

Looking Forward in a Failing World: Adolf A. Berle, Jr., the United States, and Global Order in the Interwar Years

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INTRODUCTION

Lawyers and legal scholars rightly remember Adolf A. Berle for his bold and startling ideas about the modern corporation and the transformed social relationships that came with a world of large organizations and finance capitalism. Berle's diverse career moved well beyond legal scholarship, however, to encompass U.S. policymaking in both the domestic sphere and in international affairs during the interwar years and beyond. Although his approach to foreign policy may have lacked the stunning originality of *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* and its path-breaking reinterpretation of the nature of corporate power and high finance, Berle's conception of international order matters for the insights it provides about U.S. engagement with a deteriorating global political environment during the chaotic interwar years. Contrary to present-day popular images of the time period as an era of foreign policy neglect, Berle and his internationalist peers thought seriously and extensively about world affairs, and they vigorously pursued innovations in law, economic relationships, and global culture in order to try to create a more stable and cooperative international system.

General histories of the United States in the 1920s frequently gloss over foreign policy altogether, while studies of the 1930s too often treat the Great Depression in predominantly American terms, as a matter of domestic economic policy and social crisis.¹ Consequently, it has been all

* Department of History, University of British Columbia. I wish to thank the undergraduate students in my Fall 2017 seminar, "Falling Apart: American Power in a Failing Global Order, 1919–1939," for the energy and analytical fervor that they brought to the study of the interwar period in the United States. I am also grateful to Chuck O'Kelley for inviting me to participate in this volume, and to all of the participants at the May 2018 "Berle X" symposium for their insights about Berle's life and times.

1. Frederick Lewis Allen's 1931 classic, *Only Yesterday*, did much to establish the "roaring twenties" image of the 1920s as an era in which the United States turned inward and concentrated on the frivolity of fads, fashion, and mass consumerism in an age of economic expansionism following the disappointments of Versailles and the domestic political upheaval of the post-World War I Red Scare. FREDERICK ALLEN, *ONLY YESTERDAY: AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES*

too easy for Americans to imagine the interwar years as largely removed from global currents, except for the wrenching political debates over neutrality (too often misrepresented as an unthinking “isolationism”) from 1935 onward that finally ended with the rude awakening of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.² In reality, however, world events formed a constant preoccupation for politically attentive Americans in the interwar period. Like other liberal internationalists, Berle faced an unraveling world with a keen awareness of the upheaval that dogged European relations from the end of World War I onwards, a bitter recognition of the heavy toll of modern warfare, and an ardent desire to create new mechanisms to promote peace and stability in a world that seemed capable of achieving neither.

With these considerations in mind, this essay explores Berle’s understanding of American power and its relationship to global order in the era between the First and Second World Wars. I first survey the history of progressive internationalism in the 1920s in order to situate Berle’s approach to U.S. foreign relations and global affairs, before proceeding to a close examination of Berle’s immediate response to the aftermath of World War I, and then his foreign policy activities as part of the Roosevelt administration in the late 1930s and early 1940s. My analysis focuses in

(Harper & Row 1957) (1931). More recent studies have underscored the cultural complexity of the 1920s but continue to neglect foreign policy and international affairs. *See, e.g.*, LYNN DUMENIL, *THE MODERN TEMPER: AMERICAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE 1920S* (1995); PAUL V. MURPHY, *THE NEW ERA: AMERICAN THOUGHT AND CULTURE IN THE 1920S* (2012). In an important exception, William E. Leuchtenburg’s 1958 study of the United States in the period from World War I to the early 1930s devoted attention to U.S. foreign relations, but from a now-outdated interpretive perspective that characterized the United States as a “reluctant giant” that turned inward and pursued “a withdrawal from European affairs” after the rejection of League membership. *See* WILLIAM E. LEUCHTENBURG, *THE PERILS OF PROSPERITY 1914–32*, at 112 (1958). For typical examples of general histories of the United States and the Great Depression that largely sidestep foreign policy concerns, *see* ROBERT S. MCELVAINE, *THE GREAT DEPRESSION: AMERICA, 1929–1941* (1984); RONALD E. EDSFORTH, *THE NEW DEAL: AMERICA’S RESPONSE TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION* (2000); ERIC RAUCHWAY, *THE GREAT DEPRESSION & THE NEW DEAL: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION* (2008); MORRIS DICKSTEIN, *DANCING IN THE DARK: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION* (2009). These works contain scattered references to global events, particularly the London Economic Conference of 1933 and multiple countries’ abandonment of the gold standard in the early 1930s, but on the whole, one would hardly know from such studies that world order was completely unraveling in the 1930s, and that alert American observers fully understood the calamitous state of international relations during the era between the wars. Although historical writings on U.S. foreign relations have analyzed the interwar period at length, standard surveys of the 1920s and 1930s have largely failed to incorporate the key insights of this literature.

2. In a thoughtful and persuasive essay, Brooke L. Blower has underscored the conceptual cohesiveness of neutrality within the political context of the 1930s and demonstrated the loaded connotations that render “isolationism” meaningless as an analytically useful concept. Brooke L. Blower, *From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941*, 38 *DIPLOMATIC HIST.* 345 (2014).

particular on his public efforts to promote a transformative vision of global affairs based on two principles: (1) a belief in the exceptionalism of the Americas as a solution to the constant turmoil of power politics on the European continent; and (2) a faith in a liberal international economic order as the answer to the growing geopolitical strife of the post-World War I decades.

In both areas, Berle combined quintessential features of long-established, historically grounded tenets of U.S. foreign relations with key elements of American liberal internationalism and his own expertise in law, economics, and finance. His enthusiasm for the “cooperative peace” of the Americas embodied traditional attitudes about the contrast between corrupt Old World practices and the redemptive possibilities of the New World, melded with twentieth-century internationalists’ pursuit of alternatives to power politics and Berle’s own experiences in Latin America. On the economic front, Berle’s confidence in the virtues of free trade and an open world typified American foreign policy orthodoxy, but also incorporated his own inimitable thoughts on modern realities in an age of large-scale finance. His thinking also rested on a well-established progressive intellectual tradition that associated modernity with fundamental shifts in the very structure of international relations. According to this line of analysis, the novel possibilities—and dangers—of an interdependent world order mandated the ascendance of peaceful relationships and the pursuit of the common good on a global scale as necessary alternatives to the ruinously destructive forms of competition created by great power politics.

More than mere historical interest motivates this account of Berle’s involvement with U.S. foreign relations during the fraught interwar years. Americans conditioned by the bipolar geopolitics of the Cold War have not had an easy time reckoning with the uncertainties of international relations at a time when U.S. expectations of preponderance of power no longer hold. Berle’s vision of American globalism ultimately could not escape an essential tension, namely, the inability of liberal internationalism to reconcile U.S.-centric versions of order and stability with an implied commitment to global pluralism. This central shortcoming, however, should not prevent readers today from recognizing the vibrancy, energy, and creativity that Berle and his contemporaries brought to bear on international affairs in the interwar period. For twenty-first century readers daunted by present-day international conditions, the political challenges of the post-World War I epoch provide a basis for contemplating what it means for a nation to navigate an unstable, multipolar world and its shifting centers of power.

I. POST-WORLD WAR I INTERNATIONALISM AND AMERICAN GLOBAL
ENGAGEMENT IN THE 1920S

Berle's understanding of international affairs evolved out of the complex world of American internationalism in the interwar years. After World War II, defenders of the idea that global stability demanded American leadership created a highly skewed and misleading historical narrative that alleged an American withdrawal from international affairs between the wars. According to this line of interpretation, the Senate's post-World War I rejection of U.S. membership in the League of Nations constituted a key turning point, in which rather than endorsing Wilsonian internationalism, the United States turned away from global engagement.³ This ruinous decision to step away from responsibility and decline the mantle of leadership directly paved the way for World War II, and it symbolized the high price of American neglect of international relations during the 1920s and 1930s.⁴

This myth of interwar isolationism, which was invented to defend the U.S.-sponsored reconstruction of global order after World War II, masked the diverse forms of engagement and strenuous efforts to find a path to peace and stability that defined U.S. foreign relations in the 1920s. Deep-seated bitterness certainly lingered in progressive circles over the post-World War I settlement and a sense of promise betrayed at Versailles. Strong disagreements also persisted over how the United States should best deal with the unstable borders and threats of incipient warfare that continued to foment tensions across Europe, the dangerous volatility of imperial competition in East Asia, and the constant state of debt crisis that dogged trans-Atlantic relations. This harsh international environment, however, led not to withdrawal but to novel attempts to find some way out of the morass of a disordered postwar world. Consequently, presidents, secretaries of state, individual congressmen, diplomats, peace activists,

3. On the political roots of the myth of isolationism and its persistence to the present day, see *id.* at 345–48.

4. In the late 1980s, Warren I. Cohen published an important corrective that he feared “may offend the sensibilities of a generation educated in the 1940s and 1950s,” but that adeptly captured the vigor of U.S. foreign policy and American immersion in international affairs during the 1920s and early 1930s. Notably, he explicitly excluded the word “isolationism” from his analysis. WARREN I. COHEN, *EMPIRE WITHOUT TEARS: AMERICA’S FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1921–1933*, at V (1987). In explaining his motivations for writing the book, Cohen observed that the standard survey texts had yet to reflect the scholarly literature in recognizing the extent and complexity of U.S. foreign relations in the interwar years. Now, a generation later, synthetic accounts of U.S. foreign relations have generally caught up with scholarship, but at the level of popular understanding, the idea of interwar isolationism and American insulation from world events continues to hold sway. Indeed, the Office of the Historian in the U.S. Department of State continues to endorse a modified version of the isolationist thesis. See *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, 1921–1936: Interwar Diplomacy*, OFF. HISTORIAN, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/foreword> [<https://perma.cc/NR8P-8QYC>].

business leaders, lawyers, academics, and Americans from other walks of life participated actively in a 1920s era rich with multilateral diplomacy, peace politics, and economic and cultural relations.

