

Truman Smith's Reports on Nazi Militarism: A Study of Domestic Political Priorities and U. S. Foreign Policy-Making in Franklin Roosevelt's First and Second Terms

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Truman Smith's Reports on Nazi Militarism: A Study of Domestic Political Priorities and U. S.
Foreign Policy-Making in Franklin Roosevelt's First and Second Terms

Honors Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

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By

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Truman Smith's Reports on Nazi Militarism: A Study of Domestic Political Priorities and U. S. Foreign Policy-Making in Franklin Roosevelt's First and Second Terms

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As much of the world's leadership was not sure what to think of the emerging Nazi movement in the 1920's through the 1930's, Truman Smith clearly saw the dark potential of a Nazi led Germany. From 1920-1924, Smith served as assistant military attaché in Germany. While serving, Smith was the first American diplomat to interview Hitler. Smith reported on the manipulative sway Hitler had over the masses, as well as the danger the world could face if Hitler gained power. Smith returned to Germany later in his career and served as head military attaché from 1935-1939. During this stay, Smith orchestrated a wildly successful scheme to utilize the aviator Charles Lindbergh's fame in order to gain intelligence on German air technology.

Together, Smith and Lindbergh provided the United States with unprecedented intelligence on German military build-up; however, Smith's reports were almost entirely ignored by the Roosevelt administration. A diverse combination of domestic political factors contributed to the poor reception Smith's reports received. Most notably, Smith's reports conflicted with Roosevelt's plan for the United States. In addition, negative consequences from Roosevelt's personal rivalry with Lindbergh flowed through to Smith. An examination of Smith's story offers a clear example of how domestic political agendas clouded decision making in the United States government leading up to World War II.

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Introduction

Truman Smith stands in history as a little-known but interesting American hero. After an accomplished military career leading up to and during World War II, Smith was seemingly forgotten. Smith's name was seldom mentioned after World War II until his memoirs were published in 1984. Since then, intrigued historians and journalists have sporadically examined his strange story. History shows Smith to be an astoundingly successful figure in military intelligence. Though hampered by his lack of rank, Smith submitted intelligence reports from Germany on the growing Nazi movement while he was assigned to Berlin as an assistant military attaché from 1920-1924. From 1935-1938, Smith returned to Germany to serve as head military attaché. During this time, he submitted unprecedented reports on German military build-up. Part of the reason Smith's intelligence efforts were exceptionally insightful was due to a scheme he developed in the summer of 1936 to utilize the fame of aviator Charles Lindbergh to gain better access to German air facilities. Despite Smith's efforts and early warnings of German military build-up, his reports were dismissed by the Roosevelt administration. For his efforts, Smith was illogically labeled as alarmist and later as a Nazi sympathizer. The reasons behind these accusations were purely political. An examination of Smith's story offers a

clear example of how domestic political agendas clouded decision making in the United States government leading up to World War II.

After serving in combat during World War I, Smith served as a military observer and assistant attaché in Berlin from June 1920 to April 1924. In November of 1922, Smith became the first American diplomat to interview Hitler and subsequently submitted reports on Nazi developments that history shows to be nearly prophetic, even though he lacked rank and his reports were mostly ignored. However, he did forge relationships with German military figures that proved to be invaluable contacts when he returned to Berlin as head military attaché later in his career. During this first stint in Berlin, Smith submitted reports detailing Nazi movements and aims. These warnings came nearly a decade before other more pronounced voices began warning the rest of the world about Hitler.

In the years between 1924 and 1935, Smith held various miscellaneous posts; most notably, from 1928 to 1932, Smith served as an instructor at the Fort Benning Infantry School, where General George Marshall was in command. During this time, Smith forged a close professional relationship with Marshall, and the general subsequently acted as Smith's patron for the remainder of his career.

Smith's second posting in Berlin from 1935-1938 as head military attaché, which may be the most interesting historically, can be divided into two sections. From 1935 through the first half of 1936, Smith struggled as his reports were widely dismissed by both the military and the Roosevelt administration. In November of 1936, however, Smith took a trip to Washington at his own expense to impress upon his military

superiors the seriousness of events. This trip was quite successful, and Smith received considerable support from the military going forward. In addition, Smith began utilizing Lindbergh in his air intelligence in the summer of 1936. In combination with his newly acquired military backing and the support of Lindbergh, Smith's reports received considerable circulation in the highest level of United States government from 1937-1938. These reports, most notably the General Air Estimate of 1937, contained powerful language that vividly described the rapid expansion of the German military.

