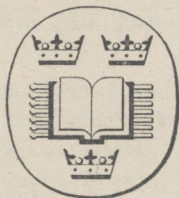


THE  
*Origins and Background  
of the Second World War*

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SECOND EDITION

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THE  
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## INTRODUCTION

No one who has studied history deeply, peering into the compound of material and spiritual forces that makes up the life of states, societies, and civilizations, will fancy it possible at this hour to write definitively about the origins of the present world war.

One reason why this is so is that many necessary documents are not available to the historian's use. Of diplomatic relations in the years preceding 1939 we know only what has been published, and that is certainly not the whole story. The inner history of German-Italian relations, of Axis plans and purposes and plots, of Russian foreign policy, of Japanese designs, all this lies buried in secret archives or perhaps still deeper in the inscrutable and undefined intentions of totalitarian dictators. Much of it may never be known, for the revolt of the Axis Powers from that international community which twenty years ago committed itself to a diplomacy proceeding 'always frankly and in the public view' has been a revolt into dark and devious ways. These states have been plunged into an atmosphere reminiscent of palace politics in the days of ancient despotisms. So that their secret historical records, if and when these ever come to light, may prove to be a source of further confusion and mystification rather than sure knowledge and understanding.

In any event, there is no doubt but that the six years before Hitler sent his armies into Poland saw a general return to secret diplomacy, even on the part of states that would have preferred to transact their business in the open councils of Geneva. The reaction was forced by governments that abolished the freedom of press and public discussion, and developed purposes and policies that required propaganda on the one hand and secrecy on the other, instead of informative, truthful, and enlightening publicity. It was a period of broadcasting and espionage. Not even in the years 1908-14 was there so great a public ignorance of what was going on in the inner circles of the great capitals of the world.

It is easy, however, to magnify the importance of this lack of knowledge of the hidden structure of diplomatic relations. Great

historical events, after all, unfold in the daylight of public awareness. And the roots and origins of a great war are far from being subsumed under the heading of diplomatic history. They are embedded in the whole political, economic, and cultural life of the world. The psychological moods of nations, their characters and habits, the broad repercussion of great happenings on popular sensibility, the propagation of ideological doctrines, the operation of economic forces, all this may be studied and observed, even very acutely, without recourse to unpublished diplomatic documents. And all this is the major and essential part of the history of the coming of the war. In short, the most important public events are really public, and the most powerful forces at work in the world may be observed by eyes that search for them.

In the last decade we have witnessed the resurrection of German and Japanese tribalism and the alliance of these peoples' illegitimate ambitions with anarchic elements in all quarters of the globe. We know our own deeds, wise and unwise. Details of the tremendous story are hidden, but the main truths are discernible. We who have lived through these years and experienced these momentous events can do something more than record them. If we have historical knowledge and insight, if we have justice and honesty, we can write of them interpretively and truthfully, in high confidence that later corrections and supplements will be only in minor details.

The main difficulty in writing an account that comes to grips with the realities underlying the war is not the dearth of diplomatic documents, or of any other kind of record. As a matter of fact the records are too voluminous for any mortal eye to read, since they are nothing less than the records of modern civilization. This war is no mere clash of states to determine a boundary, control a trade route, annex a province, or fix a dynastic succession. In its political aspect it is not so much a conflict within the international community as one between that community and mighty tribes on the warpath: that is, between hostile political cultures. In its economic and sociological aspects it is a struggle for control of the main industrial centers, the world resources of mineral and agricultural wealth, and dominion over the seven seas. In its religious and spiritual aspect it is a crisis brought on by the weakening hold of traditional religious sanctions on human conduct, with a resultant outburst of

paganism. Culturally, it presents a new chapter in the long history of conflict between Occident and Orient. A mere glimpse of the struggle in its totality is enough for realizing that so immense an upheaval is not to be comprehended fully by the generation experiencing it. We can only stand in the midst of it, trying to see the leading events in related order, bringing to bear upon them our best powers of understanding, and setting them against a historical perspective that reaches far enough into the past to show the proportion of things.