The three agreements that emerged from the Washington Conference of 1921–1922—the Four-Power, Five-Power, and Nine-Power treaties—constituted the signature diplomatic achievement of U.S. foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the post-World War I settlement, and they reflected both geopolitical considerations and the long-held aspirations of the organized peace movement. The Four-Power and Nine-Power treaties sought to guarantee order by stabilizing imperial relations in East Asia through an agreement by the United States, Japan, Great Britain, and France to respect each other’s colonial holdings and to consult in moments of crisis, and a pledge signed by these four nations, plus China and four additional European countries, to uphold China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Taken together, these provisions amounted to standard diplomatic professions of good faith in the service of mutual self-interest.⁵

By contrast, the Five-Power Treaty, which promoted naval disarmament by placing limits on the fleets of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, captured the imagination of American “peace progressives” who had steadfastly rejected the Versailles Treaty as a corrupt expression of power politics.⁶ Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, in his opening address at the Washington Conference in November 1921, gave a nod to the peace movement’s perspective when he made the case for disarmament by decrying the wastefulness of military budgets and the “crushing burden created by competition in armament,” as well as the tendency of arms races to shatter the very peace that they attempted to enforce.⁷ For a peace movement that had long associated arms production with militarism, insecurity, and international conflict, a treaty that in some instances actually mandated the destruction of war materiel in order to bring American and British naval power in compliance signaled the potential for internationalist alternatives to surmount states’ ruinous acquisition of armaments in the name of self-defense.

The failure and collapse of all three agreements in the face of Japanese expansionism and German rearmament in the 1930s led post-World War II observers to dismiss their significance, but at the time of their creation, the Four-, Five-, and Nine-Power treaties constituted a

5. A convenient summary of the Washington treaty system of 1921–1922 appears in COHEN, *supra* note 4, at 50–55.

6. On peace progressives’ pursuit of disarmament, see *id.* at 47–48; 3 AKIRA IRIYE, *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS, THE GLOBALIZING OF AMERICA, 1913–1945*, at 75 (1993).

7. Address of Charles E. Hughes, Secretary of State of the United States and American Commissioner to the Conference on Limitation of Armament 4 (Nov. 12, 1921).

major point of departure in states' desperate efforts to contain the sources of conflict that had produced the First World War.⁸ In the 1920s, proponents of international cooperation and liberal order fully expected to build on the diplomatic foundation laid at the Washington Conference. Disarmament talks, for example, continued apace, with the United States as an active participant.

In one noteworthy moment, Columbia University historian and international relations expert James T. Shotwell, who energetically promoted international organizations and strengthened international institutions throughout the interwar years, helped to formulate a new Draft Treaty of Disarmament and Security in 1924 that contributed to discussions within the League of Nations.⁹ A new international conference at Geneva in 1927 failed to advance further naval reductions, but in 1930, President Herbert Hoover backed a return to negotiations, and modest agreements resulted at the London Naval Conference.¹⁰ In addition, the World Disarmament Conference continued to convene periodically, if hopelessly, in Geneva between 1932 and 1937, even as Japanese incursions in Manchuria escalated to all-out warfare in China, and Europe continued to unravel amid the stresses of global economic depression, resurgent nationalism, and the rise of fascism.¹¹ Such developments indicated the reality of an American commitment to strengthening the stability of the post-World War I international system even absent U.S. membership in the League of Nations.

American participation in traditional multilateral diplomacy and attempts to create a new international order liberated from power politics continued in other areas as well throughout the 1920s. Struggles to find political means of dealing with reparations, war debts, and their continued drag on European economies formed a constant preoccupation of American policymakers, leading bankers, and opinion leaders. In 1924 and 1929, private financiers worked with the U.S. government to broker the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan, both designed to try to address the

8. As George C. Herring has noted, post-1945 condemnation of the agreements forged at the Washington Naval Conference "reflect ex post facto and ahistorical reasoning." GEORGE C. HERRING, *FROM COLONY TO SUPERPOWER: U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS SINCE 1776*, at 454–56, 479–80, 490 (2008). In addition, Akira Iriye pointed out in the early 1990s that until the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1987, "the 1920s was the only decade in recent history when arms reductions actually took place." IRIYE, *supra* note 6, at 78.

9. JAMES T. SHOTWELL, *ON THE RIM OF THE ABYSS* 14–21 (Garland Publ'g, Inc. 1972) (1936).

10. HERRING, *supra* note 8, at 479–80.

11. ZARA STEINER, *THE LIGHTS THAT FAILED: EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL HISTORY 1919–1933*, at 755–97, 812–15 (2005); Andrew Webster, *The Transnational Dream: Politicians, Diplomats and Soldiers in the League of Nations' Pursuit of International Disarmament, 1920–1938*, 14 *CONTEMP. EUR. HIST.* 493 (2005).

recurrent political crises associated with European debt after World War I.¹²

The Dawes Plan patched over the Ruhr crisis, which broke out early in 1923 when France, along with Belgium, responded to Germany's failure to keep up with reparations payments by sending in occupation forces. The restructuring of German debt under the Dawes Plan restored the flow of reparations, which forestalled the possibility of renewed warfare between France and Germany for the moment, and Charles G. Dawes even won a share of the 1925 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in negotiating the agreement. American observers, however, remained alert to the economic and political instabilities that continued to threaten postwar Europe.¹³ The *New Republic*, founded in 1914 as a leading journal of progressive thought and commentary, described the measure as a "tolerable compromise" but also labeled it a stop-gap measure against an otherwise "irresistible descent towards economic and political chaos in Europe." At the heart of the problem lay the counterproductive machinery of punitive reparations imposed by the Versailles Treaty. The post-World War I settlement led to an "inevitable German default" that France had used as a pretext "to seize the heart of industrial Germany."¹⁴ In doing so, however, the French had undermined their own economic and political position: "They soon found that, while they were gradually ruining Germany, they were also exposing themselves and the whole of Europe to disaster."¹⁵

To the extent that European economic conditions normalized in the mid-1920s, they did so only with the massive infusion of American capital. Far from being uninvolved, the United States constituted, as Akira Iriye has put it, "the main sustainer of the international economic system during the 1920s, in particular after 1924."¹⁶ Ultimately, the United States found no way to restore Europe's long-term economic viability within the political constraints of American creditors' insistence that Britain and France pay off their war debts, which in turn led both countries' governments to dig in their heels on German reparations. For a brief period, however, U.S. leaders thought they had found the cure for Europe's bleak economic and political state, as German reconstruction finally seemed to take root with the new infusion of American money. Warren I. Cohen has summarized succinctly the sense of cautious optimism that took

12. COHEN, *supra* note 4, at 18–22, 32–34.

13. *Id.*; IRIYE, *supra* note 6, at 90.

14. *What They Have Accomplished in London*, 39 NEW REPUBLIC 342, 343 (1924).

15. *Id.*

16. IRIYE, *supra* note 6, at 90–91; WALTER LAFEVER, *THE AMERICAN AGE: UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AT HOME AND ABROAD 1750 TO THE PRESENT* 327–38 (1989).

hold: “the peaceful reintegration of Germany into the world community and the world economy seemed to have been accomplished by 1928.”¹⁷

With U.S. economic power also came the spread of America’s cultural presence abroad, with the dramatic expansion in numbers of American tourists in Europe, the spread of U.S. corporate power and American business practices, and the growing visibility of American consumer goods, including a veritable craze for Hollywood movies and their associated glamor.¹⁸ When signs of economic weakness loomed in Germany in 1929, the Hoover administration’s negotiators attempted to prop up European recovery further, by yet again adjusting war reparations payments. The resulting Young Plan sought to reduce German reparations to manageable levels while still maintaining a high enough flow of cash for Britain and France to cover their debt obligations to the United States.¹⁹ On the whole, the wide range of economic interconnections between the United States and Europe underscored the depth of American attention to and engagement with European affairs throughout the 1920s.

All of these efforts came to naught when the global economy sank into depression in the early 1930s, and European governments responded by turning to autarkic strategies. The collaborative possibilities represented by the Dawes and Young Plans that had seemingly held such promise to generate prosperity now lost legitimacy as the depression appeared to demonstrate the price of economic interdependence in its capacity to drag national economies down and spread chaos. The abandonment of the gold standard by one country after another, in a downward spiral of competitive devaluations and beggar-thy-neighbor policies, symbolized the era’s repudiation of economic internationalism and European nations’ grasping at the straws of nationalism.²⁰

Nor did the United States find effective means of dealing with the prolonged crisis in an era when conventional economic and political thought insisted upon the payment of obligations above all else. As futile

17. COHEN, *supra* note 4, at 34.

18. FRANK COSTIGLIOLA, *AWKWARD DOMINION: AMERICAN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH EUROPE, 1919–1933* (1984); EMILY S. ROSENBERG, *SPREADING THE AMERICAN DREAM: AMERICAN ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL EXPANSION, 1890–1945*, at 87–137 (1982); RICHARD PELLIS, *NOT LIKE US: HOW EUROPEANS HAVE LOVED, HATED, AND TRANSFORMED AMERICAN CULTURE SINCE WORLD WAR II*, at 2 (1997). In addition to the obvious history of U.S. relations with Latin America, particularly in the Caribbean, Anne L. Foster has documented the prominence of American economic and cultural relations with Southeast Asia during the interwar years, a time when scholars had previously assumed little in the way of American involvement beyond the Philippines. See ANNE L. FOSTER, *PROJECTIONS OF POWER: THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE IN COLONIAL SOUTHEAST ASIA, 1919–1941* (2010).

