INTRODUCTION

In this book I delve into the effects of personality and circumstance on foreign policy and the outcomes of war. More specifically, I explore the interaction between policy conceived in Washington during World War II, defined as 1937 (Nanjing) to 1945 (Nagasaki), and the lived experience of US diplomats residing in the major belligerent countries. There American ambassadors sculpted formal policy – occasionally deliberately, other times inadvertently – giving it shape and meaning not always intended by FDR or predicted by his principal advisors. As such this book belongs to an expanding genre in diplomatic studies, centered on those activities undertaken by a cast of characters outside the limelight but who have served national leaders.[1]

Popular and scholarly interest in World War II has generated an immense literature. It continues to grow without signs of abating as audiences try to grasp the war's many facets. These include the conflict's deep origins and immediate causes, aims of the belligerents, strains within alliances, weapon technologies, life on the home fronts, genocides. Related postwar events have been evaluated too from diverse standpoints – the convening of international military tribunals at Nuremberg and Tokyo to mete out justice to Axis leaders, rumblings of Cold War confrontation, first flushes of decolonization in Africa and Asia.

Treatment of US aspects of the Second World War has also ranged broadly. Among topics of interest are isolationism's allure

and adherents, the drift into hostilities, the failure to rescue European Jewry, the Pacific campaigns, the D-Day landings, the Manhattan Project and use of atomic bombs, the internment of Japanese-Americans, the feminization of the industrial work force, and the reinvigoration of the drive for African-American civil rights. Neither has the diplomatic side of the US effort been neglected. Analyses have centered on presidential performances at summit conferences of the Big Three, where grand strategy and postwar plans were devised and ratified: Tehran, Yalta, Potsdam. Yet a crucial feature of American wartime diplomacy has been given shorter shrift by historians, namely, that having to do with US embassies and ambassadors during the crisis years, from Hitler's capture of power to Japan's 1945 capitulation.

This neglect partly stems from the fact that Franklin Roosevelt had little time for his senior diplomat, the hapless Cordell Hull. FDR kept him around primarily to maintain links with Capitol Hill, where he was respected owing to his previous congressional career, having served terms in the House and Senate where he specialized in international trade relations. The president was otherwise not solicitous of his secretary of state, whom he tolerated as a cross between Tennessee rube and Wilsonian fundamentalist. Hull had good reason to complain when he blurted early in his State Department tenure: "[Roosevelt] never tells me anything."[2]

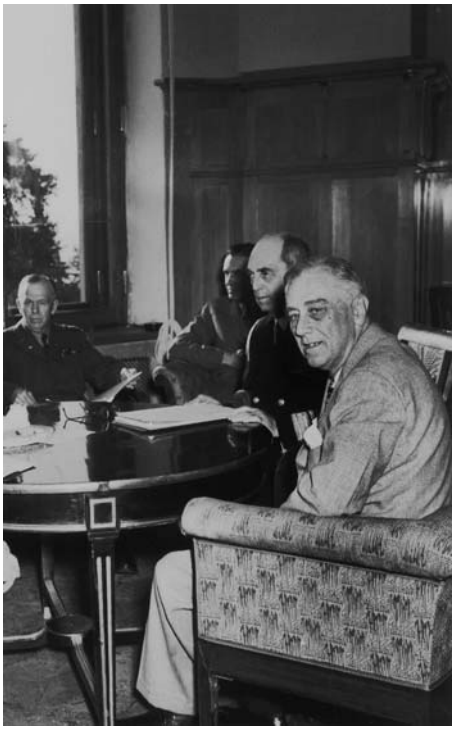
Like many presidents before and since, FDR preferred to play the part of foreign minister. Moreover, he had scant regard for State Department professionals, whom he considered a blend of incompetent and snooty.[3] Except for Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, whom FDR esteemed but let go (September 1943) to mollify Hull's accumulating resentment and in light of Welles's alleged homosexual escapades, he rarely sought out the department's people.[4] Roosevelt cared little for their ideas. He instead relied on his own inner circle for advice, notably his confidante Harry Hopkins, or men in uniform, preeminently General George Marshall.

