power. Since the close of the First World War, civilian and military leaders had pushed to restore their nation's military strength.³⁶ While the need to defend the country served as a justification for rearmament, German leaders also hoped to use military strength as a precondition for a stronger foreign policy. Even Gustav Stresemann, who led Germany back into European political society in the mid-1920s and supported the fulfillment of Germany's treaty obligations, believed his nation could not regain its freedom and

³⁴ Douglas Miller, "Hitler and the Stability of Eastern Europe," [November 29 1933] in Douglas Miller, *Via Diplomatic Pouch*, (New York, 1944) 81.

³⁵ Dodd to Hull, March 12, 1934, DS, 862.00/3216.

³⁶ Edward W. Bennett, *German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933*, (Princeton, 1979) 77.

independence as long as it was not a great power and had no significant army.³⁷ Weimar-era leaders believed a strong military force would strengthen Germany's diplomatic hand, and beyond this, some of them intended, under favorable circumstances, to use war again as an instrument of policy.³⁸

Consequently, during the Weimar period Germany violated the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles extensively. It kept men under arms well over the treaty-imposed limit of 100,000 in organizations such as the Border Defense (*Grenzschutz*) units, the Freikorps units, the "Schwarzer Reichswehr", political armies like the Stahlhelm and the National Socialist S.A., police, and "sport" associations. Furthermore, Germany concealed stocks of arms from World War I, made mobilization preparations through a secret *Landesschutz* organization, developed prohibited weapons, undertook projects illegal in Germany on foreign soil (in Russia, Sweden, Holland), and engaged in illegal armaments production.³⁹

Significantly, Americans had been aware of these treaty violations and in some cases were involved in their implementation. In his study on German rearmament in the Weimar Republic, historian Edward Bennett notes that the most common view among American observers was that "the violations were unimportant, simply a byproduct of the pettiness of Versailles, and of the even more detailed restrictions laid down by the Inter-Allied Control Commission in the early 1920s."⁴⁰ The American military attaché at the Berlin Embassy commented in 1931, "In any case I feel that the sooner these galling and childish restrictions

³⁷ Hans W. Gatzke, *Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany* (Baltimore, 1954) 109.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁹ Berenice A. Carroll, *Design for Total War: Arms and Economics in the Third Reich*, (The Hague, 1968) 58-59.

⁴⁰ The IACC was a body of Allied military officers set up by the Treaty of Versailles to supervise and enforce the disarmament of the Germany, namely with on-site inspections of German factories and military installations; Bennett, 83.

are replaced by some larger-minded and mutually acceptable convention, the better it will be for the peace of Europe.”⁴¹ Furthermore, Americans even aided German rearmament during this period, training German officers in the use of weapons systems prohibited to them by the treaty.⁴² The idea that there was injustice in a system where Germany was kept disarmed without reducing the military might of other heavily armed states was widespread in the State Department, and Ambassador Dodd himself held this belief.⁴³

Furthermore, those who felt this way could argue that the Reichswehr, far too weak to cope with any major attack, could not possibly represent a threat to international security. Indeed, this argument was advanced by Dodd’s military and naval attachés at Berlin in November and December 1933. The naval attaché, whose views mirrored those of the military attaché, concluded in a report that the leaders of Germany, including those in the military and navy, “really feel that the greatest calamity that could overtake Germany would be her being involved in a war within the next five or ten years and this is believed to be true in spite of the military consciousness and militancy prevalent in Germany today.”⁴⁴

The likelihood of a threatening rearmament, of Hitler starting Germany on a course towards a second Great War, was thus not on the top of Ambassador Dodd’s mind. Accordingly, it was not the message he sent back to Hull in explaining the German withdrawal at Geneva. The continuity that pervaded the shift from Weimar to Nazi Germany helps to explain what today at first appears to be a lapse in Dodd’s judgment. The message Dodd did send back to Hull focused on what seemed to be the important

⁴¹ U.S. Army Military Attaché Reports, Berlin Report No. 11,784, 17 Nov 1931.

⁴² Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany*, 200.

⁴³ See the entry of October 17, 1933 in *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary* (50) in which Dodd remarks that he saw “evident injustice” in the French attempts to keep Germany in a relatively defenseless state.

⁴⁴ Naval Attache's Report Transmitted by J.C. White, Counselor of Embassy, to Hull, [December 5, 1933] DS, 862.20/654. See also Confidential Memorandum of Military Attache (Jacob W.S. Wuest) Transmitted by J.C. White, Counselor of Embassy, to Hull, [November 29, 1933] DS, 862.20/653.

development, the domestic turbulence affecting the rule of Hitler and his party. Withdrawal at Geneva was Hitler's attempt to ease this situation and entrench his position within Germany. World peace was not necessarily at stake. It was under these circumstances that, after a November interview with Hitler, Dodd could put faith in the Chancellor's words that "he would not allow any incident along the Polish, Austrian, or French frontiers to develop into a war." It surprised Dodd that after his meeting with the Chancellor, a man with a certain penchant for war cries and veiled threats, he could remark: "The total effect of the interview was more favorable from the point of view of the maintenance of world peace than I had expected."⁴⁵ A perception of Germany as a threat to international security was, to be sure, not something that formed immediately.

⁴⁵ Dodd to Hull, November 7, 1933, DS, 362.1113/27.

THREE

THE VEIL LIFTED:

MILITARY CONSCRIPTION REINTRODUCED IN GERMANY

It would not be long before Dodd abandoned his hopes that the new German government would be one of either moderate or peaceful policies. By March 1935, when German officials made the shocking announcement to the world that Germany would reintroduce conscription and build a substantial standing army (one calculated to be large enough to effectively fight a two-front war), Dodd—unlike most American officials—quickly realized the major threat this development posed to world peace. A review of the reports he produced for the State Department reveals that the sense of optimism he had once exhibited in 1933 had by March 1935 faded into one of impending doom. Events in Nazi Germany between October 1933 and March 1935 had produced this sea change in his attitude towards German developments. Having witnessed a thorough Nazification of German politics and society as well as the acceleration of a frightening and illegal rearmament program, Dodd no longer held onto any illusion that the Hitler regime might either moderate or disappear. He now argued that Germany was firmly in the hands of the

Nazi Party. This alone, he asserted, should have been enough to strike fear in any rational political leader.

The entire month of March 1935 had witnessed a flurry of announcements from Great Britain, Germany, and France declaring each intended to increase the size of their respective militaries. The British spoke first. On March 4, the government released a white paper stating their intention: as “Germany was...rearming openly on a large scale, despite the provisions of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles”, they felt they had little choice but to follow the same course. The document complained that “not only the forces, but the spirit in which the population, and especially the youth of the country, are being organized, lend colour to, and substantiate, the general feeling of insecurity which has already been incontestably generated.”⁴⁶ The Germans were next. In a move that seemed to confirm the fears Britain had expressed just five days earlier, the Government announced on March 9 that a German air force was already in existence. The revelation was already public knowledge though, and the world remained largely silent. On March 12, France stepped up to the international podium. The French government declared that it would double the period of military service and reduce the age of enlistment in the French Army. The move was to alleviate the fall in the number of conscripts caused by the reduced birth-rates of 1914-1918. But the magnitude of the British, German, and French announcements made heretofore would pale in comparison to the bombshell Germany dropped on March 16. On that date, the Nazi government boldly denounced all disarmament clauses of the Treaty of

⁴⁶ British Cmd. 4827: *Statement Relating to Defense Issued in Connexion With the House of Commons Debate on March 1, 1935*. This command paper was dated March 1, 1935, and apparently was released on March 4 in anticipation of the scheduled debate on imperial defense.

Versailles as well as its separate peace treaty of 1921 with the United States and announced the reintroduction of conscription to build a peacetime army of thirty-six divisions, or approximately 550,000 men.