19. HERRING, *supra* note 8, at 481; LAFEBER, *supra* note 16, at 330–31.

20. Zara Steiner has ably chronicled the collapse of the global economy in the early 1930s and abandonment of liberal order that accompanied it. See STEINER, *supra* note 11, at 635–99.

conferences on the international debt problem continued to convene in the early 1930s, the progressive journalist and writer Walter Lippmann took U.S. political leaders and policymakers to task for their inability to prioritize the world's overall economic health ahead of the collection of reparations and debt. The drag on the German economy imposed by reparations payments scheduled to last for more than the next half-century was, Lippmann argued, simply unsustainable. But with a stagnant American political imagination unable to entertain collective, organized arrangements for defaults or debt forgiveness, "rigid and . . . nationalistically selfish" responses on the part of both European nations and the United States followed as inevitable consequences.²¹

Meanwhile, the different elements that made up the organized peace movement in the United States also remained active and vigorous in their search for international stability throughout the 1920s, through their support for disarmament, the strengthening of international law and international organizations, the fight against militarism, and the development of alternatives to warfare as means for settling international disputes.²² Diverse individuals such as Shotwell, legal scholar Quincy Wright, and radical pacifist Dorothy Detzer pursued a range of strategies. While Shotwell sought to shore up international organization, Wright worked on building the theoretical and institutional underpinnings for international law, and Detzer, as a leader in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), devoted her life to the peaceful resolution of conflicts through democratic deliberation and global citizenship, social reform, humanitarian aid, and an end to imperialism.²³ Detzer was also an effective networker and lobbyist who developed direct ties to key Congressmen, State Department officials, and the White House, and she had powerful allies she could call upon as the WILPF pursued legislation or responded to crises.²⁴ Chicago lawyer Salmon O. Levinson joined the cause as well, and his ideas about outlawry of war helped to pave the way for the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928, in which

21. WALTER LIPPMANN, *INTERPRETATIONS 1931–1932*, at 167 (Allen Nevins ed., 1932).

22. On the general history of the peace movement and its politics in the early decades of the twentieth century, see THOMAS J. KNOCK, *TO END ALL WARS: WOODROW WILSON AND THE QUEST FOR NEW WORLD ORDER* (1992); DAVID PATTERSON, *TOWARD A WARLESS WORLD: THE TRAVAIL OF THE AMERICAN PEACE MOVEMENT, 1887–1914* (1976); JOHN CHALMERS VINSON, WILLIAM E. BORAH AND THE OUTLAWRY OF WAR (1957). On the strength and significance of peace activism in the 1920s, see IRIYE, *supra* note 6, at 103–07. Additional works specific to the agenda of peace activism in the decade after the end of World War I are cited directly below.

23. See DOROTHY DETZER, *APPOINTMENT ON THE HILL* (1948); Daniel Gorman, *International Law and the International Thought of Quincy Wright, 1918–1945*, 41 *DIPL. HIST.* 336–61 (2017); JAMES T. SHOTWELL, *ON THE RIM OF THE ABYSS* (1937).

24. For ample evidence of her political connections and savvy, see DETZER, *supra* note 23.

the nearly four dozen states that had signed on as of mid-1929 formally agreed to “the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy.”²⁵

This world of peace activism and hopes for sweeping reforms in the nature and conduct of international relations certainly did not lack for critics. Skeptics, both at the time and ever since, have frequently dismissed such efforts as impractical and insufficiently cognizant of the realities of power.²⁶ Indeed, as global instability spread in the early 1930s, Reinhold Niebuhr delivered one of the most powerful, intellectually incisive, and influential of such critiques, with his searing analysis in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* of why the morality of individuals in the realm of face-to-face relationships and empathic human feeling could not be scaled up to the behavior of states.²⁷ As the 1930s proceeded, international order collapsed and global warfare resumed. The Kellogg-Briand Pact also became the foremost symbol of the futility of grand diplomatic gestures and a spirit of international comity as a foundation for lasting peace and stability.²⁸

Advocates of peace and internationalism, however, did not see the world that way, and their arguments for novel and innovative alternatives to raw power as the basis for international conduct reflected a common set of beliefs among American internationalists in the first half of the twentieth century, including Berle, about the nature of modernity and its implications for humans’ potential to transcend their own worst instincts.²⁹ Their sense of possibility came less from utopian idealism than from a

25. SALMON O. LEVINSON, OUTLAWRY OF WAR (1921). The quotation comes from the text of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. See General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy, Aug. 27, 1928, 46 Stat. 2343, 94 L.N.T.S. 57.

26. See, e.g., GEORGE F. KENNAN, AMERICAN DIPLOMACY, 1900–1950, at 95 (1951). George F. Kennan’s classic critique of internationalism and international organization is an example of geopolitical realists’ skepticism towards alternatives to power politics; or, for a twenty-first century perspective, see Michael J. Glennon, *Why the Security Council Failed*, FOREIGN AFF., May/June 2003, at 16. I have discussed the United States’ Cold War era antipathy towards internationalism and international organization at greater length in Jessica Wang, *The United States, the United Nations, and the Other Post-Cold War World Order: Internationalism and Unilateralism in the American Century*, in COLD WAR TRIUMPHALISM: THE MISUSE OF HISTORY AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM 201, 211–18 (Ellen Schrecker ed., 2004).

27. REINHOLD NIEBUHR, MORAL MAN AND IMMORAL SOCIETY: A STUDY IN ETHICS AND POLITICS (1932).

28. For example, Frank Ninkovich has commented on historian Robert H. Ferrell’s “scathing dismissal” of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in an analysis from the 1960s. FRANK NINKOVICH, THE WILSONIAN CENTURY: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY SINCE 1900, at 97 (1999). Such assessments persist to the present day, as in Stephen M. Walt’s recent characterization of the Kellogg-Briand Pact as “misplaced idealism.” Stephen M. Walt, *There’s Still No Reason to Think the Kellogg-Briand Pact Accomplished Anything*, FOREIGN POL’Y (Sept. 29, 2017), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/29/theres-still-no-reason-to-think-the-kellogg-briand-pact-accomplished-anything/> [https://perma.cc/3YRF-QE4D].

29. NINKOVICH, *supra* note 28, at 48.

determined sense that people and nations desperately needed fundamentally new approaches to international affairs in order to stave off the terrifying possibilities of modern warfare in an increasingly integrated and interdependent world. Historian Frank Ninkovich has eloquently described Woodrow Wilson's understanding of foreign policy in these terms, especially in response to World War I and the ease with which "in modern circumstances, small conflicts, insignificant in themselves, could spiral quickly out of control until the entire world was engulfed."³⁰ According to Ninkovich, from Wilson's standpoint, such a world absolutely required a new internationalism that could "replace an uncontrolled balance of power" with "an organized and rationally directed community of power," or societies might plunge headlong into radical revolution as "the price paid by modern societies for imposing the intolerable burdens of modern war upon their civilian populations."³¹

Versions of this brand of Wilsonian thought permeated peace progressives' circles and signified the vigor with which interested Americans participated in international affairs during the interwar years. Shotwell's case for liberal internationalism at the end of the 1920s, for example, highlighted the changed conditions of modern existence and the accompanying social transformations that necessitated the further reorganization of human affairs. Although the historical record suggested the impossibility of permanent peace, an age of revolutionary scientific discoveries had created a modern era of interconnection on a global scale. Economic relations that transcended national boundaries raised the possibility of large-scale political rearrangements, not out of benevolence but out of states' own sense of self-interest.³²

Given that history had moved from a scientific revolution to an industrial revolution, a political revolution towards a more collaborative international order seemed but the next logical step. Lest this notion seem too fanciful, Shotwell rooted it in a recognition of the harsh facts of political life. "We are not eliminating power from the affairs of nations when we renounce war," he contended.³³ Instead, "We are only bringing into play more pertinent powers than those of the old barbaric and destructive sort, powers that are inherent in the constructive rather than the destructive energy of civilization."³⁴ According to Shotwell's analysis, internationalists did not imagine any panaceas that could transcend

30. *Id.* at 65.

31. *Id.* at 67, 70.

32. JAMES T. SHOTWELL, *WAR AS AN INSTRUMENT OF NATIONAL POLICY AND ITS RENUNCIATION IN THE PACT OF PARIS* 23 (1929).

33. *Id.* at 28.

34. *Id.*

politics. Rather, they sought means of redirecting power to new ends, in a modern era of jarring changes that made fundamental rearrangements of human affairs seem possible and necessary, even if difficult, challenging, and not guaranteed to produce immediate results.

In her 1948 memoir, Dorothy Detzer described the expectation of slow, incremental change that came with useful activism. She cautioned against the attractions of satisfying, but pointless, symbolic gestures, such as the forlorn protest of a lone picketer whom she spotted in front of the White House one day. “War and its instruments,” she warned, “could not be exorcised by negative slogans. Peace was an affirmative value—to be won step by difficult step,” and only the “spiritually adolescent” anticipated “immediate success.”³⁵

Detzer went on to explain her understanding of peace as a process and not a permanently achievable state of being. With conflict an inevitable and ineradicable part of human life, the world needed non-violent alternatives for settling international disputes. In accordance with widespread progressive assumptions in the early twentieth century about the possibility of using reason to exert control over human affairs, Detzer looked for adjustment and improvement “through the abundant resources of ‘good will and pooled intelligence.’”³⁶ Already by the 1920s, she sensed acutely the dangers of fascism and the ways in which a harsh postwar order was feeding the rise of threatening populisms. In response, she and other activists worked throughout the interwar period for the maintenance of peace without “wistful illusions,” but in a spirit of hope for eventual progress.³⁷

This practical rationale for a new internationalist global order—that it connoted both modern possibility and a necessary attempt to address modern danger, and that it represented a pragmatic incrementalism without utopian aspiration—established, in the interwar period, a foundation for developments in U.S. foreign relations well into the 1940s. At the tail end of World War II, as American political leaders mobilized support for the formation of the United Nations, they, too, depicted the case for international organization, not as an expression of idealism but as the outgrowth of a desperate need to find alternatives to the horrific violence of total war, which had already reached appalling proportions even before the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg conceded in making the case for the Senate to endorse U.S. membership in the U.N., the new organization constituted an experiment that might well fail. But, Vandenberg declared, “I prefer the

35. DETZER, *supra* note 23, at 2, 5.

36. *Id.* at 72.