A presumption has developed that because FDR largely ignored the formal apparatus through which US foreign relations is conducted, and deployed special emissaries for delicate missions, its wartime functioning was correspondingly dull or trivial. The main action and grappling with grave matters took place elsewhere – on the battlefields, in the factories, in cabinet and Allied meetings – while State Department machinery clunked along with meager direction. Diplomats posted

abroad purportedly fell into secondary routine while hoping dimly that a return to peacetime would salvage ambassadorial dignity and deliver them from the ignominy of playing bit roles in a surpassing drama; younger officers, meanwhile, labored under the popular suspicion that they were sons of privilege who had shirked military obligations by scurrying into Foreign Service cushiness. But such interpretations distort the record. Cumulatively they give a misleading portrait, practically a cartoon, of America's diplomatic front in World War II.

The account here of FDR's ambassadors provides for a fuller understanding of the scope, intention, and controversies that marked US foreign policy. Thus, for example, the split in FDR's administration between people who – before 7 December 1941 – wanted to accommodate Japan and those who wanted to confront it was intensified by the disagreements between two distinguished envoys: conciliatory Joseph Grew in Tokyo versus tougher-minded Nelson Johnson in China. The depth of dispute between Americans who wanted to avoid involvement in European troubles ("isolationists") and people who feared the consequences of prolonged aloofness ("interventionists") was vividly illustrated by the two successive heads of Embassy London: Joseph Kennedy versus John Winant. W. Averell Harriman, to cite another case, helped stabilize the uneasy Soviet–US wartime alliance. Later, as Harry Truman's tutor, he had tangible impact on the president as he tried from April 1945 onward to understand Stalin's ways and goals.

Concomitantly, occupation of the ambassadorial office by irresponsible or naïve people was not a trite problem or simply more fodder for satirists in their ridiculing of diplomats as pompous functionaries who swill champagne and consume caviar. The posting of ill-qualified men abroad did mischief. They hindered the attainment of US ends. William Bullitt in Paris, for instance, inadvertently misled FDR's cabinet in 1940 about the resilience of French society and the robustness of its military forces. At the same time, he assured the French government of US determination to provide abundant materiel at the hour of need, when in fact the administration had neither the means nor will to send decisive help. The overall result of Bullitt's mission was to confuse officialdom in both Washington and Paris during a portentous moment. In China during 1944–1945 Patrick Hurley, to mention another sad instance, disparaged his staff – excellent in the main – and misunderstood a central political reality: abiding antipathy between Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) and Mao Zedong. This did not



1 Left to right: General George Marshall, W. Averell Harriman, Admiral William Leahy, FDR. Yalta 1945.

allow for civil peace or China's playing a role as one of the world's policemen, an assignment blithely devised by FDR and endorsed by the uncomprehending Hurley.

An appreciation of the ambassadorial ledger of achievements and fumbles is integral to understanding the US record in World War Two. Diplomacy, for good or ill, was much more than just FDR.[5]

The first section of this study is centered on ambassadors posted to the Axis capitals – Tokyo, Berlin, Rome – before direct US involvement in hostilities. These people monitored the currents racing toward war and suggested methods for containing them or, failing that, preparing for national emergency. The focus of the Japanese chapter is on the period of 1937–1941, from the resumption of Sino-Japanese violence to Pearl Harbor, and probes the question of whether a plausible alternative existed to war in the Pacific. The German chapter takes up the story

at an earlier date, with the Nazis coming to office in 1933 and William Dodd's warnings against them, and ends in December 1941, by which time Hitler's armies had overrun most of Europe. The tale of diplomats in Germany during the 1930s throws into relief those dilemmas posed by the Third Reich to FDR's America and its equivocal response. The main question in the Italian chapter turns on whether a more adept US policy could have prevented Mussolini's developing an exclusive orientation on Germany.

I devote the book's second section to Axis victims. The China chapter pivots on the record of American officials in the mauled Middle Kingdom. The matter for them was twofold, hinging on whether Chiang might contribute significantly to the anti-Japanese struggle and assessing prospects for China's assuming a greater international part in the future under US tutelage. The French chapter deals with the only great power in the European war to collapse during the first year of combat. The June 1940 surrender presented dilemmas to Americans regarding the collaborationist Vichy regime. They hoped it might maintain a modicum of independence from the Third Reich and, perhaps, be dislodged from the German sphere. At a minimum, Washington expected that the Vichy contribution to Germany could be weakened or otherwise played to US–British advantage. Realization of these military-diplomatic imperatives clashed with a humanitarian imperative. A few diplomats, exemplified by the chargé d'affaires S. Pinkney Tuck, wanted in mid-1942 to aid thousands of Jews at risk of deportation by Vichy and delivery to German custody. With the dissolution of Vichy in 1944 and France's return to belligerency against Germany, the United States acquired another ally, but only marginally better positioned than China to contribute to Axis defeat.