In his March 16 speech, Hitler represented his action as a necessary, if not unpleasant, response to defend Germany against the belligerent threats posed by Britain and France. Abiding by the Treaty of Versailles and Wilson's Fourteen Points had thus far only done a disservice to Germany in Hitler's analysis. Far from following the disarmament doctrine they preached at Geneva, Britain and France were beginning to increase their armaments. Germany had little choice but to follow suit.⁴⁷ A government statement added that the time had come "to bring to an end the unworthy and in the last resort menacing state of powerless defensiveness" of the Reich by increasing its security.⁴⁸ The stated intention therefore was not to provoke Germany's neighbors, but rather to help maintain peace—still "the profoundest and most sincere wish of the German people."⁴⁹

In reality, the Germans had seized an opportune moment given to them by the recent actions of the British and French to declare rearmament plans that had been long decided upon. The announcements of March 9 and 16 were not as much responses to foreign actions as they were the expression of a pre-determined consensus on military objectives between the German generals and the political leadership. Indeed, there is ample evidence Hitler had intended to reintroduce conscription since his first days in office. He had stated this intention at least as early as the 4 February 1933 cabinet meeting where he had promised rearmament to the army. The specifics of this rearmament were determined in the months preceding the March 1935 announcement. The General Staff of the army command

⁴⁷ Hitler's Proclamation to the German People, 16 March 1935.

⁴⁸ Norman Baynes, *Hitler's Speeches*, 1208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1198.

produced an analysis during this period to determine the minimum necessary size of a peacetime army to enable a wartime army to effectively fight a war on several fronts. Chief of the General Staff Ludwig Beck released a memorandum on 6 March 1935 summarizing his office's findings. In the note, he recommended an armaments objective that corresponded precisely with the plans announced to the world by the Chancellor ten days later.

The March 16 announcement had a profound impact on European diplomacy. Both Britain and France protested formally against the German action. The United States, however, remained completely removed from the affair. President Roosevelt preferred not to involve his country in European affairs through a protest note. Many other officials agreed with this line. Ambassador Breckenridge Long in Rome believed the United States was not bound to any action as it was not a signatory of the Treaty of Versailles. Ambassadors Robert Bingham in London and Jesse Straus in Paris wrote Hull jointly to affirm Roosevelt's move to keep the United States out of European matters.⁵⁰ In Geneva, Norman Davis wrote that he believed Germany had "much justification" for the announcement. It was only "stupid for France to think she could keep Germany forever in a position of inequality."⁵¹ Indicative of the effect Germany's announcement had on American diplomacy, on March 22 President Roosevelt left the White House for a fishing trip off the coast of southern Florida.

⁵⁰ Long to Hull, March 21, 1935, DS 862.20/757; Bingham to Hull, March 29, 1935, DS, 862.20/798.

⁵¹ Davis to Welles, March 27, 1935, Norman Davis Papers, Box 63.

The indifference and even muted support present in the attitudes of many American diplomats were not found at the Berlin Embassy. After nearly eighteen months in Berlin, Ambassador Dodd was wary to put faith in Hitler's public pronouncements of peaceful intention or the likelihood that he would be satisfied with mere "equality" in Germany's armaments. He now reacted to Hitler's forays into international politics with well-reasoned and calculated fear. It was a dramatic shift from the optimism and trust he exhibited in October 1933. By March 1935, it is apparent that he was no longer blinded by the elements of continuity between Weimar and Nazi Germany that had given him false hope in the early months of the regime. No longer did he consider the Chancellor just another politician or his regime one subject to the normal rules of engagement inherent to factional politics. Dodd now saw the Nazi government as an entity distinct from its immediate historical predecessors, and an increasingly radical and belligerent one at that. The following section of this chapter will delve into Dodd's reporting on the events of March 1935 to shed further light on the Ambassador's changed attitude. Why the Ambassador's perceptions of the Hitler regime changed so dramatically during the eighteen months between the German withdrawal at Geneva and the announcement of conscription will be tackled in the final section.

On March 12, immediately following the French announcement, Dodd wrote to the Secretary of State to stress that Germany's March 9 announcement of its air force should not be interpreted as a stray attempt to retaliate against the release of the British White Paper. Instead, the German action was one more step building towards Hitler's greater military plan. Dodd correctly understood that the Germans merely seized an opportune moment to announce to the world an air force that had already been under construction for

several years. Hitler's stated motivation of self-defense and desire to work within the international system should not be trusted: the Chancellor's "Government is taking no practical cognizance of the provisions of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles," Dodd insisted.⁵²

Dodd's distrust of Germany's commitment to peace was only heightened after Germany's second announcement on March 16. In hindsight, it appeared to Dodd that the March 9 announcement was placed as a "trial balloon" for the second announcement, testing the waters of world opinion before dropping the real bombshell. He again emphasized that the German actions were not predicated upon French and British action. Instead, "indications all give weight to the assumption that the Nazi Government had simply reached a point in European peace maneuvers beyond which they believed it impossible to proceed before endeavoring to straighten out certain definite inequality mental complexes... Their protestations of peaceful intent may be subject to question and viewed with suspicion."⁵³

With these ominous developments afoot, Secretary Hull requested Dodd's personal estimation of the state of peace in Europe in early April. In analyzing Dodd's reporting on the withdrawal at Geneva in the previous chapter, it was asserted that the Ambassador's historical frame of reference had been the relatively peaceable era of the Weimar Republic. In April 1935, his frame of reference switched to the volatile period leading up to the First World War. He described that it was a situation "parallel to that of 1912. The Hitler triumvirate [i.e. Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels] is however far more powerful than the Kaiser was. The Reichswehr is not as ready for war now as the old army leaders were but

⁵² Dodd to Hull, March 13, 1935, DS, 862.248/114.

⁵³ Dodd to Hull, March 16, 1935, DS, 862.20/725.

grievances and ambitions of the Nazi forces are much deeper.” Dodd reiterated that “war is the direct and major aim” of the Third Reich. He believed that an armed conflict was likely to arise within one to two years. At the moment, only a fragile peace existed in Europe: “some blunder or local disturbance might at any time release the dogs of war.” His concluding remark was ominous—“Thus ‘civilized’ Europe offers a sad and barbaric picture.”⁵⁴

The second episode in this study’s look at the reporting of Ambassador Dodd immediately reveals that between October 1933 and March 1935 there was a dramatic change in Dodd’s estimation of the Nazi regime. Regarding the magnitude of Hitler’s power in Europe, Dodd wrote on March 28 1935: “at the moment he is more powerful than ever in Germany, and by the same token he is more than ever a potential menace to the peace of Europe.”⁵⁵ Delving into the implications and nuances of this rather brief evaluation elucidates exactly why Dodd’s perception of the Hitler regime changed as it did. Over the preceding eighteen months, Dodd had witnessed a series of events and shifts in the power structure of the Nazi regime that had allowed him to form this assessment. Three factors are critical. First, during the period German foreign policy had taken on an increasingly National Socialist tone. The influences of moderation from conservative politicians like von Bülow and von Neurath that earlier buoyed Dodd’s optimism had begun to fade. Dodd judged that increasing radicalism and belligerence appeared likely in this realm. Second, between October 1933 and March 1935, a series of events transpired that

⁵⁴ Dodd to Hull, April 5 1935, DS, 862.20/835

⁵⁵ Dodd to Hull, March 28, 1935, DS, 741.62/79

secured Hitler's rule, indicating that the Nazi-dominated political landscape would not be changing any time soon. Dodd viewed Hitler's permanence in itself as a threat to peace. Finally, as time wore on and the pace of German rearmament quickened in the months leading up to March 1935, Dodd became far less trusting of Hitler's peaceful intentions. He developed a keen appreciation for the German war machine that was under construction.

The decline of Foreign Office influence on German foreign policy was a direct product of the outcome of a clash between that Office's more conservative views and Hitler's more radical ones. Between 1933 and 1934, the professional diplomats frequently expressed doubts about Hitler's course and betrayed a pessimistic belief that the Chancellor had, by injudicious behavior, isolated Germany. Rather than taking heed of their warnings, Hitler felt their advice was blind to realities (*Wirklichkeitsfremd*) and believed the outlook of the Office unnecessarily overcautious. Years later, Hitler was to say: "In 1933-34 the reports of the Foreign Office were miserable. They always had the same quintessence: that we ought to do nothing."⁵⁶ By the middle of 1934, the Foreign Office experienced a serious diminution in its influence over policy making affairs and presented little opposition to Hitler's plans. Conservative political power was making an exit from the German political scene and little could be done to reverse the decline. In a 26 January 1934 report to the State Department, Ambassador Dodd approvingly quoted an article from a Turkish newspaper, saying "The old Marshal and von Papen support von Neurath but in the present circumstances they cannot be of much help because they more and more themselves represent a past which others wish to forget."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgesprache im Fuhrerhauptquartier 1941-2*, (Berlin, 1997) 97.

⁵⁷ Dodd to Hull, January 26, 1934, DS, 862.00/3193.