37. *Id.* at 86.

chance rather than no chance at all,” because if global order collapsed yet again, the next world war would “open new laboratories of death too horrible to contemplate.”³⁸ Harold E. Stassen, a member of the American delegation at the San Francisco conference charged with creating the U.N., emphasized the organization’s evolutionary gradualism, in which the U.N. was expected to adapt over time to ever-shifting circumstances. The U.N. Charter, he told an audience in Washington, D.C. in mid-1945, “is drafted, not for a world standing still but for a world that is dynamic and living.”³⁹ Senator J. William Fulbright, in line with peace progressives’ well-established concept of peace itself as a process, stressed in the Senate debate over ratification that “[p]eace is not a negative, static concept. It is not a tranquil state of felicity and blessedness. It is a positive method of adjusting the endless conflicts inherent in the nature of restless and energetic men.”⁴⁰ Despite—or rather because of—the collapse of global order in the 1930s, internationalist ideology and international organization in the form of the U.N. emerged reinvigorated as key means for trying to prevent even more devastating wars in the future, not from a stance of blind confidence but from a fear of the cost of failure.⁴¹

This was the world in which Adolf A. Berle came of age as he moved from early encounters with high-stakes diplomacy as a young adult to his rise as a middle-aged statesman and a mover and shaker within the Roosevelt Administration in the 1930s. The implications of modern interdependence, the dangers of power politics, and the possibilities of international cooperation marked his publicly stated efforts to grapple with the post-World War I settlement, U.S. relations with Latin America, and the deteriorating international sphere of the interwar years.

II. THE AFTERMATH OF PARIS: BERLE, PROGRESSIVE SKEPTICISM, AND THE SEARCH FOR A NEW INTERNATIONALISM

Berle grew up as a precocious child in an intellectually ambitious Boston family. He entered Harvard at the age of fourteen, earned a Harvard law degree in 1916 at the age of twenty-one, and briefly worked at Louis D. Brandeis’s law firm just as Brandeis departed for his appointment to the Supreme Court. After the U.S. entry into World War I, Berle enlisted in the Army, which led to his initial assignments abroad. He first ended up in the Dominican Republic in early 1918, where his legal expertise came in handy for helping corporate sugar producers clarify the legal status of landholdings during the American occupation that lasted

38. 91 CONG. REC. 6982 (1945) (statement by Sen. Arthur H. Vandenberg).

39. 91 CONG. REC. 7276 (1945) (address by Harold E. Stassen).

40. 91 CONG. REC. 7962 (1945) (statement by Sen. J. William Fulbright).

41. Wang, *supra* note 26, at 208–10.

from 1916 to 1924. Then, by happenstance, he was assigned to military intelligence as a Russian expert based on nothing more than a reputation for being a quick study. He was not sent to Siberia, however, but to Paris, as the Army tried to establish its place within the U.S. delegation at the peace talks that dominated the first half of 1919. There he rubbed shoulders with William Bullitt and the other “young liberals” who believed that the United States needed to reach an accommodation with Soviet Russia, no matter the lack of ideological appeal of Bolshevism, and he watched as the kind of Wilsonian peace he desired fell victim to the horse-trading of European powers.⁴²

The lessons Berle drew from these experiences and his subsequent observation of U.S. foreign policy in the early postwar years reflected both a sense of bitterness about Versailles and a progressive search for a way out of the chaos that had produced the Great War in the first place. In August 1919, a little more than a month after his discharge from the Army, Berle wrote a commentary in *The Nation* titled “The Betrayal at Paris.” His essay decried the reduction of Wilson’s Fourteen Points to “stock jests in the Paris music halls,” condemned the Versailles treaty for avoiding any serious reckoning with the colonial question and for selling out claims in the Baltics for national self-determination, and maligned the perversion of disarmament into a punitive weakening of Germany “while the remainder of Europe and Asia armed against each other and their internal difficulties.”⁴³ In addition, the negotiations in Paris had corrupted the League of Nations beyond recognition. “Colonel House,” Berle ruefully declared, “dickered and trafficked for it like any European diplomatic spoilsman” and “[e]very Power collected her price—recognition of secret treaty-rights, concessions, compromises.”⁴⁴ Like many postwar progressives, Berle denounced the League of Nations, not out of opposition to international institutions but because he thought the new organization had become so distorted as to be nothing more than a balance-of-power arrangement. Rather than being the exemplar of a new diplomacy, the League had turned into an “abortion of compromise and

42. JORDAN A. SCHWARZ, *LIBERAL: ADOLF A. BERLE AND THE VISION OF AN AMERICAN ERA* 1–36 (1987). The young Lieutenant Berle warned his superiors in a December 1918 memorandum on American aid to Russia, “Owing to the attitude of Japan, Great Britain and France there has been constant danger of our becoming involved in an apparently imperialist policy.” Memorandum from Lieutenant Adolf A. Berle, Jr. (Dec. 10, 1918), in 2 *FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES: THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE, 1919*, at 471, 473 (1942).

43. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *The Betrayal at Paris*, *NATION*, Aug. 9, 1919, at 170.

44. *Id.*

hate.”⁴⁵ Even worse, Woodrow Wilson had assented to all of these arrangements, and “the master was himself the traitor.”⁴⁶

In subsequent essays, Berle elaborated upon this critique of the postwar settlement. Writing in the *New Republic* in mid-1920, he detected signs of future conflict in the U.S. intervention in Vladivostok and Archangelsk and in the American failure to contain Japanese ambitions in Manchuria towards the end of the war. “We have nothing to show for our adventure,” Berle observed, “save an unnecessary hate for us in the Russian people, and an unnecessary menace in the Pacific.”⁴⁷ Two years after the armistice, he reflected in the *Survey* on a League of Nations that he saw as riven between the potential for progressive economic cooperation—“a sort of international communism, to use a dangerous term, recognizing social rights in national property above individual rights”—and the pursuit of great power imperialism through “an eternal grand alliance.”⁴⁸

The provocative reference to economic internationalism as a kind of “international communism” provided an early indication of the analysis of a revolutionary economic order and its implications that Berle would develop with such insight and originality in *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* a decade later. For the most part, however, Berle’s thinking embodied terms familiar to peace progressives, namely, an emphasis on international cooperation and humanitarian possibility combined with a distaste for and suspicion of imperial power. As Berle noted, states could too easily subvert his prized economic liberal alternative. “It must be confessed,” he observed, “that in the very awakening of a liberal economic thought lies the greatest danger.”⁴⁹ Humanitarian relief efforts and economic aid at their best helped people to survive and promised economic recovery and development. Berle warned, however, that “if the politicians, the schemers and the diplomatists master the idea and capture the machinery, then relief administrations become bribes; control of raw materials become tools of oppression or potential threat; cooperation in transportation becomes a veiled form of blockade.”⁵⁰ The League still held out the possibility for “the use of international cooperation for the common welfare of the common peoples of a world in want.”⁵¹ Liberal internationalist means, however, could all too easily be diverted towards great power, imperialist ends.

45. *Id.* at 171.

46. *Id.*

47. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Our Undeclared War*, 23 *NEW REPUBLIC* 92, 94 (1920).

48. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *The League at Cross-Roads*, 45 *SURVEY* 327, 327 (1920).

49. *Id.*

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

Like so many internationalists who detested the Versailles treaty, Berle did not see a world in peace in the early 1920s but instead perceived readiness for renewed fighting in multiple hotspots around the world. Their perceptions remind present-day readers that the interwar period should not be understood as peacetime but as an era of slow-simmering conflict before the renewed outbreak of unrestrained warfare in China and on the European continent in the 1930s. In addition to the unsettled borders and firefights that continued to plague postwar Europe for years after the official end of the Great War, the major international powers continued to arm themselves.⁵² As disarmament talks began in Washington, D.C. in November 1921, Berle observed that ongoing preparation for conflict “makes peace merely a milder form of war activity.”⁵³ He then described a dark set of realities: “Munitions are piled up; weapons perfected; guns tested; spies broadcast in suspect countries; industrial plants made readily adaptable to military use; propaganda machinery completed.”⁵⁴ In a setting of deep-seated insecurity, distrust, ambition, and short-sighted leadership among the strongest nations, the production of war materiel drained valuable resources, perpetuated want among the vulnerable masses, and guaranteed the resumption of armed conflict. Berle predicted dire consequences should the Washington Conference fall short of its goals: “Failure . . . *this time* will mean immediate, definite misery; probably a Far Eastern war with ourselves as principles [sic].”⁵⁵

Although from a present-day vantage point Berle’s prediction might seem uncannily prescient, it was actually par for the course in the interwar period, when every international confrontation raised fears of ruinous escalation to a new world war. The *New Republic*, for example, regularly highlighted the potential for renewed hostilities to break out, whether in response to Japan’s determination to increase its power in China, the dangers of Polish nationalism, and the tensions between France and Germany in the early 1920s, or the Japanese takeover of Manchuria, brewing conflict in the Balkans, and the rise of Nazism in the early 1930s. Today, Americans tend erroneously to think of the 1920s and 1930s as a peaceful interim between the two world wars, particularly amid the heady

52. The pages of the *New Republic* provide lavish evidence of American attentiveness to the tenuous state of global affairs in the early post-World War I years, including continued rivalries on the European continent, as well as inter-imperial tensions in Asia. See *A Year of Appeasement*, 22 NEW REPUBLIC 390, 390–93 (1920); *National Egotism vs. International Relief*, 23 NEW REPUBLIC 105, 105–07 (1920); Herbert David Croly, *America, Britain, and Japan*, 27 NEW REPUBLIC 152, 152–54 (1921); *Hapsburg and Horthy*, 28 NEW REPUBLIC 208, 208–11 (1921); George Glasgow, *The Next European Conference*, 31 NEW REPUBLIC 245, 245–47 (1922); *The Realization of European Peace*, 37 NEW REPUBLIC 55, 55–57 (1923).

53. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Bread and Guns*, 47 SURVEY 269, 269 (1921).

54. *Id.*

55. *Id.* (emphasis added).

economic growth and cultural exuberance of the “Roaring Twenties.” When contemporary observers contemplated international conditions, however, they found at best an unstable and dangerous hiatus from all-out warfare, in which any crisis of the moment might constitute the spark that would set off the next great global conflagration. When Berle surveyed the state of the world in the early 1920s, he expressed common sentiments in understanding the post-World War I settlement as an abject failure that could not establish or maintain international stability. Hence the desperate need for a new, creative, and effective internationalism in a world that otherwise seemed destined to return to war.

III. EUROPEAN CORRUPTION, ECONOMIC LIBERALISM,
AND THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF THE AMERICAS: BERLE ON FOREIGN
POLICY IN THE 1930S

Although Berle issued a series of public commentaries about the United States and international affairs in the early 1920s, after his demobilization from the Army, he concentrated primarily on building his legal and academic career, along with his place in New York City’s high-powered, progressive intellectual and political circles. Berle first combined a corporate law career with two years in residence at the Henry Street Settlement, a leading institution within the settlement house movement and its model of progressive reform. His experience with parsing out the legal technicalities of landholding in the Dominican Republic, where determination of title required reckoning with the legacies of Spanish colonial rule, then led, in 1923, to a stint of pro bono work in New Mexico on behalf of the American Indian Defense Association. Meanwhile, his corporate legal practice and fascination with the social implications of the corporate form led to articles in academic law journals and attempts to obtain an academic position. In 1927, amid the intellectual ferment of legal realism, Berle’s interests in the dynamic between law and society led to a grant from Harvard Business School for a collaborative study on the corporation with an economist, an appointment to the Columbia Law School, and a partnership with Gardiner Means, an old friend who happened also to be a graduate student in economics at Columbia. Their research, of course, produced the twentieth century’s signature work on law, economics, and the radically changed nature of property ownership in modern society, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*.⁵⁶

With the Great Depression in full force, Berle’s novel understanding of the changed social, economic, and legal realities that, from a liberal

56. SCHWARZ, *supra* note 42, at 37.

perspective, mandated an innovative governmental policy response, along with his New York connections, made him a natural pick for New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt's inner circle of experts—the so-called “brain trust”—when Roosevelt decided to run for president in 1932. Berle drafted speeches and dispensed advice on economic policy during the campaign, but he did not take an official position in the new Administration. Berle liked to be close to power, but he resisted the constraints of formal appointments. He preferred to work behind the scenes and to stay in New York City. For the next several years, he weighed in periodically on economic policy, especially financial matters, proselytized publicly on behalf of the New Deal and state capitalism, and muscled in on city government by allying himself with Fiorello La Guardia's mayoralty.⁵⁷

Given Berle's avoidance of an administrative position with the New Deal, it was surprising when he agreed, at the behest of both Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, to become Assistant Secretary of State in 1938. Indeed, when Hull first broached the subject in the spring of 1937, Berle wrote in his diary that he “would give a good deal to get out of it.”⁵⁸ But with Roosevelt's apparent assent to the idea that the appointment would give the State Department its own braintruster in the White House, Berle took the assignment.⁵⁹ He planned on staying for just six months, but after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, Roosevelt withdrew his acceptance of Berle's resignation, and Berle ended up serving for the next six years.⁶⁰

In his capacity as a State Department official, Berle acted as a kind of jack-of-all-trades who advised the Administration on all matters as he saw fit, whether on domestic economic policy or U.S. foreign relations. On a practical, day-to-day level, he dealt with problems of war mobilization, the diplomatic balancing acts mandated by U.S. neutrality prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, questions of debt service in Latin America and the maintenance of exchange balances with European powers that employed his legal and financial expertise, and other U.S. foreign policy matters.⁶¹ With the renewal of great power conflict looming in Europe and

57. *Id.* at 69.

58. Adolf A. Berle, *Diary Entry for 26 April 1937*, in NAVIGATING THE RAPIDS 1918–1971: FROM THE PAPERS OF ADOLF A. BERLE 126 (Beatrice Bishop Berle & Travis Beal Jacobs eds., 1973) [hereinafter NAVIGATING THE RAPIDS].

59. See Adolf A. Berle, *Diary Entries for 10 December 1937 and 10 January 1938*, in NAVIGATING THE RAPIDS, *supra* note 58, at 151, 159.

60. SCHWARZ, *supra* note 42, at 123–24; Adolf A. Berle, *Diary Entry for 14 September 1938 and Editors' Note*, in NAVIGATING THE RAPIDS, *supra* note 58, at 184–85.

61. I have derived this point by culling through references to Berle in the State Department serial set, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES [hereinafter FRUS], for the period from 1938 to 1946.

Asia, he also used his position as a public platform for articulating cooperative political alternatives to the destructive expansionism that threatened yet again to plunge the world into violence. In accordance with basic progressive principles, Berle continued to hope that human beings could learn to control their collective destiny through the application of reason over crude forms of self-interest and create a future in which “at last an intelligent method by which international affairs may be handled in the common interest of peoples.”⁶² For Berle, the “cooperative peace” of the Americas and liberal economics offered the best possibilities for finding some way out of the traditional rivalries that had repeatedly undermined stability in Europe throughout the continent’s history, as well as the imperialist machinations across the Pacific that made Asia an equally likely flashpoint for setting off the next great war.⁶³

As an answer to what Berle called the “‘death watch’ of Europe” and the other grim circumstances of the late 1930s, Berle heralded the Americas as an instructive example of enlightened and cooperative statesmanship. Berle had advised on the Roosevelt Administration’s Good Neighbor policy, which promised to replace the era of American military interventionism in the Caribbean in the first third of the twentieth century with a more egalitarian and cooperative foreign policy stance towards Latin America. He also took part in the 1936 Buenos Aires Conference, which sought a coordinated hemispheric response to the rise of fascism in Europe. Although the conference did not arrive at a firm consensus, representatives from twenty-one nations signed a “Declaration of Principles of Inter-American Solidarity and Cooperation” that reaffirmed pan-American respect for the sovereignty of the region’s nations and their relations with each other on a basis of equality, and they agreed to mutual consultations to deal with threats to peace in the Americas.⁶⁴ These experiences, combined with his early Army assignment in the Dominican Republic and his general interest in events in the Caribbean and South

62. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Address at the George Washington University Winter Conference on Inter-American Affairs (December 5, 1939), in *Cooperative Peace in the Western Hemisphere*, 1 DEP’T ST. BULL. 659, 663 (1939).

63. A long historical tradition on both sides of the Atlantic drew strong contrasts between the Old World and the New, whether in terms of Old World civilization vs. the energy and barbarity of the Americas, or the corrupt power politics of international affairs in Europe vs. a more enlightened state of affairs in U.S. free trade ideology or in relations across the Americas more generally. See PELLIS, *supra* note 18, at 2–5. Berle expressed a version of the latter narrative in 1941, when he outlined a long history of warfare on the European continent from the late sixteenth century onwards vs. the promise of an American-led peace someday in the future. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *The Coming Epoch of Rebuilding*, 4 DEP’T ST. BULL. 611, 612–15 (1941).

64. SCHWARZ, *supra* note 42, at 122; see also Declaration of Principles of Inter-American Solidarity and Cooperation, Dec. 21, 1936 (available via the Avalon Project: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam07.asp [<https://perma.cc/W3U7-CFF8>]).

America, formed the basis for Berle's public insistence from the late 1930s onward that the exceptionalism of the Americas offered a model for an internationalism that could maintain peace and stimulate economic prosperity.

Throughout his tenure at the State Department, Berle grafted his faith in the collaborative relationships of nations in the Americas with well-established progressive internationalist themes, particularly modern interdependence and the virtues of gradualism. As he explained in an address on the Lima Conference, broadcast late in 1938, in a global order bound together by ever-more intricate economic ties, new communications technologies, and air travel, the peace and stability of the Americas manifested the benefits of internationalism. "We are no longer two vast islands," Berle stated loftily, "but part of an integrated civilization."⁶⁵ Berle then went on to paint an idyllic picture of how international relations functioned in the western hemisphere. In a region of independent nations free from the yoke of empire, competition remained confined to the positive sphere of cultural interchange rather than the amassing of armaments, and barriers to trade remained low, to the mutual benefit of all. As Berle told his listeners, in sharp contrast to Europeans who suffered through the Great War, "You have not a bomb-proof shelter in your back yard; you have never seen a gas mask. That is the great achievement of cooperative friendship in the western world."⁶⁶ Together, the nations of the Americas had built "the peace of cooperation" rather than "the peace of empire."⁶⁷

These achievements, Berle contended, resulted from the virtues of an internationalism that accepted incremental change over flashy gestures and grand promises. Hard times and the enormity of global problems led to desires for immediate solutions. Berle observed, "People are tempted to look for spectacular developments; to expect drama; to seek magnificent achievements."⁶⁸ But that was not how the world worked. "Real progress on the road to peace," he argued, "is rarely made that way. Spectacular diplomacy, or, to quote a phrase, 'sudden diplomacy,' is unusual, and when it does happen is often a mistake."⁶⁹ The Americas had stabilized relations only through a slow and unglamorous process of negotiation and

65. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Relations Between the Two Americas*, 5 VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY 149, 149 (1938).