After Smith was diagnosed with diabetes, and subsequently exited his post in Berlin, in December of 1938, he proceeded to work as a military adviser in Washington. During this time, 1939-1941, Smith came under fire from various figures in the Roosevelt administration. A diverse range of factors, most notably his history with Lindbergh, contributed to the attacks he received. Smith entered retirement in 1941, but returned to active duty after the attack on Pearl Harbor at the request of General Marshall. During the war, Smith served as a military advisor to General Marshall, and he retired with the rank of colonel in 1946.

Though Smith's reports on Hitler from the early 1920's are certainly historically significant, his reports from the late 1930's are even more so. Not only is the content of the reports militarily important, but the reception of the reports holds complicated political implications. Ultimately, the question remains: Why was Smith ignored? The answer to this question is complex and varies depending on timeframe. The first factors contributing to the reception Smith's reports received start with domestic attitudes and opposing voices abroad in 1935 and 1936.

1935-1936 – Opposing Voices

In 1935 and 1936, Smith faced several obstacles in impressing the developments of the German military on American leadership. The most documented explanation for Smith's reports being undervalued involves his position. In the 1930's, the Military Intelligence Division of the Army (G-2) was little respected and the position of military attaché was far from prestigious. These factors gain little mention in contemporary sources because allegations of Smith's Nazi sympathy generally take the spotlight, but the lack of respect held for the post of military attaché was a real issue for Smith in 1935 and 1936.

The lack of respect for military attachés is well documented even outside of work referring to Smith. This poor reputation held by military attachés was matched by the inadequacies of the Military Intelligence Division. Smith details his thoughts on G-2 and his initial training for his 1935 Berlin post in his memoirs. Of his instruction, Smith recalls it to have been "cursory and quite inadequate," to the extent that Smith felt he had gained nearly nothing from his training.¹ In regards to G-2 as a whole, Smith recalls: "I saw at first hand how inadequately organized, staffed, and financed the Military Intelligence Division was. It became clear to me also that Military Intelligence was the orphan branch of the General Staff and the army as a whole and that military attachés lacked prestige and were little regarded or listened to."²

¹ Ibid., 26.

² Ibid., 26.

The CIA records that the struggles in G-2 were well known, and that among military officers, the post of military attaché was considered a dead end.³ The record provided by the CIA states that on the surface Military Intelligence presented that the post of military attaché was highly respected, and that attachés received top-notch training before being sent to their assignments. This image could not be further from reality. The reputation of posts in Military Intelligence was so poor that the most qualified officers could seldom be recruited to intelligence posts. In addition, the training in G-2 was so inadequate that attachés were often thrown into their posts so unprepared they could not even develop sensible reports.⁴

Military attachés were also extremely underfunded. The job of attachés was far from easy: “Operating against odds, only too often in periods of tension, they must exercise discretion in all their procedures: they must refrain from spying or other conspiratorial activities, and contacts likely to disturb regular ‘harmonious,’ peace-conductive diplomatic relations between states.”⁵ Within the tight pressures of not upsetting international politics, attachés often gained the bulk of their information from social events. Considering this, the CIA website details the struggle the attaché corps faced in obtaining funding: “The United States was in a serious economic depression, and Congress was not about to increase MID's budget so that a few attachés could host cocktail parties in Paris, Berlin, Rome, London, Moscow, and Tokyo. Unfortunately, the annual appropriations battle reinforced the perception in the Army at large that the

³ Central Intelligence Agency, “The Role of US Army Military Attachés Between the World Wars,” Last modified June 27, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/95unclass/Koch.html#ft1>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Alfred Vagts, *The Military Attaché* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), ix.

attaché corps was nothing more than a well-heeled country club.”⁶ As Smith proved however, much could be gained from “cocktail parties.”

Smith noted that his department’s lack of funding did limit his movements in Berlin considerably. Notably, Smith recalls the lack of funding limited his travel in a major way.⁷ In addition, Smith felt an espionage presence needed to be in Berlin, separated from the attaché corps, and as Smith noted, “not a penny for espionage was available to his office.”⁸ Overall, G-2 and the post of military attaché were neither respected, nor funded sufficiently.