The fall of Foreign Office influence was counterbalanced by the rise in power of new individuals and organizations, all elements of the overlapping confusion of the Third Reich's institutional jungle. The rise of the organizations run by Alfred Rosenberg, Ernst Bohle, and Joachim von Ribbentrop presented the most serious challenges to Foreign Office autonomy. These men all undertook to prove to Hitler that the doubts and fears of the Foreign Office were groundless and that the Chancellor—and these men themselves—had more realistic views of the international situation. The first organization formed was Rosenberg's *Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP* in April 1933. Its mission statement was clear, announcing that now "the particular desires and the unique aspirations of National Socialism will find expression within the area of foreign policy." Bohle's organization, the *Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP*, was formed on 17 February 1934. It was charged with taking over all party communications between Germany and groups abroad and was responsible for party members who lived or traveled in other countries (including all German diplomats who were party members). Finally, there was Ribbentrop's *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*, set up during the late-summer of 1934. The organization was created to collect and analyze foreign intelligence and tried whenever possible to absorb other Foreign Office functions. These three organizations all served to eat away at the dominance of the Foreign Office and spread decision-making processes around a host of individuals and institutions in the Reich.

Dodd witnessed these shifts in power taking place. He reported in January 1934 that "the Nazi element in Berlin are not satisfied with the way things are going in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Wilhelmstrasse [i.e. the Foreign Office], allegedly, must be purified like other ministerial departments, the diplomatic personnel and especially the central

administration comprising ‘in too great number functionaries who are non-Aryans and even Jews.’”⁵⁸ With these developments afoot, the Ambassador could no longer hold out the hope that the conservative forces of the Foreign Office, most notably Konstantin von Neurath, would be able to moderate or possibly frustrate Hitler’s more radical foreign policy plans. On February 19 1934, Dodd noted that the Office was “far from having recovered the authority in national councils which it possessed in the days of Stresemann.”⁵⁹ Of the foreign minister, Dodd wrote that despite the fact that he might tell British Ambassador Eric Phipps of his trepidation over Hitler’s assumption of presidential powers in August 1934, he was ready to “heil Hitler” with the rest.⁶⁰ “I have never seen evidence,” Dodd wrote in his diary, “that the Secretary ever resists the arbitrary conduct of the Fuhrer.”⁶¹ Hence not only was the Foreign Office losing influence over foreign policy making, it appeared to Dodd that the organization was “unquestionably” molding “its general policies to the dictate of the Nazis.”⁶²

Between Germany’s withdrawal at Geneva and the March 1935 announcements, Dodd also witnessed a dramatic consolidation of Hitler’s power within the regime. The Blood Purge of 30 June to 2 July 1934 was a critical moment in this development. Tensions had been growing between Hitler, the Right (e.g. conservative politicians, the army), and the Left (e.g. the SA), and the Chancellor decided to move against both ends of the spectrum to insure his own leadership. The *Schutzstaffel* and *Gestapo* were ordered to murder several prominent members of the SA, leaders of the Reichswehr, and conservative critics of the regime. The death toll hit at least eighty five, including Ernst Roehm (leader

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dodd to Hull, February 19, 1934, DS, 862.021/43.

⁶⁰ Dodd to Hull, August, 15, 1934, DS, 862.00/3378.

⁶¹ William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 139 [3 August 1934].

⁶² Dodd to Hull, August, 15, 1934, DS, 862.00/3378.

of the SA), Gregor Strasser (former high ranking SA official), Kurt von Schleicher (German general and former chancellor), Ferdinand von Bredow (former head of military intelligence service and defense minister) and scores of other party functionaries. Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen was taken into protective custody and resigned from his high post the following day.

Dodd described the atmosphere during these days as “more tense than at any time since I have been in Germany.”⁶³ Initially, his sheer emotional reaction to the events overpowered any attempt at objectivity and legitimate analysis. Through the tense hours of the crisis, his daughter recalls, he was pale, excited, and silent. On June 30, Dodd wrote in his diary that through all the confusion stirring in Berlin, he could see that “some putsch or coup d’état is on.”⁶⁴ Of Hitler, Dodd wrote on July 13, “I have a sense of horror when I look at the man.”⁶⁵ From the start of his ambassadorship, Dodd had found the Chancellor to be loathsome and dangerous; the purge heightened this sentiment and from there on out, Dodd refused to meet with Hitler. Further, he even considered resigning in protest after the episode, griping “My task here is to work for peace and better relations. I do not see how anything can be done so long as Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels are the directing heads of the country.”⁶⁶ When Dodd’s emotions and frustrations leveled off, he wrote that his takeaway was that knocking out extremists of both the Right and Left variety favored neither side: Hitler was the main beneficiary of these events. Though chaos seemed to reign in political

⁶³ William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 115 [28 June 1934].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 117 [30 June 1934].

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 126 [13 July 1934].

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123 [8 July 1934].

circles in the immediate aftermath of the Blood Purge, Hitler had nevertheless come out on top.⁶⁷

The Chancellor's position was further entrenched following the death of President Paul von Hindenburg the next month. On 2 August 1934, the day of Hindenburg's death, the government did away with the last remnant of the separation of powers, declaring the incorporation of the President's and Chancellor's powers into one office. Hitler became the Head of the State as well as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Reich. Moreover, the signatures bringing these changes into effect included such conservatives as Vice Chancellor von Papen, Foreign Minister von Neurath, Minister of Finance von Krosigk, General von Blomberg, and Minister of Economics Schacht. Any hope for a conservative political backlash against Hitler's radicalism faded quickly. The threat posed by the other major potential source of opposition, the Reichswehr, was also significantly reduced that day when its officers and men took a new oath of allegiance to their commander-in-chief. Significantly, the oath was sworn not to the Constitution, nor the state, but to Hitler personally: "I swear by God this holy oath: I will render unconditional obedience to the Fuhrer of the German Reich and People, Adolf Hitler, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready, as a brave soldier, to stake my life at any time for this oath."⁶⁸

With these steps, Hitler had destroyed the last meaningful possibilities of opposition to his rule; the prospect frightened Ambassador Dodd. As he wrote in his diary on August 2, "The President of the Third Reich, Leader of the National Socialist Party, and Chancellor of the Reich are now all united in one person: the adolescent Austrian who started the

⁶⁷ Dodd to Hull, July 30, 1934, DS, 862.00/4002.

⁶⁸ Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, (New York, 1962), 282.

putsch business in 1923 and who has killed hundreds of opponents in order to consolidate his powers.”⁶⁹ Writing to Secretary of Commerce Daniel Roper on August 14, he expressed further concern: “My hope has been that when Hindenburg passed away there would be a change in the direction of more rational international relations.” But now “on the contrary, everything tends the other way.”⁷⁰ Hitler’s unassailable grip on power was secured with the plebiscite vote of August 19 endorsing the Fuhrer’s assumption of presidential duties. While every single danger to the regime had not been removed, the Embassy reported to Washington on August 21, “it would be rash to predict that any of them will cause the Dictator’s downfall.”⁷¹ And so it was that the Nazi revolution was completed: Hitler had become the dictator of Germany.

In tandem with the Nazification of foreign policy and the consolidation of Hitler’s power, Dodd also witnessed the quickening pace of rearmament across Germany in the months leading up to March 1935. He became increasingly fearful of these developments and likewise, increasingly skeptical of Hitler’s commitment to peace. On September 24, 1934, the Ambassador submitted a report to Hull entitled “Germany’s Will for Peace”, with the intent of contrasting Germany’s “professions of peaceful intentions with such information as is available indicating that these protestations are being made at a time when military preparations are constantly taking place.”⁷² The central question he posed was “how far can Hitler’s protestations of peace be trusted?” Quite apart from the analysis he sent off to Hull in late 1933, Dodd was now wary of taking Hitler at his word. He begins his report by stating that while the peaceful tone of Hitler’s speeches might make it seem as

⁶⁹ William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 115 [2 August 1934].

⁷⁰ Dodd to Roper, August 14, 1934, FDRL, O.F. 523.

⁷¹ Dodd to Hull, August 21, 1934, 862.00/3885.