66. *Id.*

67. *Id.* at 150.

68. *Id.*

69. *Id.*

change, in which “[o]ver a period of years we have overcome suspicions, settled outstanding controversies, [and] created mutual trust.”⁷⁰

In subsequent years, as war engulfed East Asia and Europe, Berle echoed this theme of successful international cooperation in the Americas in order to outline the possibility of a peaceful alternative to mutually destructive violence between nations. As he crowed in March 1941, in a special issue of *Survey Graphic* on the Americas, the region had achieved a “cooperative peace” with effective working arrangements that granted it a productive “peace without empire.”⁷¹ Two months later, in another essay in *Survey Graphic*, Berle again touted the exceptionalism of the Americas, where “we have not needed to invoke dictatorship nor create strange doctrines of master peoples, nor to force agreements by threats of conquest, nor to coerce unwilling neighbors into the cooperation of servitude.”⁷² Instead, the western hemisphere had made itself “the very embodiment of cooperative action” and created “the most apt instrument of civilization which the world has yet seen.”⁷³

Of course, such blustery professions of hemispheric comity should not be taken at face value, given Latin America’s place in U.S. foreign relations as what Greg Grandin has called “a workshop of empire.”⁷⁴ Grandin has stressed a long record of U.S. interventionism up to the early 1930s: “by 1930, Washington had sent gunboats into Latin American ports over six thousand times,” and in the first third of the twentieth century, “U.S. troops invaded Caribbean countries at least thirty-four times, occupied Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, and Costa Rica for short periods, and remained in Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic for longer stays.”⁷⁵ Anti-imperialist critics of the United States in the interwar period also described the nation’s policy towards its hemispheric neighbors in harsh terms. Protestant missionary and staunch anti-interventionist Samuel Guy Inman, for example, in a 1924 essay, underscored the long record of U.S. imperial control in the Caribbean

70. *Id.* With respect to the virtues of normal diplomacy, in November 1943, Berle similarly depicted the general direction of U.S. foreign policy and the expected future formation of a new international organization not as the result of “vast and glittering generalities,” but the product of “steady, detailed, undramatic hard work, applied day by day.” Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Both Dreamers and Diplomats Are Needed*, 10 VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY 150, 150 (1943).

71. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Peace Without Empire*, 30 SURV. GRAPHIC 103 (1941); see also, Adolf Berle, Jr., *After Lima*, 28 YALE REV. 449 (1939); Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Democracy in Its Relationship to Foreign Affairs*, 5 VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY 377 (1939).

72. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Common Defense and Common Welfare*, 30 SURV. GRAPHIC 281, 282 (1941).

73. *Id.* at 283.

74. GREG GRANDIN, EMPIRE’S WORKSHOP: LATIN AMERICA, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE RISE OF THE NEW IMPERIALISM 2 (2010).

75. *Id.* at 3, 20.

whether through military means, economic domination, or both. "In these smaller countries of the South, controlled by our soldiers, our bankers, and our oil kings," Inman declared, "we are developing our Irelands, our Egypts, and our Indias." In the process, he continued, "[w]e are piling up hatreds, suspicions, records for exploitation and destruction of sovereignty in Latin America, such as have never failed in all history to react in war, suffering, and defeat of high moral and spiritual ideals."⁷⁶

Berle himself was not blind to this history of U.S. imperialism in the Americas, particularly the Caribbean. Indeed, in the early 1920s, he had strongly condemned the abuses of American occupation forces and U.S. corporate power in the region. As he wrote of the Dominican Republic in 1921, U.S. intervention had failed to advance public health, infrastructure, or education, and military atrocities had accompanied the de facto reality of American conquest.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, in Haiti, Berle observed, the United States had become the equivalent of the Germans in Belgium during the Great War.⁷⁸ In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Berle also sometimes alluded publicly to the recent history of U.S. imperialism in the region, although for the most part he considered such episodes part of a benighted past that had been replaced by a new era of hemispheric cooperation.⁷⁹

Such concerns constituted more than mere lip service for Berle, who also voiced them in behind-the-scenes policymaking contexts throughout his diplomatic career. He paid close attention to the sensitivities of U.S. and European power in the Americas, especially when it came to Brazil, a country that he thought was on the verge of becoming a major player in global affairs.⁸⁰ In March 1943, for example, amid Allied discussions of postwar economic planning, Berle insisted that the other American republics be kept in the loop whether or not they were formally part of the wartime alliance, except for Argentina with its pro-fascist leanings. In particular, he noted Brazil's sense of exclusion from the post-World War I settlement and emphasized the need "to keep our American associates, and especially Brazil, fully advised of what was going on."⁸¹ As U.S. Ambassador to Brazil in 1945 and 1946, Berle also sided in significant instances with Brazilian sovereignty and interests. In the spring of 1945,

76. Samuel Guy Inman, *Imperialistic America*, ATLANTIC MONTHLY, July 1924, at 107.

77. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Santo Domingo*, 45 SURVEY 510 (1921).

78. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Habilitating Haiti*, 46 SURVEY 433 (1921).

79. See Berle, *After Lima*, *supra* note 71, at 468; see also Berle, *Peace Without Empire*, *supra* note 71, at 103–05.

80. On Berle's perception of Brazil as an emerging power, see Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *The American Outlook in Foreign Affairs*, 11 DEP'T ST. BULL. 476, 478 (1944).

81. Letter from the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) to the Secretary of the Treasury (Morgenthau) (Mar. 2, 1943), in 1 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, GENERAL 1058 (1963); Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) (Mar. 23, 1943), in 1 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, GENERAL 1062 (1963).

he cautioned U.S. officials to cooperate with Brazil's leadership rather than indulge any temptation on the part of the United States and its chief wartime allies to seize German archival materials in Brazil. "Brazil has already promised access to information in question," he emphasized, whereas "[j]oint demand here by four principal Allies for possession of these archives would provoke immediate explosion. . . . It was Germany who surrendered, not Brazil."⁸² Towards the end of the year, he vigorously attacked U.S. efforts to make inroads on Brazilian control over Brazilian oil. According to the notes of the conversation that took place among State Department officials, although Berle agreed to follow instructions, he also "made it clear that he, as an individual, wished to have no part of" the effort to force oil concessions on Brazil. Rather, Berle insisted, "the Brazilians had a right to go into the refining business in their own country and that any effort on our part to oppose such a development would be construed by the Brazilians as an unwarranted interference with an internal matter."⁸³ Thus, to at least a noteworthy extent, Berle attempted to put his long-held antipathy towards imperial rule into practice during his tenure at the Department of State. Moreover, even the most critical of scholars have recognized the distinctiveness of the Good Neighbor era and the seriousness of Roosevelt's commitment to what Grandin has labeled "a decade of unparalleled hemispheric cooperation."⁸⁴

At the same time, however, Berle papered over darker historical realities, as well as the imbalances of power that co-existed with professions of egalitarian good will towards the rest of the Americas. For example, in his public pronouncements as Assistant Secretary of State, Berle concentrated on recent decades and managed to avoid ever mentioning the United States' aggressive conquest and seizure of half of Mexico's territory in the U.S.-Mexico War of the 1840s.⁸⁵ Like other boosters of pan-Americanism, he wanted to believe that U.S. policy had turned over a new leaf after World War I, first with Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes's conciliatory gestures towards international cooperation in the Americas after the one hundredth anniversary of the Monroe Doctrine in 1923, and then the adoption of the Good Neighbor

82. The Ambassador in Brazil (Berle) to the Secretary of State (May 28, 1945), in 3 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1945, EUROPEAN ADVISORY COMMISSION; AUSTRIA; GERMANY 1145-46 (1968).

83. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by Mr. Charles B. Rayner of the Petroleum Division and the Chief of the Division of Brazilian Affairs (Chalmers) (Nov. 23, 1945), in 9 FRUS 1946, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 532 (1969).

84. GRANDIN, *supra* note 74, at 34.

85. At most, he allowed himself a vague reference to "boundary disputes between the United States and Mexico." Berle, *Peace Without Empire*, *supra* note 71, at 103.

policy a decade later.⁸⁶ By side-stepping a deep-seated past and focusing on the more pleasing aspects of hemispheric relations in the Rooseveltian era, Berle constructed a parable of the Americas as a cooperative alternative to corrupt, militaristic relations, particularly on the European continent. This harmonious image of comity across the Americas, however, conveniently ducked harder questions about economic liberalism and its implications for U.S. relations in the region that would ultimately return full force during the Cold War.

Berle's publicly articulated faith in an exceptionalism of the Americas hinted at the widespread benefits of a liberal international economic order, a commitment on Berle's part that rested on free trade as the long-established, historically rooted cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy ideology. From the nation's founding onward, U.S. leaders hailed free trade and market access as an enlightened alternative to European imperial corruption and a means by which a militarily weak but resource-rich United States could make its way in the world.⁸⁷ Twentieth-century notions of modern interdependence further strengthened the progressive internationalism that eventually evolved into mid-twentieth century liberal orthodoxy. As Berle stated in a radio address in February 1935, several years before he joined the Department of State, "The breaking of international barriers is the major problem in foreign relations. We have a world economy; it is trying to operate in separate compartments throughout the western world."⁸⁸ From Berle's standpoint, it simply did not make sense for states to operate contrary to modern economic realities. Doing so only fomented international instability. As Berle put it in a public lecture in March 1939, "A world which does not permit commerce to flow freely is a world in constant distress." By contrast, "If trade is open, fighting is unnecessary."⁸⁹ Liberal order redounded to the mutual benefit of all.