But precisely here is the principal difficulty in all writing of contemporary history: when one is close to events it is hard to evaluate them historically, hard to avoid a near-sighted view. Less than a decade has passed since the Nazi revolution and the Japanese secession from the League of Nations. Since that moment of 1933, which now seems pivotal in the twenty years' armistice, the world has been descending anew into the abyss. But it is not easy to appraise the forces driving on that descent. Events need to mature before historical judgments can be made of them: their pregnancy must come to issue, indeed, before their true nature can be discerned. That is the reason why the present global convulsion, if it is to be grasped with any penetration and sense of proportion, must be seen not only against the background of world events since World War I, but in relation to the main currents of modern political, economic, cultural, religious, and ideological history.

To grasp the crisis as a whole and to set it in the broad perspective of modern history has been the prime purpose of the authors.

15 *December* 1942

## NOTE FOR THE SECOND EDITION

APART from the correction of several minor textual errors, the authors have not revised their original work that was completed in 1943. But to that work they have added a short analytical history of the Second World War, especially in its political aspects. This addition was made to increase the book's utility for basic instruction in the history of international politics.

There have been many revelations of things unknown at the time the book was written. The Pearl Harbor investigation, the Nuremberg trials, the trial of Pierre Laval, and numerous writings of a varied character have added to the factual knowledge of the coming of the war, but have not modified significantly the story that we attempted to tell in 1943. Our effort at that time was to explain as objectively and honestly as we could how the international world moved from the conclusion of World War I to the outbreak of World War II. The passing of several years and the publication of new historical information have not brought obsolescence to that effort. We have even allowed the Introduction and Chapter I, which obviously 'date,' to stand in their original form as documents that illustrate a historian's wartime view of the great conflict.

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13 *November* 1946

## WORLD COMMUNITY AND WORLD CRISIS

MODERN history, viewed in its broadest aspect, presents itself as the history of growing world organization: an immense effort to integrate the human race in a system of orderly relations, and a ceaseless resistance to that effort.

So far has the effort succeeded: that there has been formed a world community (although by no means as yet universal) of states that repose upon an interdependent economy and share, in greater or lesser degree, a common civilization originating in Europe. Foundations of this were laid centuries ago when the nations of western Europe which had been formed in medieval Christendom began to discover other lands, and colonize, or conquer, or enter into political and commercial relations with them. From the fifteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, North and South America, the East and West Indies, coastal Africa, India, and Australia were brought under the political and economic control of white and Christian men coming out of western Europe and the British Isles. At the same time political and economic relations were greatly developed between the states of Christendom and those of the Islamic world which spreads across a vast part of western and southern Asia, northern and eastern Africa. In the expanding process,<sup>en</sup> great national empires came into being: Spanish, French, Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, and British. They reached to all the continents and many of the islands in the three great oceans.<sup>te</sup> And with their formation went a world-wide spread of European languages, religion, science, art, technology, and civil and political institutions. As a result, new independent states came into being, prospered, and grew great: our own Republic and the states of Latin America. And foundations were laid for the system of political liberty and national autonomy in the Dominions of the British Empire. So that the expansion of Europe was not merely the growth of national empires but a multiplication of the free states of western Christendom.

This majestic development of historical life had reached to very advanced limits even before the advent, only a century ago, of modern steam and telegraphic communications. But down to that time it had proceeded along national lines, and collisions were neither so frequent nor so grave as to destroy the belief that the world was large enough for western nations to expand indefinitely without taking much account of one another. The cycle of wars that occurred between the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776 and the fall of the Napoleonic empire in 1814-15 certainly contradicted that belief, but did not extinguish it; and the nineteenth century advanced without very much thinking in terms of world community. The sense of unity in a common civilization had greatly declined, and it could hardly be expected to revive unless some great common peril of universal dimensions arose to bring the nations back to a realization of their joint membership and mutual interdependence. The Orient still slumbered. China and Japan were closed in a near-absolute isolation; and only such events as the Anglo-Chinese war of 1840-42 (whereby the British acquired Hong Kong) or the Indian Mutiny of 1857 gave signs of the great Asiatic reaction against the West that was to culminate in contemporary Japanese imperialism.