A problem Smith faced specifically concerning his post was his responsibility to report not only on the development of German ground forces but also on their rapidly expanding air force. Referring to himself in the third-person, Smith details the difficulty he faced in reporting on German air development: “The military attaché possessed as much, but no more, knowledge of air corps organization and tactics than did the average American infantry officer who had been trained in the army school system. This was small. His technical knowledge of air matters was negligible.”⁹ Kay Smith writes in her unpublished autobiography that her husband’s lack of aeronautical expertise weighed on him heavily, because even with his limited knowledge of air science, he knew something huge was occurring in Germany.¹⁰

Smith attributed the lack of respect for his knowledge and the bad reputation of his title to his feeling that his reports were not being taken seriously in the General Staff

⁶ CIA.

⁷ Truman Smith, 164.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁰ Kay Smith, 90.

or the Air Corps.¹¹ The growing strength of the German Luftwaffe impressed Smith to the extent that Smith returned to the States at his own expense in November 1936 in an attempt to convince his superiors of the seriousness of events in Germany. Smith's wife records that this trip was successful and he did succeed in convincing much of the military leadership he encountered of the growing threat in Germany.¹²

By the end of 1936, Smith had gained considerable support in the military. This support would ultimately save his career when the political firestorm approached in 1940. Since the lack of respect for attachés and G-2 was substantial, the backing Smith received in Washington provided much needed support. Smith received support from, among others, General George Marshall and Bernard Baruch. These two men in particular were responsible for Smith's reports being not only circulated in "the highest military circles"¹³ in the late 1930's, but they made Smith's work known to influential figures in the Roosevelt administration, and even the President himself.

General Marshall, who became the Chief of Staff of the Army, served as Smith's patron from when Smith first served under Marshall as an instructor at Fort Benning in 1928 to when Smith retired in 1946. Marshall actually sent Smith's General Air Estimate from November 1937 to the President as "an example of outstanding military intelligence."¹⁴ Marshall went on to battle the President over military appropriations, and in this combat he relied heavily on Smith's reports.

¹¹ Truman Smith, 84.

¹² *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹⁴ Lindbergh, 872.

Bernard Baruch was a chief economic adviser to the President and was widely known for having Roosevelt's ear. As one of the only real "middle-men" in the politics surrounding Smith's story, Baruch is an interesting figure. Baruch was well liked by the Roosevelt administration as well as the administration's isolationist opponents.¹⁵ Baruch described himself as somewhat "obsessed with the subject of preparedness."¹⁶ The reports Smith was submitting were not only being circulated widely enough that they reached Baruch, an economic consultant to the President, but Baruch actively used Smith's reports in some of what he calls the "many occasions I was pressing him (FDR) to take more decisive preparedness measures,"¹⁷ from 1936 through 1940. The value of the support Smith received from Marshall and Baruch cannot be overstated.

Despite this support, one of the chief criticisms of Smith prior to 1937 was that "some of his reports had exaggerated the strength of German forces, especially the air force, in comparison with the reports of the British and French."¹⁸ The perceived reliability of foreign attachés was about as reputable as that of American attachés. Vincent Orange writes in the *Journal of Military History* that "British intelligence departments in the 1930s were short of staff, funds, equipment, and prestige. There were far too many of them, they refused to cooperate with one another, and they had little influence on decision makers, civilian or military."¹⁹ This status was quite similar to that of the American attaché corps, and the British attachés in Berlin handled their lack of prestige differently than Smith did.

¹⁵ Bernard Baruch, *The Public Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 307.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 276-279.

¹⁸ Truman Smith, x.

¹⁹ Vincent Orange, "The German Air Force Is Already 'The Most Powerful in Europe': Two Royal Air Force Officers Report on a Visit to Germany," *The Journal of Military History* 170, no. 4 (October, 2006): 1015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4138193>.

Colonel Andrew Thorne assumed his post as head British military attaché in Berlin in 1932. In 1934 and 1935, Thorne reached much different conclusions concerning the state of German affairs than Smith would eventually report in 1935 and 1936. Thorne reported that he felt the German army operated separately from Hitler's rule. He went on to conclude that military leaders in Germany were not particularly loyal to Hitler and could put a stop to Hitler's regime at any moment.²⁰ Smith could not have disagreed more; in fact, in his memoirs, Smith incredulously recalls a conversation he had with the Supreme Commander of the German Luftwaffe Hermann Goering near the end of his time in Berlin: "With moist eyes and a voice tinged with emotion, he turned to the attaché (Smith) and said, 'Smith, there are only three truly great characters in all history: Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Adolf Hitler.'"²¹ Smith was immediately struck by the fanatical devotion and support Hitler possessed. As early as the 1922 Smith noted about Hitler: "So intense and dramatic were the times, and so well did Hitler understand how to play on the emotions of his audiences, that the lack of logic in his message was often entirely overlooked."²² Though they were proven false not long after they were submitted, Thorne's reports of divided German leadership did damage the influence of Smith's early reports from Berlin in 1935 and 1936.