86. Juan Pablo Scarfi has also highlighted Latin American support for pan-Americanism and a version of the Monroe Doctrine that viewed it as an aid to regional security rather than as purely a policy of U.S. hegemony. Notably, however, that view was strongest in the "ABC" countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, nations well outside the Caribbean basin where the United States exerted dominance in the first third of the twentieth century. Juan Pablo Scarfi, *In the Name of the Americas: The Pan-American Redefinition of the Monroe Doctrine and the Emerging Language of American International Law in the Western Hemisphere, 1898–1933*, 40 *DIPLOMATIC HIST.* 189 (2016).

87. See *THE FEDERALIST* NO. 11 (Alexander Hamilton) (available via the Avalon Project: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed11.asp [<https://perma.cc/BLP4-ETAN>]); George Washington, Farewell Address (Sept. 17, 1796) (available via the Avalon Project: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp [<https://perma.cc/X5UH-YU5P>]).

88. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Other Forces Which Determine Our Foreign Policy*, 1 *VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY* 415, 415 (1935).

89. Berle, *Democracy in Its Relationship to Foreign Affairs*, *supra* note 71, at 379 (1939).

Berle elaborated upon his reasoning in an address that reflected upon the deteriorating political situation in Europe in mid-1937. With war looming across the Atlantic, Berle called upon American business leaders to embrace a liberal international economic order. He explained the impossibility of self-sufficiency for the major powers, all of which required resources from outside their borders, including in some cases, the basic means of feeding their populations. They could acquire these goods only through two options: trade or force. As Berle put it, “If commerce fails, there is only one resource left—that of conquest.”⁹⁰ American business, however, had too often dealt with the deteriorating economic environment of the Great Depression by devoting its energies to the self-defeating mission of “figuring out ways of excluding all foreign goods,” which not only had damaging economic effects but destabilized political relationships as well.⁹¹ “A general exclusion of other countries from their obvious markets,” he warned, “must contribute directly to a disordered, warlike, and ultimately revolutionary world.”⁹² Peace and stability required liberal economics, a point that Berle would continue to reinforce in subsequent years.

When it came to the specifics of liberal order, Berle translated his expertise in corporate finance into a call for government-mediated provision of credit at an international level. Here he appealed to the Americas as a source of useful lessons. As he observed in a 1939 essay, loans to South American trading partners in the 1920s had generally resulted in lost investments, which led potential investors to shy away from new commitments despite the ongoing need for long-term credit as a basis of economic development. Government agencies, such as the Export-Import Bank, offered the possibility of making up the shortfall and assuming necessary risks that private investors no longer wished to incur.⁹³ Eventually, Berle hoped, the creation of an inter-American bank as a new international institution could facilitate healthy forms of investment and development across national boundaries.⁹⁴ The disaster of international finance post-World War I, Berle stressed in the fall of 1942 to an audience of Alabama businessmen, made imperative a workable system of “economic power achieved by cooperation” someday in the future, when

90. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *We Are Looking Down the Gunbarrels*, 3 VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY 655, 655 (1937).

91. *Id.*

92. *Id.* at 656. In a similar vein, two years later Berle called upon businessmen to “think a little less about ‘selling,’ and a little more about ‘trading,’” and thereby uphold the exchange relationships necessary to healthy international relationships. Berle, *After Lima*, *supra* note 71, at 465.

93. Berle, *After Lima*, *supra* note 71, at 466–68.

94. Berle, *Peace Without Empire*, *supra* note 71, at 107.

the new world war would end, and the United States could “embark on the task of healing the world.”⁹⁵

Berle’s conception of modern international finance dovetailed neatly with themes he had developed in the early 1930s in *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, particularly the disjuncture between traditional notions of political economy and the nature of economic life in the modern corporate era.⁹⁶ Just as the modern corporation had utterly demolished old concepts of property ownership through the separation of ownership and control, by the early 1940s, Berle could also argue that the old economics of colonial extraction and nineteenth-century economic imperialism no longer made sense in a world in which ownership mattered less than “that the product shall be available on reasonable terms.”⁹⁷ Similarly, the twentieth-century revolution in finance, to Berle’s mind, had overcome the Marxian thesis “that nations would fight whenever it became difficult to export capital.”⁹⁸ Instead, he argued, “Today, when an inter-American development scheme is proposed, ‘capital’ is really the last thing we think about.”⁹⁹ Where *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* had outlined a historical shift in the nature of ownership that created a public stake in corporate economic life and a rightful place for government intervention, a revolution in finance similarly sparked a movement towards the government-mediated export of capital, aimed not at profit but at desired developmental results. Berle observed, “To continue the pace [of modern industrial production], there had to be a general rise in standards of living everywhere. The economic interest in ‘markets’ became, not a private concern, but a matter of social and governmental policy.”¹⁰⁰

Thus Berle arrived at the liberal economic internationalist creed: the global economy was not a zero-sum game that required some nations to be mired in poverty in order to serve others’ prosperity, but rather, economic growth and development, wherever they occurred, contributed to global political stability as well as the health of international economic life.¹⁰¹ As Berle confidently told an audience of teachers in March 1944, “The day of the exploiter is gone, and exploitation can be no part of

95. Adolf A. Berle, *The Realist Base of American Foreign Policy*, 9 VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY 53, 56 (1942).

96. I have discussed *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* in these terms in Jessica Wang, *Neo-Brandeisianism and the New Deal: Adolf A. Berle, Jr., William O. Douglas, and the Problem of Corporate Finance in the 1930s*, 33 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 1221, 1232–34, 1243–44 (2010).

97. Adolf A. Berle, *The Economic Interests of the United States in Inter-American Relations*, 4 DEP’T ST. BULL. 756, 758 (1941).

98. *Id.*

99. *Id.*

100. *Id.* at 759.

101. *Id.* at 760–61.

American policy. . . . [T]he generation coming of age must be taught that foreign business and foreign trade is the art of contributing to the foreign country rather than the art of seizing an exploiter's profit."¹⁰²

Beneath this idealized version of a liberal international economic order, however, lay the harsher conditions of geopolitical power. On the one hand, Berle understood such realities, and he argued that heavy-handed action by the United States would endanger the free-flowing capitalism that the world needed post-World War II. In December 1945, for example, he warned the Department of State yet again that the effort to gain U.S. oil concessions in Brazil was "both highly dangerous and highly unsound."¹⁰³ If the United States pushed too hard, he insisted, "the immediate result of representation when made will be [an] instant declaration by [the] Brazilian Gov[ernmen]t that they consider refining [an] industry affected with a public interest under [the] Economic Charter [of the Americas], closing the door to free capital movement in this industry for some time to come, and killing the very promising attempt which [the] Petroleum Council is now making towards liberalization."¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, however, the broader contours of U.S. economic relationships inevitably put the Department of State in the service of American financial interests. Although the United States generally refrained from gunboat diplomacy during the "Good Neighbor" years, the Foreign Bondholders' Protective Council relied upon State Department officials, including Berle, for diplomatic intervention whenever opportunities loomed to resume payments on defaulted bonds or otherwise uphold American bondholders' interests, whether in Panama, Brazil, Haiti, El Salvador, or elsewhere in the region.¹⁰⁵ The foreign policy establishment and U.S. oil companies also coordinated over efforts to gain compensation for nationalized oil industries in Mexico and Bolivia in the late 1930s.¹⁰⁶ In addition, loans for monetary stabilization, development

102. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Address at the Schoolmen's Week Convention (Mar. 22, 1944), *in* 10 DEP'T ST. BULL. 278, 281 (1944).

103. Telegram from the Ambassador in Brazil (Berle) to the Secretary of State (Dec. 12, 1945), *in* 11 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1946, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 537 (1969).

104. *Id.* at 537–38.

105. *See, e.g.*, The Secretary of State (signed by Berle on the Secretary's behalf) to the President of the Foreign Bondholders Protective Council, Inc. (White) (Oct. 5, 1939), *in* 5 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1939, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 753 (1957); Memorandum of Conversation by the Adviser on International Economic Affairs (Feis) and the Assistant Adviser on International Economic Affairs (Livesey) (Mar. 5, 1940), *in* 5 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1940, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 584 (1961); The Secretary of State (signed by Berle on the Secretary's behalf) to the Minister in Haiti (White) (Sept. 20, 1941), *in* 7 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1941, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 348 (1962); The Secretary of State (Berle on the Secretary's behalf) to the Chargé in El Salvador (Cade) (Sept. 1, 1943), *in* 6 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 339 (1965).

106. In a discussion with oil company executives where Berle was present, Secretary of State Hull provided assurances that the Department of State "was doing all that it could day and night to

aid, or other purposes reinforced U.S. power throughout the Americas.¹⁰⁷ Where proponents of economic liberalism argued for a mutually beneficial web of relationships at work, critics have always suspected imperialism by another name. The Good Neighbor policy eased historical tensions for a time and raised hopes for a new beginning, but it never transcended American economic priorities.

Moreover, concessions to Latin American interests also reflected the pragmatic requirements of U.S. policy in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly as Berle and other State Department officials sought to shore up hemispheric defenses after World War II broke out in Europe.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, in other parts of the world, Berle conceded American interests in defending European allies' colonial prerogatives, despite his own instinctive anti-imperialism. Following the invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, for example, he told the Australian Foreign Minister "that we felt that the status quo in the Dutch West Indies, as well as the Dutch East Indies, ought to be preserved."¹⁰⁹ In September 1940, when French diplomats feared U.S. policy towards Japan would sell out French colonial interests in Indochina, then under Japanese occupation, Berle similarly reassured the French Ambassador "that this Government had specifically asserted its desire to protect the French Empire as a part of the heritage of the French people."¹¹⁰ Chinese territorial claims also did not escape Berle's notice, and in the spring of 1943, he reminded the Office of Strategic Services not to offend Chinese sensibilities as it carried out operations in Tibet.¹¹¹ Berle's anti-colonial leanings notwithstanding, he did not hesitate to ally U.S. foreign policy with other imperial powers'

attempt to uphold the principle of an orderly world society," although he also conceded that short of military action, the United States could do little to achieve the return of company property. Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of the American Republics (Duggan) (May 31, 1938), in 5 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1938, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 322 (1956).