During the rest of the nineteenth century the European and Europeanized world enjoyed what seemed a fairly secure existence, and continued to expand. The Russians pressed east over northern Asia to the Pacific, and the Americans filled in a continent; the while Africa was penetrated and partitioned by the British, French, Belgians, Germans, Dutch, Italians, Portuguese, and Spanish. The British advanced the frontiers of their imperial position in Asia and garrisoned the routes to India. Countless Pacific islands were added to the world community under many flags. Australia, New Zealand, and Canada took form as self-governing parliamentary states under the British crown, and the Latin American republics grew in wealth, population, and security. The world seemed boundless and safe for the great community which the European white man had formed.

## THE CENTURY BEFORE 1914

But an immense change had transpired since about 1840. The mechanization of industry, beginning in Great Britain, had spread over the European continent, the United States, the British Dominions, reaching even to Asia. Railways, canals, and steamships had shortened distances, and telegraphic wires had made communication instantaneous. The age of electric power arrived and with it a new swiftening of the pace of technological advance. The new industrialism drew ravenously upon ever larger sources of mineral and vegetable raw materials. The volume of international trade multiplied many times over, and capital leaped across frontiers to produce vast new enterprises in 'backward' regions and effect a most complex economic interpenetration among all the states of the world community.

For a short period, roughly from the '40s to the '60s, when Great Britain abandoned her protective tariffs and sought to lead the whole world toward Free Trade, western civilization seemed to be evolving toward one great society with its heart and nerve center in British industry and finance. London was the principal money market of the world; British business was the chief creator and exporter of both capital and manufactured consumption goods; the British Empire was the only world power in the sense of reaching territorially to all the great continents. The British navy protected the great trade routes of the world, and was the main police agency of western civilization for the suppression of piracy and the sea-going slave trade.

All promise of so great a measure of unified organization in the economic structure of the great society disappeared, to be sure, in the later years of the century, as a result of political nationalism and the emergence of great semi-autonomous economic organisms such as protectionist America and the German Empire, with its aspiration to form the European continent in a system rivalling the free-trade business empire of Great Britain. Similar impulses were displayed by all the leading states of the world from about 1870 down to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Even the British Dominions were turning protectionist and the Empire itself seemed



headed toward some kind of Pan-Britannic customs union designed to increase the material strength and cohesion of the far-flung imperial order.

But this economic nationalism, or imperialism, did not break the world community into isolated and self-contained parts. Stable gold-based currencies were generally maintained, and no insurmountable barriers were raised against the international exchange of commodities. The community remained an integral reality within which there took place a promising growth of international institutions. There was a wide extension of the subject matter of treaties, and a good part of the world's life and activity was brought within the sphere of international legislation. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, there came a steadily increasing mass of conventions between states for the regulation of tariff and commercial relations, for postal exchange, for the protection of patents, trade marks, and copyrights, for the operation of railways, shipping, telegraph wires, and cables, for international coinage, for regulation and policing of international rivers and waterways, and for the protection of neutral trade in time of war. In addition to this complex network of new international law, there arose a number of permanent or temporary international boards, commissions, and administrative agencies to execute these functions.

The most powerful currents of modern life seemed to flow irresistibly toward world organization. Banks and business corporations, exporters and importers, shipping and railway companies multiplied and ramified their interests and activities, forging new material links in the international community. Public and private loans ceaselessly crossed political frontiers and the ownership of stock shares in great enterprises became more and more distributed internationally. The passport system declined; the freedom and ease of travel increased, and with it the rapid sweep of ideas and intellectual influences over political and linguistic boundaries. Hundreds of international associations of a literary, political, economic, charitable, philanthropic, learned, and scientific character sprang into existence. And international congresses became a common feature of world civilization.

In this global community, moving toward an ever higher degree of cultural, legal, and economic integration, the apostolate of the