In addition, when Colonel F.E. Hotblack took over Thorne's post in Berlin in 1935, he entered with the expectation Thorne had left for him. From 1935 through early 1937, Hotblack's reports became less and less consistent with Thorne's. By late 1937 when Smith submitted his most meaningful report, "The General Air Estimate of

²⁰ Wesley Wark, "Three Military Attachés at Berlin in the 1930s: Soldier-Statesmen and the Limits of Ambiguity," *The International History Review* 9, no. 4 (November, 1987): 592, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40105843>.

²¹ Truman Smith, 100.

²² *Ibid.*, 70.

November 1, 1937”, Hotblack’s intelligence was in complete support of Smith. At the time Smith submitted his General Air Estimate in 1937, Hotblack was submitting reports to British Intelligence claiming that Germany would be prepared for an all-out offensive against Europe within two years.²³

By 1937, contradictory foreign intelligence was not an obstacle for Smith to overcome. Prior to 1937, however, contradictory reports impacted the reception of Smith’s reports in a major way. Thorne’s reports fueled an already raging problem in the perception of Germany held by the United States as well as Great Britain from 1933 to 1937, which greatly impeded the impact of Smith’s reports. The idea that the Nazi state was deeply divided was one of the worst assumptions made prior to World War II. In seemingly wishful thinking, much of the world’s leadership became convinced that “a policy of negotiated and limited readjustment to the international *status quo* would be welcomed within the Third Reich.”²⁴ This act of self-deception proved to be extremely harmful, and it brings up another problem Smith faced in Berlin at the hands of the United States ambassador, Dr. William Dodd.

Dodd was well known to be a pacifist who had a “marked distaste for military matters.”²⁵ He did not like to associate himself with military men; instead, the doctor enjoyed the company of professors in Germany. He had no confidence in Army and Naval attachés in Berlin: “Army and Navy attachés here, and I think all over Europe, are utterly unequal to their supposed functions.”²⁶ Dodd consistently battled the idea that Germany was militarizing. Even when the military attaché preceding Smith, Colonel

²³ Wark, 599.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 593.

²⁵ Truman Smith, 76.

²⁶ Vagts, 71.

Wuest, raised the alarm and tried to alert the United States that Germany was mobilizing for war, Dodd insisted that Wuest was overly excited, and what Wuest had to say was not even worth listening to.²⁷ While Dodd asserted that Wuest and Smith were both alarmist, he was proven wrong when the Germans took over the Rhineland in 1936. This risky act from Hitler, which Smith reported would happen a few days beforehand, completely shocked Dodd.²⁸

The well-educated ambassador had long been a critic of Hitler, but despite his criticism, he completely underestimated the fiery dictator. When news broke that Hitler had indeed moved into the Rhineland just as Smith had predicted, Dodd abandoned his fellow diplomats to discuss his disgust at Hitler with his professor friends. In the process, Dodd found that his cohorts were in fact Nazis themselves, a fact that shocked and appalled the ambassador to the extent that he hid himself inside his study. This event caused Dodd to become disgusted with military matters in general, to the extent that he would not even appear with any American military officers if they were in their uniforms. This behavior lasted, at the cost of tax-payers' dollars, until his dismissal from his post for inadequate performance in late 1937.²⁹

This complete underestimation of Hitler exhibited by Dodd represents a much wider feeling within the United State government in the 1930s. The impact of Smith's reports was compromised not only by Dodd, but also by the general lack of concern with German military build-up present in much of the United States. When Smith began his post in 1935 in Berlin, the global politics were in a complicated stage in which all

²⁷ Ibid., 71.

²⁸ Kay Smith, 83-85.

²⁹ Ibid., 86.

military intelligence needed to be carefully weighed and considered. Instead, Smith recalls that at no point during his time in Berlin did Dr. Dodd ever ask any information from Smith on German developments.³⁰ This attitude exhibited by Dodd explains much of why Smith's reports from 1935 and 1936 were ignored.