⁷² Dodd to Hull, September 24, 1934, DS, 862.20/700.

though the Chancellor had modified and moderated more aggressive plans (such as those professed in *Mein Kampf*) since coming to power in January 1933, hope should not be invested in this possibility. After all, Dodd notes, the Chancellor had so far stuck adamantly to his plans as far as the Jewish question was concerned. Additionally, the incorporation of Austria with Germany was fast becoming a reality. Hence potential warnings that can be gleaned from *Mein Kampf* should be considered “well worth serious thought.” The Ambassador reiterated the warnings presented in this work, namely that Hitler “definitely advocates the seizure of new land, on which to settle Germany’s growing population, from weaker nations and thereby insure Germany’s right to freedom of existence.” The land would be taken in the East, from Russia, as well as from France, so as to ensure German dominance of the continent.

Steps towards this type of territorial expansion seemed to be underway already, Dodd noted worryingly. He goes on to describe “unmistakable” increases effected in Germany’s material preparation for war. An armaments stockpile was being forged that would “before long constitute a very definite source of political and military strength to the Government of the Reich.” Dodd’s sources included informants, the reporting of his consuls stationed across Germany, as well as his own observations. The “striking” development in military aviation was most conspicuous to the Ambassador. Massive recruiting into the Air-Sport Organization (*National-Sozialistische Luftsport Verband*, a civilian flying organization of the NSDAP), the conversion of formerly commercial airports into exclusively military ones, the construction of new air fields across the country, and increased manufacturing activity in the aircraft industry all indicated serious efforts towards the construction of a military air force (note that this was observed months before the March

9 1935 announcement of the air force's existence). Additionally, in factories throughout the country, there was increased activity in the manufacturing of firearms, explosives, and military vehicles. Reports further indicated that as many as ninety new barracks were being constructed in Germany.

Evidence of the mounting rearmament was so overwhelming that one month after cabling "Germany's Will for Peace" to Washington, Dodd was compelled to send another missive "to confirm and amplify still further the view that the German Government is rearming steadily."⁷³ He continued to provide additional detail on barrack construction, firearm production, and activity in military aviation (including that the men of the Air-Sport Organization were being trained in bomb-dropping). He also provides substantial detail on changes occurring in the Reichswehr. Reports indicated that its numbers were approaching 300,000 (three times the size of the limit mandated by the Treaty of Versailles), that large numbers of young men were being recruited for short-term service and then slotted into the reserves, that retired officers from the First World War were being recalled and reinstated with high positions, and that large numbers of officers were being transferred to East Prussian posts—right on the frontlines of Hitler's territorial ambitions to the East. Dodd concluded this report by making clear he no longer viewed Germany's rearmament as a matter of justified self-defense, simply "equality" in armaments, as he expressed in late-1933. He viewed the developments in far more belligerent terms. He noted, for example, that in the speeches of Alfred Rosenberg, mentions of Germany's commitment to international peace are conspicuously absent. Moreover, Rosenberg was now making statements such that "Germany's mottoes of equal rights and honor are inevitably tinged with a warlike implication."

⁷³ Dodd to Hull, October 26, 1934, DS, 862.20/708.

Dodd's interpretation of the events of March 1935 was certainly different than many of his colleagues working in Washington and elsewhere. Whereas the President and other political figures made little of the developments, Dodd reacted to them with all seriousness. In his analysis, he painted a picture of imminent war and of a dictator bent on territorial conquest. He placed what he saw within the context of Hitler's longer term military planning and feared the Chancellor's step-by-step move towards war. His pronouncements were founded on all that he had witnessed in Germany during his short time as Ambassador. The slide towards Nazi radicalization that Dodd believed would moderate in late-1933 only accelerated over the succeeding months. Particularly portentous was the diminution of conservative Foreign Office influence and the increasing Nazification of foreign policy making. Hitler never fell into line with the conservative, "wiser men." Nor did he disappear from the political scene, as some American political spectators had hoped. Instead, the Chancellor's position only became more entrenched in Germany after the Blood Purge, the passing of President Hindenburg, and Hitler's program of *Gleichshaltung*. Dodd also saw the pace of rearmament picking up speed, with Germany's sincerity in its commitment to self-defense and armaments "equality" increasingly doubtful. In Dodd's estimation, war was coming and soon he would come to hold the belief that international action against Germany needed to be taken

FOUR

“A SEVEN LEAGUE STEP TOWARD WAR”: THE REMILITARIZATION OF THE RHINELAND

Germany's most brazen foreign policy move to date, the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, reaffirmed all of the frightening conclusions Dodd had reached by March 1935. Not only did the Ambassador bemoan the threat Hitler posed to Europe and the world after the Rhineland affair, he now also warned the State Department that international action, in the form of a European conference including Germany, was the only way to avert the impending world cataclysm. And yet again, Dodd would find little company among American political circles in his dire assessment of the German situation.

Both the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact had provided for the demilitarization of the Rhineland in western Germany. The provision was an important part

of these treaties as it formed one of the strongest guarantees of peace in Europe after the First World War. Firstly, it did so by creating a buffer zone on Germany's western edge, making it virtually impossible for a surprise German attack on France or the Low Countries. Secondly, as Germany was herself now made open to western invasion, she would be extremely unlikely, or at the least extremely foolish, to launch attacks on her other neighbors: belligerence towards Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, or Denmark might very well be met with a French attack that Germany could not possibly fend off. The imposition of a demilitarized zone on Germany thus provided a key element to the maintenance of peace after the war. Though it seems a disproportionate contribution on Germany's part to insure European stability, she did not go unrewarded. With the signing of the Locarno Pact in 1924, she received British and Italian guarantees against French aggression as well as the withdrawal of occupation troops in advance of the schedule set down in Versailles. Just two years after the French occupation of the Ruhr, this came as welcome compensation to the Germans.

For Hitler, however, a demilitarized Rhineland was unacceptable within the scope of his long-term planning. The zone's main purpose—to preclude German territorial expansion and complicate any attempts at German rearmament—conflicted directly with the core of Hitler's program. Upon coming to power, though, Hitler issued no public qualms about the Rhineland arrangement. He recognized the danger in arousing suspicion about Germany's adherence to Locarno at a time when his regime was still young and weak. Furthermore, the Chancellor was still operating on the principle that Germany would be bound by agreements it had signed voluntarily (i.e. the Locarno Pact), but not by those

imposed upon it (i.e. the Treaty of Versailles).⁷⁴ Through the first half of 1935, Hitler repeatedly reaffirmed his commitment to keeping the terms of the Locarno Pact. His public attitude changed after the concluding of the Franco-Soviet Pact on 2 May 1935. On 21 May 1935, Hitler proclaimed that the as-yet-unratified pact, which provided for mutual assistance in case of “an unprovoked attack on the part of a European state,” had “brought an element of legal insecurity into the Locarno Pact.”⁷⁵ These words caused a stir among foreign diplomats; they feared what it might portend for the future of the Rhineland. Germany had already repeatedly violated the Treaty of Versailles and a future repudiation of the Locarno Pact was expected by many. Over the course of the next year, Hitler’s veiled threats continued. In the following spring, his intimations turned into action.

On 7 March 1936 German troops marched into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. Later that day, Hitler gave an hour-and-a-half speech to the assembled Reichstag at the Kroll Opera House. In line with Hitler’s earlier peace speeches, his oration was bathed in attacks on the uselessness and horrors of war, pleading with leaders the world over to replace “useless strife” with the “rule of reason.”⁷⁶ The Chancellor explained that his action was necessary for the self-defense of the Reich, especially after the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Pact. To demonstrate the sincerity of his peaceful intentions, he also offered a set of proposals to insure Germany’s good relations with its European neighbors. Firstly, he offered to replace the now-defunct Locarno Pact with a twenty-five-year nonaggression pact with France and Belgium that would also demilitarize the frontiers between these countries and be guaranteed by England, Italy, and possibly the Netherlands.

⁷⁴ Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany*, (Chicago, 1970) 240-241.

⁷⁵ William Evans Scott, *Alliance Against Hitler: The Origins of the Franco-Soviet Pact* (Durham, N.C., 1962) 246.

⁷⁶ Norman Baynes, *Hitler’s Speeches*, 1271-1293.

He also offered to negotiate nonaggression pacts with all of Germany's other neighbors, even Lithuania, if the ethnic Germans in Memel were given autonomy. Finally, he offered to bring Germany back into the League of Nations, provided the Treaty of Versailles and the League Covenant were separated and a promise made to discuss Germany's colonial claims.