107. See, e.g., The American Delegate (Hull) to the Acting Secretary of State (July 23, 1940), in 5 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1940, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 915 (1961); The Secretary of State (signed by Berle on the Secretary's behalf) to the Ambassador in Uruguay (Dawson) (June 12, 1942), in 6 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 720 (1963).

108. See, e.g., Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) (May 14, 1940), in 5 FRUS, 1940, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 16-17 (1961); Telegram, The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Argentina (Armour) (May 23, 1940), in 5 FRUS, 1940, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS 17-18 (1961).

109. Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) of a Conversation With the Australian Minister (Casey) (May 10, 1940), in 4 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1940, THE FAR EAST 13-14 (1955).

110. Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) (Sept. 12, 1941), in 5 FRUS, 1941, THE FAR EAST 287-89 (1956).

111. The Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) to the Director of the Office of Strategic Services (Donovan) (Apr. 23, 1943), in FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, CHINA 629 (1957).

desire to preserve their territorial claims, especially when necessary to shore up allied nations' positions on the European continent.

At the same time, wartime relations between the United States and its European partners did not always proceed smoothly, and U.S. interests did not necessarily move in lockstep with European imperial preferences. Berle's well-known distrust of British intentions, for example, expressed itself in multiple ways.¹¹² In one incident in late 1940, Berle carped about British reticence over how best to manage and balance exchange in French Morocco, which meant that "it might be necessary for us to consider taking an independent line if British policy remained obscure, and we desired to cooperate."¹¹³ Two years later, following the assassination of François Darlan in Algiers for his service in the Vichy government, Cordell Hull similarly griped about British efforts to take diplomatic advantage of the situation at the expense of the United States, when the United States had bent over backwards not to attack British colonialism in India.¹¹⁴ In the summer of 1943, Berle also warned Hull "to be very cautious about committing ourselves to the line which the British apparently wish to follow" when it came to the return of Greece's monarchy to power after the war.¹¹⁵

As concerns with the shape of the postwar peace began to replace the immediate needs of the war, U.S. policy also walked a fine line on whether or not to align itself with French imperial designs. During the debate in the fall of 1943 over whether the Allies should employ Chinese troops against the Japanese occupation of Indochina, Berle emphasized that the issue spoke to the fundamental motivations of the United States: "whether, in the Far East, we are reestablishing the western colonial empires or whether we are letting the East liberate itself if it can do so."¹¹⁶ He followed up the next day with a prescient comment to Undersecretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr.: "Frankly, I doubt if we could defend before the Congress a very considerable expenditure of American lives for the sole purpose of keeping Indo-China in French, as against Chinese or Indo-Chinese, hands."¹¹⁷

112. On Berle's suspicions of British imperial power, see SCHWARZ, *supra* note 42, at 175–84.

113. Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Henry S. Villard of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Dec. 18, 1940), in 2 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1940, GENERAL AND EUROPE 632 (1957).

114. Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Chargé in the United Kingdom (Matthews) (Jan. 5, 1943), in 2 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, EUROPE 28–29 (1964).

115. Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) to the Secretary of State (Aug. 31, 1943), in 4 FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, THE NEAR EAST AND AFRICA 151 (1964).

116. Memorandum of Conversation by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) (Oct. 21, 1943), in FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, CHINA 883–84 (1957).

117. Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle) to the Under Secretary of State (Stettinius) (Oct. 22, 1943), in FRUS: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1943, CHINA 885–86 (1957).

Ultimately, Berle's diplomatic career exemplified the contradictions between internationalist aspirations and the workings of U.S. power throughout the twentieth century, whether in the Americas or in the world as a whole. In his public writings and addresses, Berle portrayed the extension of the Good Neighbor policy and an expanding liberal economic order as paths toward constructive alternatives to the instability and violence of power politics. During his service in the Department of State, however, a long tradition that identified U.S. foreign policy interests with the interests of American investors and corporations, the pressures of wartime alliances, and the United States' own uneasy identity as an expansionist, imperial power that nonetheless identified ideologically with its own anti-colonial history formed the combined realities that made any easy transition to Berle's ideal world impossible. Indeed, the ascendance of the United States to superpower status ultimately meant a Cold War order that relied more on a preponderance of American economic and military power than on the cooperative relationships and liberation from geopolitics that liberal internationalists had so ardently sought during the interwar years.

CONCLUSION: BERLE, LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM,
AND GLOBAL DISORDER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In the post-World War II period, as the United States adapted to its newfound capacity to dominate global affairs, Berle himself also moved from his progressive roots to the establishmentarian inclinations of an elder statesman in Cold War American politics. Thomas McCormick, in an essay written in the early 1990s, adeptly described the contrast between Berle's early theoretical daring and his later middle-of-the-road pragmatism as "a classic servant of power."¹¹⁸ Over time, McCormick contended, Berle moved from a bold "moral and intellectual model of social capitalism" (that is, an early twentieth-century progressive critique of capitalism) to a more pallid mid-century liberal orthodoxy.¹¹⁹ Ultimately, "Berle the intellectual, imaginatively confronting the pivotal issues of equity and efficiency, had metamorphosed into Berle the booster, energetically promoting economic internationalism as a way to evade and beg those issues."¹²⁰ During his tenure in the State Department in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Berle's circumscribed acknowledgments of the not-so-distant history of American imperialism set his path towards his

118. Thomas J. McCormick, *Walking the Tightrope: Adolf A. Berle and America's Journey from Social to Global Capitalism, 1933–1945*, in *BEHIND THE THRONE: SERVANTS OF POWER TO IMPERIAL PRESIDENTS, 1898–1968*, at 126 (Thomas J. McCormick & Walter LaFeber, eds., 1993).

119. *Id.* at 126.

120. *Id.*

liberal anti-communism and uncritical embrace of Rostovian modernization theory during the Cold War. Rather than acknowledge the aspirations for national independence that drove anti-colonial and post-colonial politics in multiple parts of the world, he blamed anti-American sentiments on communism and turned a blind eye to the U.S. military interventionism and covert operations that became a signature feature of American power in the Cold War.¹²¹

The experience of the Cold War exposed the ease with which American liberal ideology could be used to scuttle other nations' efforts to chart out independent futures for themselves. The peoples of Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and East Timor, among other places, paid a heavy price for the United States' Cold War interventionism. At the same time, however, the harsh, deteriorating climate of the interwar years also provides a stark reminder of the dangers of illiberalism and the conditions that motivated liberal internationalists in the 1920s and 1930s. In his history of the "Short Twentieth Century" from 1914 to 1991, Eric Hobsbawm evocatively described the catastrophic state of global affairs from the final years of World War I to the early years of World War II. Hobsbawm underscored the truly dire conditions of the era: "while the economy tottered, the institutions of liberal democracy virtually disappeared between 1917 and 1942 from all but a fringe of Europe and parts of North America and Australasia, as fascism and its satellite authoritarian movements and regimes advanced."¹²²

From the perspective of those who held on to faith in the early twentieth century progressive, humanitarian project of peace and the creation of a world that would allow individuals to realize their fullest human capacities, including meaningful participation in the political lives of their communities, the world fell apart in the interwar years, and it required liberal institutions for its post-World War II reconstruction. For a generation that lived through the disaster of two world wars, liberal order brought peace and stability in Europe, even as the Cold War conflict and the simultaneous post-colonial struggles of the decades that followed World War II extracted heavy costs from the Third World.

Meanwhile, present-day developments underscore the risks of abandoning liberal institutions and policies. Although the state of liberal order in the twenty-first century has not yet reached a level of chaos comparable to that of the 1930s, it has become more tenuous than it has been in many a decade. The current age of Brexit and Trumpism, growing

121. SCHWARZ, *supra* note 42, chs. 9–10.

122. ERIC HOBSBAWM, *THE AGE OF EXTREMES: A HISTORY OF THE WORLD, 1914–1991*, at 7 (1994).

doubts about the benefits of open markets and calls for heightened trade barriers, suspicions of immigrants and demands for tighter borders across Europe and the United States, and the ugly reassertion of blood-and-soil nationalisms and their attendant racism amid the ongoing reconfiguration of power in the international system all reflect an erosion of confidence in liberal democratic institutions to an extent not seen since before World War II. It is simplistic to think that the past repeats itself or to draw analogies that fail to recognize the unique features of a given historical moment. But history does provide resources for contemplating realms of possibility beyond our own and for identifying the warning signs of dangerous instability, particularly in an ever-changing global order where the United States can no longer assume the preponderance of power that it possessed in the decades that immediately followed the end of World War II.

It seems fitting that this essay appears right around the hundredth anniversary of the start of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. After the passage of a century since the end of World War I, however, few people now alive can recall in a deep-seated, visceral way, as Hobsbawm did in *The Age of Extremes*, just how unstable and dangerous the world seemed in the interwar period, and just how ruinous the collective effects were of individual nations' decisions to turn inward. A time period when people still believed that the future would be fundamentally different from, and better than, the present, however, also continually generated a creative search for novel options and possibilities. Berle certainly did not offer an indisputable diagnosis or unimpeachable set of solutions to the world's problems in the 1920s and 1930s. The diverse intellectual resources of the time period and their access to political power, however, perhaps highlights best what seems most lacking—and most needed—in American politics today.