In reality, though Smith consistently reported on German mobilization for his entire service in Berlin, his reports in 1937 and 1938 offer the most insight into the state of the United States government at the time. Several barriers stood in the way of Smith's reports in 1935 and 1936, but by 1937, these obstacles had been conquered. In 1937, Dodd had lost credibility, Smith had gained immense support from his military superiors, and Smith gained a new assistant air attaché, Major Albert Vanaman, who possessed top of the line aeronautical expertise.³¹ Considering these factors, along with the support he received from Baruch and Marshall, when Smith submitted the most important report of his service in Berlin, his "General Air Estimate of November 1, 1937," it effectively had a direct path to the highest levels of the Roosevelt administration. The continued poor reception Smith's reports received ultimately give insight into domestic political priorities in the 1930's, the ultimate hindrance impacting Smith's intelligence efforts.

1937-1938 – Domestic Priorities

Hitler's rise to power in Germany stands as one of the most gravely underestimated events in history. Across the globe, Hitler was regarded as little more than a dupe by many. Even in Germany, Franz Von Papen, who convinced President Paul von Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor, was so confident that Hitler was weak

³⁰ Truman Smith, 77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

and could easily be controlled that he boldly claimed: “Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far into the corner that he’ll squeak!”³² Events, of course, went much differently than Papen anticipated, and while Hitler was being underestimated in Germany, a comical image was simultaneously being created of him in the United States.

One of the starts of the outrageous picture of Hitler came from the book *I Saw Hitler* by Dorothy Thompson. In her book, which stemmed from her 1931 interview with the soon-to-be leader of Germany, Thompson clearly and colorfully described Hitler as feminine, socially backward, and mentally fragile.³³ Thompson also openly questioned Hitler’s ability to lead; she states in her writing that entering her interview: “I was convinced that I was meeting the future dictator of Germany. In something less than fifty seconds I was quite sure that I was not.”³⁴ *Time* magazine also reported on Hitler as a silly figure, making light of his appearance as a “pudgy, stoop-shouldered man” and highlighting anything strange about him.³⁵ *Time* also went on to fuel an unfortunate and common misconception that the Nazi party was “pledged to so many things that it is pledged to nothing.”³⁶ This perception of Hitler was quite common in the United States in the mid-1930s and ultimately reduced the impact of Smith’s reports, as well as detracted from the plight of Jews in America and in Germany.

The common doubt over the seriousness of Hitler’s regime was a major detriment to Smith and his reports. With the exception of Jews, the majority of Americans were unconcerned with Hitler. In addition, the concerns and protests voiced by Jews in

³² Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 570.

³³ Dorothy Thompson, *I Saw Hitler*, (New York: J.J. Little and Ives Company, 1932), 14,16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ “Hitler Into Chancellor,” *Time*, February 2, 1933, 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

America ultimately did as much harm to their own cause as it helped. Rabbis openly criticized Hitler and predicted that he would lead the world to another world war.³⁷ On May 11th 1933, fifty-thousand Jews even gathered in Chicago to protest the oppression against Jews in Germany.³⁸ Though this protest actually did not have a huge effect on the public, it did touch Edith Rodgers, a Massachusetts Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives. On May 13th, two days after the protest, Rodgers voiced in the House her feeling that the United States should intervene in Germany to aid the suffering Jews there.³⁹ Directly after Rodgers addressed the House with her opinion, however, the President released a statement emphasizing that any actions by the Nazis were strictly European affairs.⁴⁰

The public was generally in favor of this isolationist policy. Anti-Jewish sentiments were extremely common in the United States in the pre-World War II era,⁴¹ which combined with a Nazi propaganda barrage to eliminate much of the sympathy Americans had for German Jews. Truman Smith recalls in his memoirs that Hitler was outspoken in his speeches against the Jews, but that the common belief was his violent rhetoric was exclusively for propaganda purposes, and that the dictator would never actually become too abusive to Jews.⁴²

³⁷ "Rabbis Denounce Hitler in Sermons," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1933, 28.

³⁸ "50,000 Jews Unite in Chicago Protest." *The New York Times*, May 11, 1933, 10.

³⁹ "Scores Hitler in House," *New York Times*, May 13, 1933, pg. 7.

⁴⁰ "U.S. Views Nazi Aim as Europe's Affair," *Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 1933, pg. 4.