For the magnitude of what had just taken place—the obliteration of the keystone to peace and stability in a Europe by a radical, militaristic, and increasingly powerful Germany—the initial French and British responses were muted and ineffective. For the French, military action was out of the question. While France was still stronger militarily than Germany, she was also politically unstable, economically weak, deeply divided on social and economic issues, and intensely fearful of another war. The French military was extremely hesitant, as it was prepared only for defensive action and had no intention of driving German troops from the Rhineland.⁷⁷ Without strong British support for sanctions, little action was likely to be taken. The British, however, were neither ready for war nor willing to fight one over territory in Germany's "own back garden."⁷⁸ As the British Secretary of State for War Douglas Hogg described public sentiment, most British did not give "'two hoots' about the Germans reoccupying their own territory."⁷⁹ When the government issued a statement on March 7, it labeled the action a breach of international behavior but did not go so far as to call for any immediate counteraction. Set on avoiding conflict with Germany, the British Foreign Office informed the American charge d'affaires

⁷⁷ Offner, *American Appeasement*, 140.

⁷⁸ Lord Lothian (Phillip Kerr) quoted in Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, (Boston, 1985) 196-197.

⁷⁹ Douglass Hogg in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C, 5, No. 33.

in London that “England would make every endeavour to prevent the imposition of military and/or economic sanctions against Germany.”⁸⁰

Meanwhile, the United States remained entirely uninvolved with the crisis. French Foreign Minister Pierre-Etienne Flandin had appealed to the United States for a public condemnation of Germany’s treaty repudiation on moral grounds, but the United States rejected this request. Hull justified the rejection on the grounds that the Versailles provisions relating to the Rhineland were not part of the separate peace with Germany of 1921 and that the United States was not a Locarno signatory.⁸¹ Under Secretary of State William Phillips explained that the nation’s position must remain “hands off,” in keeping with the “historical attitude of the American people.”⁸² German Ambassador to the United States Hans Luther, after speaking with several State Department officials, reported on March 9 that the Department appeared to feel “that the German step was to have been expected, that it is indeed understandable, since, after all, it is German territory which is involved, and that it promises a pacification of the European atmosphere.”⁸³ Just as the President had done after the German announcement of conscription the previous March, Roosevelt again left Washington to go fishing.

As one might expect from Ambassador Dodd’s reaction to the announcement of German conscription, the apathy and indifference predominant in Washington did not echo at the American Embassy at Berlin. The Ambassador recognized the remilitarization of the

⁸⁰ Atherton telegram 92, 9 March 1936, DS, 740.0011/381.

⁸¹ Hull Memorandum to Roosevelt, March 9, 1936, DS, 740.0011/395.

⁸² Phillips Memorandum, March 14, 1936, DS, 740.0011/480.

⁸³ Luther to Foreign Ministry, March 9, 1936, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, D, V, 164-165.

region as a first step towards far darker developments. By undoing the Rhineland provisions, German attacks on its eastern neighbors became possible. The move also generated a great and undesirable change to the status quo of European international relations with Germany rising to the top and France falling. Dodd's only hope was that the European powers, and possibly even the United States, would take a determined stand to reverse, or at the very least halt, the progress Hitler had made towards achieving continental predominance. Too soon, Dodd feared, Hitler would be in a position to incorporate "his medieval claims to the Danube zone all the way to the Black Sea" into his Greater German Empire.⁸⁴

The events of March 7 did not take Dodd by surprise. He had been expecting the German action for at least a month. After the Franco-Soviet Pact was concluded, Dodd grew suspicious of how the Germans might interpret the development and manipulate the situation to their advantage. He did not trust the assurances he received from Nazi officials that the Germans would continue to respect their treaty obligations. On February 5, Dodd was informed by Ferdinand L. Mayer, the counselor of the embassy, that he received assurances from German Ambassador to the United States Hans Dieckhoff that despite "Germany's distaste for [the Rhineland] arrangement...Germany had every intention of keeping to Locarno provided the others did so."⁸⁵ However, when the French Chamber of Deputies ratified the Franco-Soviet pact, Dodd warned Hull that while Hitler might not act immediately, "the record is to be kept clear" so that at a future date Germany could use the

⁸⁴ Dodd to Hull, March 16, 1936, DS 862.00/3579.

⁸⁵ Dodd to Hull, February 6, 1936, DS 862.20/1102.

Franco-Soviet alliance as “an excuse” for sending troops into the Rhineland and breaching the Locarno arrangements.⁸⁶

Accordingly, when Dodd went to the Kroll Opera House on March 7 to hear Hitler’s speech, the Ambassador focused on the belligerent implications of the remilitarization and gave little weight to the many peace proposals. Despite Hitler’s “impressive” words and his “evident appeal to world cooperation,” Dodd made more of the Nazi leader’s occasionally “belligerent attitude” and his “alarming” references to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. He viewed the constructive aspects of his speech, the appeals to peace and the proposals, as insincere. They were merely “a device.” The Ambassador also recognized that Hitler and his officials had significantly underplayed the military scope of the remilitarization. He reported on March 8: “despite the statement made by Dieckhoff yesterday morning of “several battalions” making a “symbolic entry” into the Rhineland, our Military Attaché states, according to reliable information, that by tomorrow morning, March 9, there will be some forty to forty-five thousand German soldiers in the demilitarized zone, say about three full divisions with appropriate corps troops...He considers that the military reoccupation of the zone has greatly strengthened Germany’s military position in Europe.”⁸⁷

Dodd was well aware of the strategic implications of the remilitarization. France’s position was now on the decline and Germany’s hands no longer tied up in the east: “With the demilitarized zone reoccupied and fortified, France and if necessary Belgium may be contained by a relatively moderate force and thus prevented from creating an effective immediate military diversion in support of the Little Entente or Russia. In brief, a fortified

⁸⁶ Dodd to Hull, February 28, 1936, DS 762.65/176.

⁸⁷ Dodd to Hull, March 8, 1936, DS, 740.0011/375.

Rhineland zone and the powerful army which Germany proposes to have would seem to spell the end of France's present position on the continent."⁸⁸ Already there was developing "a new Europe, with France declining, England losing her empire and Germany becoming the master of all."⁸⁹ The Embassy's military attaché pointed out another important effect of the remilitarization to Dodd: "By a single daring move on the diplomatic chess board, [Hitler] has cut the military basis from under the whole series of French post-war alliances." In this way, it was a necessary "prelude to any German foreign policy," either military or diplomatic in nature, for it tipped the balance of power in Germany's favor. Short of a war to roll back Germany's recent progress, the military attaché warned Dodd, "we will shortly hear the rattle of the footsteps of the Little Entente climbing off the French and onto the German band wagon."⁹⁰

The situation was dangerous. While German rearmament was not yet complete as of March 1936, it would be in just a year or two. Furthermore, Dodd understood the fact that "there need be no mobilization in Germany today in the 1914 sense of the word as all existing German war units are now at war strength and military movements can be executed with almost complete secrecy."⁹¹ Additionally, he felt confident that both "the Army and people would be united behind Hitler" in the case that military sanctions were placed on Germany, either in response to the Rhineland affair or some other future development.⁹² In case of such a conflict, Dodd placed little faith in the abilities of European diplomacy to defuse the situation: "France and England cannot agree, Mussolini gives out pro-German

⁸⁸ Dodd to Hull, March 18, 1936, DS, 740.0011/475.

⁸⁹ William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary*, 330.

⁹⁰ Report by the Military Attaché in Germany (Truman Smith), March 20 1936, DS, 740.0011/654. The Little Entente was an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia formed in 1920-21. France had supported this alliance by signing treaties with each member nation.

⁹¹ Dodd to Hull, March 12 1936, DS, 740.0011/425.

⁹² Dodd to Hull, March 14, 1936, DS, 740.0011/442.

statements and Poland is afraid to make a move until actual war breaks. It is dictator Europe against Western Europe, the German people offering more of a solid front than at any time since 1914.”⁹³ He lamented in his diary that “England and France, having failed to see realities, have put themselves in dangerous positions and practically ruined the League, their one hope of avoiding war.”⁹⁴ In the final analysis, Dodd concluded that unless there was a dramatic shift in the current course of European international relations, Hitler would “give the appearance of peaceful cooperation for a year of two...[and then carry out his]...plan to dominate the Balkan zone.”⁹⁵

The course the British and French took to solve this crisis was fruitless. The decisive moment in this process was an Anglo-French conference held in London on March 12-13. This conference was critical because the only chance that sanctions or any type of drastic action would be taken against Germany was if Britain lent its support. Flandin attempted to persuade Britain to take this course but was ultimately unsuccessful. Britain was unwilling to make this commitment for three reasons. First, the dominions of the British Commonwealth would not stand with Britain if it came to war. Second, there was great opposition to war among the ranks of Britain’s own leaders. Third and most important, British public opinion did not want to risk war over something that didn’t even represent an attack on another country.⁹⁶ Neville Chamberlain recorded in his diary for 12 March 1936 that he had emphasized in his talk with Flandin “that public opinion here would

⁹³ Dodd to Hull, March 16, 1936, DS, 862.00/3579.