Section three of the book deals with America's two most important coalition partners. The Britannia chapter concentrates on the vicissitudes of the US–British relationship from the 1938 Munich conference to victory in 1945. That period was marked by the fateful weakening of the British empire and US rise to dominance in the English-speaking world. As developed in the Soviet chapter, by war's end the USSR, alone among nations, occupied a spot from which to challenge America's emergent global writ. The main outlines of the postwar Soviet–US contest of wills ("Cold War") took shape during the anti-German alliance of 1941–1945.

The concluding chapter combines several elements: reflections on FDR's statecraft and the nature of the US diplomatic corps in the World War II era; an evaluation of ambassadorial diplomacy with emphasis on the intersection between Washington conceptions of exalted policy and lived experience overseas; ruminations (not too tangential, I hope) on the long shadow cast by the Second World War. Regarding this last item, these words of William Faulkner apply: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."[6]

Irrespective of their place of residence and the specificity of each mission, FDR's envoys dealt with common puzzles. They went beyond the ordinary requirement of producing reliable reportage (embassy as "relay station") or leading orderly life in alien settings. Foremost among difficulties, the president's representatives had to divine Roosevelt's elusive mind, prerequisite for giving an intelligible account of US concerns to host governments. The difficulty in this discernment was further aggravated by the brittleness of White House–State Department communication. Authorized ambassadors, moreover, had to take precautions to preserve their usefulness whenever the president graced foreign governments with visitations by roving emissaries. They typically presumed much, not infrequently "scooped" the embassies by acquiring useful information first, and got quick entrée to personages, who thereafter required persuasion that the local diplomats were worth knowing. Too often, not without reason, the suspicion shared by ambassadors and potentates alike was that FDR more dearly valued analysis acquired by his "utility players" than by long-term retainers assigned to distant stations. Yet despite these handicaps, several of America's ambassadors acquitted themselves well. They added materially to the US cause and to the sum of diplomacy's moderating purpose. The bungling of other people must be read as a cautionary tale.

This history of World War II envoys is meant as more than a study of a discrete topic in twentieth-century US foreign relations. It is a vehicle to investigate broad questions of diplomacy and international relations within the context of a specific crisis. Diplomacy normally aims to advance the national interest by nonviolent means. By its very existence, diplomacy fosters procedures and a semblance of community, however incipient, among competitive states and anxious peoples.

The Second World War's immense violence did not obviate diplomacy. It is an ameliorative activity, premised on recognition that the problems afflicting states – born of insecurity, competition, self-regard – constitute a condition that cannot be fixed but only managed. Diplomats do not aim at perfect peace or absolute justice but settle for, and count themselves lucky when they have achieved, approximations of such ends. Secretary of War Henry Stimson was incontrovertibly right when he stated in 1947: "The face of war is the face of death . . . [War] has grown steadily more barbarous, more destructive, more debased in all its aspects."[7] Incomprehensible to "progressivist theory," war since Stimson's time has continued to derange global society.[8] Yet the diplomatic vocation, in tandem with its sturdy helpers – international law and organizations, treaty regimes, regional associations – can slow the war reflex and purchase respite from disaster.

By retrieving salient elements in the careers of FDR's ambassadors, one can better grasp not just "lessons" of the past, such as they are, or the modalities of modern foreign policy, but also better comprehend the fragility, ambiguities, and enduring urgency of diplomacy. This study argues implicitly for the primacy of diplomacy, even during violent times, a useful orientation for Americans and other peoples as they pick their way through the twenty-first century's hazards. The local knowledge, intuitions, compromises, and tact that compose the essence of diplomacy – velvet covering the mailed fist – are even more vital in stirred eras than in placid ones.

Part I

Axis