⁴¹ John Elson and Daniel Levy, "Did F.D.R. Do Enough?" *Time* 143, no. 16 (April 14, 1994): 83, EBSCO Academic Search Premier (9404127685).

⁴² Truman Smith, ix, 55.

Jewish businessmen also had their own scheme turned against them by the Nazis when they attempted to boycott German goods on a global scale.⁴³ Before Jews began implementing this boycott, the Nazis had already begun issuing “warnings” to Jews in general, stating that if they kept up their “treachery”, there would be major ramifications.⁴⁴ After the boycott was implemented, the Nazis launched their counter-attack, claiming that by boycotting German goods, the Jews were simply extending their treachery. The Nazis further decided to reciprocate and boycott Jewish goods and services and to begin removing more Jews from positions of importance.⁴⁵

While the nation was being influenced by German propaganda, President Roosevelt was actually aware of the true story in Germany. Dr. Dodd reported to the President on the abuses that German Jews were experiencing, but Roosevelt responded that the Jews were essentially on their own.⁴⁶ While much of the public simply was not sure what to think about Nazi Germany, the President was aware of the situation and chose to place his New Deal as the main priority of the United States government.

To those whom history remembers as the “New Dealers,” the New Deal represented much more than the social reform it literally entailed; it represented hope that democracy was still a viable system of government. In the midst of dictatorships and communism, Roosevelt wanted to turn his New Deal into somewhat of a “shining light” for democracy.⁴⁷ Roosevelt wanted his program to rise above the attacks from his opponents, who called the New Deal the “Jew Deal” and questioned Roosevelt’s

⁴³ “Boycott Threat Facing Germany,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 1933.

⁴⁴ “Hitler Warns Jews,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 1933.

⁴⁵ “More Jews to Go,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 28, 1933, 4.

⁴⁶ Duffy, 68-69.

⁴⁷ Jordan Schwarz, *The New Dealers*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xvi-xvii.

motives.⁴⁸ In hopes of preserving his New Deal's funding from being spent elsewhere in response to escalated arms concerns, the President put much of his faith in global disarmament as a foreign policy strategy.

The President put a large amount of effort into pushing disarmament to preserve peace. Those who advocated for military preparedness, many of whom were isolationists, did not agree with Roosevelt on arms.⁴⁹ Bernard Baruch is recorded as quoting: "Peace does not follow disarmament; disarmament follows peace."⁵⁰ This policy of Roosevelt's did what he wanted it to do, however, because it allowed him to justify postponing much needed military funding and slash military appropriations to create funds to dump into the New Deal.

Though eventually they faded behind larger events in history surrounding World War II, many criticisms arose against the President because of how he handled Smith's reports. Smith described the press coverage of his activities with Lindbergh in Berlin to be highly inaccurate. He believed that the press simplified German affairs and contributed to the misconception that Germany was weak and divided. Despite this, the fact remains that they did receive substantial exposure in the press because of the presence of Lindbergh.⁵¹ As Smith's reports began being covered up by the Roosevelt administration, General Marshall even went so far as to submit Smith's reports to external political figures who were not afraid to battle the Roosevelt administration in

⁴⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁹ Justus Doenecke, "Toward an Isolationist Braintrust: The Foundation for Foreign Affairs" *World Affairs* 143, no. 3 (Winter 1980/1981): 264-277. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20671864>.

⁵⁰ Baruch, 266.

⁵¹ Truman Smith, 117.

order to keep the reports from being completely forgotten and to prevent the work of Smith going unrecognized.⁵²

Almost entirely due to this action taken by General Marshall, accusations developed that the President had purposefully withheld Smith's reports from Congress in order to remove them as a barrier to slashing the military appropriations.⁵³ These accusations climaxed when Representative Albert Engel, a Michigan Republican, provided well-documented evidence that showed how the President cut the annual military appropriations by forty million dollars, despite having been aware of Smith's reports.⁵⁴ Though Smith recalls Engel's attack on the President as being of a completely partisan nature, the fact remains that Roosevelt was adamant that the New Deal needed to take priority, even when it meant sweeping Smith's unprecedented but unpalatable reports under the rug.⁵⁵

Events surrounding Smith's reports offer insight into the Roosevelt administration and the battle for military appropriations that raged through the 1930s. The President opposed heavy military spending up until 1938 when the Sudeten crisis and Kristallnacht began to impact the views of American citizens. As Nazi aggression became to be more apparent, and Nazi troops trashed Jewish businesses and abused their owners, American public opinion began to see past the propaganda war Germany had launched against the Jews.⁵⁶ Public opinion shifted even further against the Nazis when in 1939 and 1940, the

⁵² Ibid., 117-118.