⁹⁴ William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 332.

⁹⁵ Dodd to Hull, March 16, 1936, DS, 862.00/3579.

⁹⁶ Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany*, 258-259.

not support us in sanctions of any kind. His [Flandin's] view is that, if a firm front is maintained by France and England, Germany will yield without war. We cannot accept this as a reliable estimate of a mad dictator's reactions."⁹⁷ Meetings of both the League and the Locarno powers continued for months after this point, but without Britain's resolve to act against Germany, all progress made was bound to be ineffectual. Hitler, aware of British sentiment, felt confident enough to refuse cooperation with the other powers and reject all proposals for settlement arising out of the League and Locarno talks. Additionally, once the various peace proposals of Hitler had served their purpose of confusing public opinion abroad and deterring military action, all German interest in them vanished.⁹⁸

By Ambassador Dodd's estimate, the best course of action for France and Britain would have been to take a determined stand against Hitler and enter into negotiations with Germany. As the talks continued to drag on, with little progress made, Dodd wrote to Hull on April 2:

Each nation and individual concerned is doubtless trying to estimate Hitler's sincerity in [his commitment to peace]. While this is a natural approach to the necessary forming of an opinion with regard to Germany's position we feel that the decision should rest on a different ground than that of sincerity. We feel that the best present chance is to call Hitler's bluff for peace, since the powers concerned do not seem willing or capable of calling his bluff for war, to put it that way. If, after negotiation it appears that Hitler is not bluffing for peace and is working for a harmonious settlement of European problems, then well and good; Europe would be on its way out of its present major difficulties. If, on the other hand, after a few months' consideration and negotiation in a real spirit of equality, it is found that Hitler's proposals are a sham and only a façade for conquest then European opinion and indeed world opinion will have a sounder basis for common agreement and doubtless common action and meanwhile little if anything will be lost.⁹⁹

Making an educated guess about which of these two possible outcomes Dodd thought more likely underlines his support for a united stand against Germany. As the Ambassador had

⁹⁷ Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, (London: 1946) 279.

⁹⁸ Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, 261.

⁹⁹ Dodd to Hull, April 2, 1936, DS, 740.0011/556.

little doubt that Hitler meant war, one can surmise that he hoped the British and French would come to detect Hitler's "sham" through negotiations. As yet unable to come to terms with the present realities of the Nazi threat, the British and French would be brought to their senses and realize, as Dodd did, the necessity to contain future German aggression. Dodd's solution to the Rhineland affair, and indeed all of Europe's "present major difficulties," was thus for British, French, and world opinion to understand Germany in the same light as Dodd did. Only then could action be taken against Germany to prevent the European war Dodd feared.

George Messersmith—American minister to Austria, a friend of Dodd's, and someone who frequently shared the Ambassador's view of German developments—wrote a memorandum to the State Department that further elucidated Dodd's line of argument.¹⁰⁰ Like Dodd, Messersmith bemoaned the fact that European leaders were blind to the very real threat of Nazi aggression. He felt this ignorance owed itself primarily to one factor, Europe's fear of war: "Europe knows that it lives at a time when war is still an instrument of policy which has to be reckoned with, particularly by Germany. It recognizes this by building up war machines, but when the moments come when the machine so expensively built up must be used, the fears which dominate Europe prevent action. It is this fear which Europe has of war which National Socialism has been, is and will continue to capitalize." He went on to argue that at this point in Germany's military build-up, "a determined stand by the powers now is almost certain not to lead to war, and it is the only thing which will bring to an end the series of faits accomplis which the German program provides for." He concluded by warning State Department officials that "it is perhaps too much to say that this

¹⁰⁰ Dodd states in his diary that on the topic of the remilitarization of the Rhineland and what should be done, he generally found himself in agreement with Messersmith. William E. Dodd Jr. and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary*, 329 [April 6 1936].

will be the last chance which Europe has to save itself from the ultimate catastrophe of a great war, but there are many indications that this is the turning point on which the future course towards war or peace will be determined.”¹⁰¹

While neither Dodd nor Messersmith seriously called for American intervention in the affair, it is apparent that Dodd would have been in favor of this development. What held the Ambassador back from calling for American participation was his acceptance of the political realities of his nation’s anti-interventionism. Writing to President Roosevelt of American abstention from the Rhineland affair, he quipped: “If Woodrow Wilson's bones do not turn in the Cathedral grave, then bones never turn in graves. Possibly you can do something, but from reports of Congressmen's attitudes, I have grave doubts. So many men, including my friend [historian Charles] Beard, think absolute isolation a coming paradise.”¹⁰²

After the experience of the Second World War, Secretary Hull was able to write that, in hindsight, the Rhineland affair was an “obvious...seven league step toward war” and regrettably, a development “in which we were not involved.” A bit quicker to the draw, Ambassador Dodd made this realization on March 7, 1936. While Dodd was nowhere near being alone in realizing the military implications of Hitler’s Rhineland move, he found little company in the highest echelons of world governments when it came to the urgency he felt to deal with the situation. Over the three years of his service in Germany, Dodd had observed a nation whose government was radicalized by a mad Fascist dictator with

¹⁰¹ Memorandum by the Minister in Austria (George Messersmith), March 9, 1936, DS 740.0011/512.

¹⁰² Memo, William E. Dodd to Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 4, 1936, President’s Secretary’s File (PSF) Safe Files: State Dept., 1941, FDRL Digital Archives.

expansionist aims, whose economy was absorbed by a large-scale and illegal rearmament program, and whose neighbors were frequently referenced as targets of future German aggression. This was enough to convince Dodd that peace and political stability had a limited lifespan in a Europe where Hitler's ambitions remained unchecked. While he saw the situation clearly, he felt Europeans, most importantly the British and French, were not facing the facts. His solution to the Rhineland affair thus involved a process by which the British and French would be forced to come to grips with the reality of Hitler's program. Dodd argued that a firm stand against Germany was necessary. A firm stand would reveal Hitler's true intentions, and if those intentions were found to be belligerent, as Dodd surmised, then ultimately the will and determination to take action against Hitler would come to fruition.

FIVE

FOUR SAD YEARS IN BERLIN: A VOICE UNHEARD IN WASHINGTON

Dodd continued in his post as Ambassador for another twenty-one months. The events of this period, particularly the remainder of 1936, strengthened the conclusions he had arrived at after the Rhineland affair; in his final months, he wrote consistently of the threat Germany posed to world peace and the necessity of international cooperation to defeat it. The Spanish Civil War, beginning on July 17, 1936, contributed strongly to this analysis. By August, the situation already looked bleak to Dodd. Hitler and Mussolini were openly aiding Franco, France was sharply divided over aiding the Republic, and England remained neutral. Writing to Assistant Secretary of State Moore, Dodd lamented the fulfillment of his “sad prophecies these last eighteen months about Europe’s steady move toward solid dictatorship.” Dodd argued it was a development which would place the

United States in grave peril.¹⁰³ In November, the Ambassador wrote to the State Department that the Germans and Italians were fully committed to the creation of a third totalitarian state in Europe. During this month, Germany and Italy officially recognized the Franco Government and now, as Dodd rightly observed: “Mussolini and Hitler must see to it that [Franco] is successful or be associated with failure. This a dictator can ill afford...[Now Mussolini and Hitler must] go the whole way in helping Franco.”¹⁰⁴ The Ambassador watched anxiously as the events in Spain foreshadowed what he feared might engulf the rest of the continent in the years ahead.

The ever closer relationship between Germany and Italy also disturbed Dodd. The war in Spain had illustrated the two nations acting towards a common cause: the defeat of a communist threat and the support of a fledgling fascist regime. The alignment of Germany and Italy made perfect sense within their respective foreign policies, Dodd wrote, noting: “if it is true, as many believe, that Italy has definitely limited her imperial aspirations, for the time being at least, to the Mediterranean and is willing to see the other Fascist imperialism, Germany, control Central Europe, there would be no reason why these powers, under the pressure of the Soviet menace...should not join to press for unity in Central and Southeastern Europe and the creation of a solid defensive position in the middle of the Continent.”¹⁰⁵ In late-September, Dodd noted that developments hinted strongly at the formation of a German-Italian alliance; the Ambassador cited military discussions in Rome between high-ranking German and Italian officers, a visit to Mussolini by Minister of Justice Hans Frank and Nazi Youth leader Baldur von Schirach, and an identical Italian-

¹⁰³ Dodd to Moore, August 17, 1936, R. Walton Moore Papers, FDRL, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁰⁴ Dodd to Hull, November 19, 1936, DS 852.01/149.

¹⁰⁵ Dodd to Hull, September 3, 1936, DS 740.00/59.

German response to a forthcoming five-power Locarno conference.¹⁰⁶ Dodd's predictions proved accurate when on October 25 Mussolini announced the formation of a Rome-Berlin axis.

Moreover, by the end of 1936, Dodd argued that Germany was on a solid footing for war. Hitler's Four Year Plan, announced in September, would render the Reich "as independent as possible from foreign raw materials and food stuffs" and expand its army from 24 to 36 divisions. Dodd believed that Hitler's newly acquired material and military strength would greatly enhance the Chancellor's bargaining power in his dealings with the Locarno states.¹⁰⁷ Dodd also asserted that the Chancellor's position was bolstered by strong support at home. He wrote to Hull that he felt it "safe to assume that Hitler, for the present at least, can count upon the support of an overwhelming majority of the Germany people in any venture he might undertake, whether it be one of outright conquest or one cloaked in the guise of repelling an invader."¹⁰⁸

The year 1937 saw little in the way of Nazi foreign policy initiatives (beyond continued intervention in the Spanish Civil War). For Dodd, it would be his last in Berlin. At several points during this year, he had considered retirement due to a certain futility he felt in serving his mission. After years of warning the President and State Department of the Nazi threat and years of calling for international cooperation, he had progressed little in effecting any material change in the position of his government. Two developments in particular contributed to Dodd's feelings of hopelessness. First, President Roosevelt killed the idea of an international peace conference after hinting at the possibility earlier in the year. Second, Dodd's hope that the President and Congress might formulate some

¹⁰⁶ Dodd to Hull, September 21, 1936, DS 740.0011/805.

¹⁰⁷ Dodd to Hull, October 2, 1936, DS 751.60C/96.

¹⁰⁸ Dodd to Hull, September 18, 1936, DS 762.00/131.

economic device in conjunction with other states to punish aggressor nations faded after the passage of the Neutrality Act of 1937. The act revealed that anti-interventionist sentiment still held sway in Congress and that there was little chance of the country cooperating in any international action. Dodd's frustrations, coupled with his declining health, left him with strong doubts that he could carry out any effective mission in Berlin. By the end of 1937, he was convinced that "nothing can be done in the United States or in Nazi Germany to better relations."¹⁰⁹

Dodd planned his resignation for the spring of 1938. His mission was cut short, however, when he was recalled in November 1937 over a series of public gaffes that had embarrassed the State Department and angered the German Government. The first of these was the printing by several leading American newspapers of a confidential letter written by Dodd to several United States senators on May 11, 1937. In this letter, he issued the cryptic warning that "There are individuals of great wealth who wish a dictatorship and are ready to help a Huey Long. There are politicians who think they may gain powers like those exercised in Europe. One man, I have been told by friends, who owns nearly a billion dollars, is ready to support such a program and, of course, control it." An uproar ensued in which several senators denounced Dodd for his scaremonger tactics and demanded his recall. Though a recall was never issued, his political reputation at home was irreparably damaged.

Dodd's refusal to attend that year's Nazi Party Congress in Nürnberg further injured his standing in the State Department. While in years past foreign embassies had avoided this event, in 1937 the British and French reversed their policy and attended. The State

¹⁰⁹ Dodd to Hull, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1937. Vol. II*, (Washington, 1937) 374.

Department demanded Dodd do the same, but he refused. The Ambassador wrote a confidential letter of protest to Hull which again fell into the hands of leading American newspapers.¹¹⁰ The leak amplified doubts among politicians of Dodd's effectiveness as an Ambassador and also damaged his reputation among Germans in Berlin.

The last straw for Dodd came on August 4, when he remarked to an American audience that "the basic objective of some powers in Europe is to frighten and even destroy democracies everywhere"—a thinly veiled criticism of his host nation. German officials reacted negatively to this statement and the next day German Ambassador Dieckhoff formally protested to Secretary Hull and Under-Secretary Sumner Welles. On November 23, Dodd received orders from Hull to wrap up his affairs by December 31. On December 28, Dodd left Germany and concluded his "four sad years in Berlin."¹¹¹

Upon his return to the United States, Dodd spent the final two years of his life on a speaking tour to warn Americans of the grave dangers present in the current European situation. Though his reception on this tour was highly enthusiastic, his audiences were generally composed of groups already supporting his views: for example, the Federation of Jewish Women's Voters, the Massachusetts League of Women's Voters, Women Shoppers for the Japanese Boycott, the Church League for Industrial Democracy, the Zionist Organization of America, etc. The former Ambassador also tried, though unsuccessfully, to reiterate his message to more important figures. Roosevelt, Hull, and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were all unwilling either to take his advice or give him a hearing. Between February and April 1938, Dodd attempted three times to discuss

¹¹⁰ Dodd believed that Under-Secretary Sumner Welles had leaked the letter to New York papers in the hope of forcing him from his post. See Robert Dallek, *Democrat and Diplomat*, 313.

¹¹¹ Memo, William E. Dodd to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 26, 1937, President's Secretary's File (PSF) Safe Files: State Dept., 1941, FDRL Digital Archives.

European affairs with Roosevelt. Each time, he found himself unable to get placed on the president's busy schedule. When he sent an hortatory note to Cordell Hull, he received only a ceremonious reply. His request for a meeting with Senator Key Pittman, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, was entirely ignored. After only one month back in the States, Dodd was ready to announce that he saw "no leadership anywhere willing to try to save Modern Civilization."

At the end of this study, the question remains as to why the American leadership ignored Dodd's calls for action during and after his ambassadorship. From 1934 on, Dodd consistently wrote of the threat Nazi Germany posed to international security. However, these three years of warnings had little, if any, effect on American foreign policy. To determine why this was so, it is necessary to consider three issues: the anti-interventionist political climate of the United States during these years, the nature of President Roosevelt's foreign policy, and Dodd's reputation within the State Department.

In 1935, when Dodd was ready to declare that the "dogs of war" were to be released in Europe at a moment's notice, the Chicago-based *Christian Century* declared "Ninety-nine Americans out of a hundred would today regard as an imbecile anyone who might suggest that, in event of another European war, the United States should again participate in it."¹¹² The following year, a poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion set this figure more precisely at ninety-five percent.¹¹³ Until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, anti-interventionist sentiment held strong sway over Congress

¹¹² "A Peace Policy for 1935," *The Christian Century*, LII (January, 1935) 40.

¹¹³ George Gallup and Claude Robinson, "American Institute of Public Opinion—Surveys, 1935-38," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, II (July, 1938) 388.

and the American public opinion. Anti-interventionist legislators were elected in all sections of the country and represented both major parties. Some of the most influential men of the period were staunch proponents of this ideology: men like Senators William E. Borah and Gerald P. Nye, influential international law authority Judge John Bassett Moore, prominent historian Charles A. Beard, and 1930s political personality Norman Thomas.

The strength of this political philosophy relied on a number of factors. Firstly, it grew out of a long-standing and deeply engrained American foreign policy tradition of unilateralism. The principles of this doctrine stretch back to George Washington's 1796 Farewell Address, in which the departing president warned future leaders to steer clear of European entanglements so as to avoid unsavory political relationships abroad and secure liberty at home. In the 1930s, isolationist legislators sought to preserve American government's absolute control over its foreign policy by avoiding any long-term political commitments to other nations. Hence policy makers were unwilling to restrict their freedom of action by tying their decisions to those reached by international agencies or multilateral conferences. Additionally, any consideration of participating in a military conflict in Europe meant a *de facto* alliance with Great Britain and France, and this raised the risk of substantial and perhaps permanent entanglement in European affairs.

Just as important, anti-interventionism grew out of the protracted economic crisis at home. With widespread unemployment and poverty, the Great Depression forced an inward focus on domestic problems among politicians and voters. Manfred Jonas, in his *Isolationism in America*, writes that "Even when the activities of other nations posed a potential threat to the security of the United States, they were regarded by many as

distractions diverting the Administrations from the country's 'real' problems."¹¹⁴ A poll conducted in December, 1936, to determine "the most vital issue before the American people today" ranked unemployment first and economy in government second.¹¹⁵

Finally, a general abhorrence of war in the United States during the 1930s bolstered the anti-interventionist impulse. These feelings stemmed from both the memories of the horrors of the First World War as well as widespread disillusionment with United States involvement in that conflict. President Wilson, in what appeared to be a departure from the unilateralist tradition, had led his nation to war to make the world safe for democracy. Upon entering the conflict, Wilson expressed his desire to play an active post-war role in redesigning the very nature of international relations, the basis of which would be a League of Nations. The decades after the war revealed this project to be a failure. The Nye Committee, which between 1934 and 1936 studied the causes of American involvement in the war, further contributed to these feelings. The Committee's findings convinced many Americans that the financial interests of bankers, arms manufacturers, and other businessmen had strongly influenced their nation's decision to go to war in 1917. This pushed even more Americans into the anti-interventionist camp. In this atmosphere, Ambassador Dodd was viewed as a member of what anti-interventionists labeled the "messianic" group, eager for a larger American role in heading off fascist plans.

If Dodd could find little echo of his interventionist calls in Congress and the American public, he was also doomed to fail in eliciting any material response from President Roosevelt. Roosevelt did in fact display internationalist leanings similar to those of the Ambassador. Personal correspondence carried on between Roosevelt and Dodd

¹¹⁴ Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, (Ithaca, 1969) 25.

¹¹⁵ George Gallup and Claude Robinson, "American Institute of Public Opinion—Surveys, 1935-38," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, III (October, 1939), 595-596.

shows that the President himself placed confidence in Dodd and believed him to be doing a good job.¹¹⁶ However, the President understood that an effective foreign policy could only be built on top of a solid base of domestic support; he was not a free agent and thus he limited his policy goals to what the public and congressional leaders would accept. Accordingly, the brand of internationalism he followed was highly pragmatic, tempered by a sense of realism and the necessary practical considerations involved in running an effective political machine. Between 1933 and 1937, any unmerited focus on international developments would have only served to confuse the public, divide his supporters, and endanger his New Deal program.¹¹⁷ Dodd stood little chance of overpowering these considerations to change Roosevelt's political course.

Lastly, Dodd's inability to affect American foreign policy derived from his poor reputation within the State Department. In his biography of the Ambassador, Fred Arthur Bailey considers this subject in some depth. In his words:

State Department regulars found Dodd a mystery. He was not a wealthy political appointee who acquiesced to polite suggestions from his professional staff, nor did he rank among those who had risen from within the service to command an embassy considered too sensitive for a mere amateur. He was an intellectual, a scholar, and a professor who had left his confining Chicago classroom to teach on a world stage, to instruct presidents, dictators, senators, and foreign-service officials. He was a Jeffersonian Democrat determined to cut through the diplomatic obfuscation that he believed hindered efficient relations between nations. And he was a southern-born yeoman suspicious of all aristocratic affectations, seeing in them the arrogant oppression of the common man.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Franklin L. Ford, "Three Observers in Berlin," in *The Diplomats: 1919-1939*, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, (New York, 1953) 456.

¹¹⁷ For example, when the Spanish Civil War began in 1936, Roosevelt considered shipping armaments to the Spanish government, but quickly decided against repealing any of the Neutrality Act arms embargos. Domestic pressures overwhelmed any interventionist impulse. Firstly, supporting the Republicans meant the alienation of the American Catholic electorate—in Roosevelt's words "the loss of every Catholic voter next fall." Secondly, in 1937 Roosevelt's New Deal programs faced a significant challenge by a Supreme Court decision that declared several parts of FDR's domestic program unconstitutional. During such a crisis, FDR could not easily divert his attention from these issues. (FDR quoted in Justus D. Doenecke and John E. Wilz, *From Isolation to War: 1931-1941*, [Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2003], p. 66.)

¹¹⁸ Fred Arthur Bailey, *William Edward Dodd: The South's Yeoman Scholar*, 146.

Dodd's unique background and mannerisms jarred with officials in the State Department. Shortly after Dodd arrived in Berlin in 1933, Jay Pierrepont Moffat, the State Department's chief of its division of western European affairs, wrote to the acting charge d'affaires in Berlin: "Your chief, Mr. Dodd...is a curious individual whom I find it impossible to diagnose."¹¹⁹ In his memoirs, Cordell Hull described Dodd as "sincere though impulsive and inexperienced."¹²⁰ He also described Dodd as "somewhat insane" on topics such as Jeffersonian democracy and world peace during a meeting with Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff in the summer of 1937.¹²¹ In short, by 1937, a New York Times reporter could write that Dodd had "long been one of the Department's worries...[and that] it is no secret in those generally discreet corridors that a change at Berlin has long been desired and would be welcome at any time."¹²²

The Department's negative view of Dodd strongly colored how its officials interpreted and made use of his reports. Several examples illustrate that Department officials took Dodd's words with a grain of salt. When Assistant Secretary Moore received the Ambassador's account of a tour of southern Germany, including an incriminating map denoting the location of several new munitions factories, Moore forwarded it to Roosevelt, but appended an endorsement designed to soften the message. "Dr. Dodd's letter presents a rather dark picture of what is going on in Germany," he wrote, but he added that there were alternative interpretations to his description of fully activated munitions factories. They

¹¹⁹ Moffat quoted in *Ibid.*, 142.

¹²⁰ Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, I, 572.

¹²¹ Dieckhoff to Neurath, 5 August 1937, *GDFP*, Series D, I, 627. While Hull appears to have disliked Dodd at the personal and professional level, he ultimately held many of the same internationalist views that Dodd exhibited. The Secretary of State, at least privately, frequently expressed his belief that the United States must cast its influence against war through concerted action against the aggressor nations. In public however, he yielded to the isolationist climate, going no further than issuing statements calling on nations to adhere to the rule of law and respect a standard of morality. See Harold B. Hinton, *Cordell Hull: A Biography*, (Garden City, NY, 1942) 279-282.

¹²² *New York Times*, May 14, 1937.

provided, after all, employment for a people burdened by depression.¹²³ By January 1937, Moore found himself utterly opposed to the views Dodd expressed on the state of world affairs. That month, he complained to the president's personal secretary, "I cannot share [Dodd's] gloomy midnight belief that the world is now on the verge of another war."¹²⁴ Secretary Hull also evinced weariness of the Ambassador's rhetoric. Thanking him for his most "vivid picture of conditions in Germany," Hull reminded Dodd that it merely "indicated how difficult it is to make any long range forecasts."¹²⁵

When President Roosevelt embarked on his search for a new ambassador to Germany in 1933, he sought a man familiar with the German people and their history who could produce telling and accurate analysis on the state of German developments; after witnessing the first months of Hitler's chancellorship, it was clear in Washington that Germany would be a focal point of international relations in the coming years. The appointment of William Dodd proved to be wise in many ways. He certainly met Roosevelt's criteria for the ambassadorship and his foresight as an ambassador was unparalleled within the era during which he served. As a professor of history and a political outsider, he was able to give advice that was both outside of the box and prescient. Indeed, the unorthodox style of diplomacy Dodd practiced that grated State Department officials so egregiously proved a huge boon to his abilities as a rapporteur. As early as 1934, he had concluded that Hitler and his gang were irrational madmen, unlikely to bind themselves to any of the rules of international discourse. He argued repeatedly that the world must

¹²³ Moore quoted in Bailey, 161.

¹²⁴ Moore quoted in Bailey, 162.

¹²⁵ Hull quoted in Bailey, 161.

confront the Hitler of *Mein Kampf* and let go of any hope that the Chancellor's protestations of peace might be genuine. In this sense, he eclipsed political leaders in the United States, Britain, and France, who failed to comprehend Hitler as anything other than a German nationalist with traditional goals that could be satisfied by mere acquiescence and appeasement. Sadly, Dodd's foresight went unrewarded and ignored. Especially because Dodd was an outsider, he found his views on Nazi Germany marginalized when they did not square with the consensus of entrenched governmental interests. It is both telling and unfortunate that in the Government Printing Office's 1941 publication of *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (a collection of diplomatic papers from the period), Dodd and his reports received not a single mention.

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