⁵³ Vagts, 71.

⁵⁴ Special to *The New York Times*, "Charges President Hid Nazi Air Facts," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1944, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009) (106831415)

⁵⁵ Truman Smith, 117.

⁵⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Kristallnacht: A Nationwide Pogrom, November 9-10, 1938," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005201>.

Germans overran Poland, Denmark and Norway.⁵⁷ Finally, in the summer of 1940, when Germany began attacking Western Europe, General Marshall successfully acquired sufficient funding for the military to begin preparing for the possibility of conflict.⁵⁸

The extensive fight and delay over the military appropriations is explained in three primary reasons by Bernard Baruch in his diaries. First, Baruch explains that Roosevelt was essentially a control freak, and he liked having leverage over his subordinates. A second reason was actually that the President was weary of industry dominating the economy, an issue he felt like could happen if large military spending was instituted. The third factor Baruch lists is that Roosevelt did not want to stir the pot before the election in which he ran for his third term.⁵⁹

Indeed, the military suffered mightily at the hands of the domestic politics. General Marshall thought the narrow-mindedness of politicians was handicapping the military and felt it was important for the United States to be ready for war.⁶⁰ Similarly to Marshall's feelings concerning the military, Bernard Baruch was quite concerned with the inadequacy of the American military.⁶¹ Baruch also mentions, however, that the President was also quite aware and concerned about how unprepared the United States would be if attacked.⁶² This presents an interesting quandary; the President slashed military budgets to create more funds for his New Deal, but he also harbored concerns of preparedness, and wanted to "shake Americans from their isolationist delusions before it

⁵⁷ William Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 299.

⁵⁸ Cray, 152-153.

⁵⁹ Baruch, 280-281.

⁶⁰ Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall Soldier and Statesman* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 126-127, 151.

⁶¹ Baruch, 177-179.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 177-179.

was too late.”⁶³ If Roosevelt was concerned with military preparedness, and wanted to act against isolationism, why would he cover up Truman Smith’s reports? If anything, one would think Roosevelt could have used Smith’s reports as evidence to support military buildup.

The largest reason for Roosevelt’s action concerning Smith’s reports came down to the same factor that many of the President’s decisions hinged on: timing. Exactly at what point the Roosevelt administration’s agenda changed from an isolationist one to an interventionist one is a topic for another paper, but one point is clear, and that is the President was extremely mindful of timing in relation to where public opinion rested at a particular point in time. In the mid-1930s, regardless of how concerned Roosevelt was with the military, the New Deal received “top legislative priority” over foreign policy decisions and “the outside world would have to fend for itself.”⁶⁴ This attitude is consistent with how the President responded to the fifty-thousand Jews that protested against the Nazis in Chicago in 1933. The President had certainly shifted gears, however, by the late 1930s, when he began his attempt to sway public opinion in favor of war.⁶⁵

If Smith’s timing in Berlin had been slightly different, his story would be remembered in a much different way and may have changed the course of world history. Instead, Smith’s reports were consistently at odds with the President’s agenda. In 1935 and 1936, Smith’s reports contradicted the cuts Roosevelt wanted to implement to military funding, and in 1937 through 1938, Smith’s reports did not line up with the complex plan Roosevelt put in place to systematically shift public opinion. Smith’s

⁶³ Ibid., 179.

⁶⁴ George McJimsey, *The Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (University Press of Kansas, 2000), 191-192.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 194.

reports came across as abrupt and startling, and the President was against shocking the public.

A major problem Smith saw in military intelligence was the robotic nature of aeronautical reports. In his memoirs Smith described air reports as “so bulky, statistical, and technical that anyone who read them needed both leisure and training in all branches of aeronautical knowledge to absorb their information.”⁶⁶ In his “General Air Estimate of November 1, 1937,” Smith aimed to create a “brief, all inclusive, and couched in dramatic rather than technical terms” summary of Germany air progress.⁶⁷ Smith certainly succeeded in this effort, providing the War Department with a relatively brief but detailed overview of the German Luftwaffe and its immense development. Lindbergh was a vital part in the preparation of this report, and his influence is clear when reading it. The language is dramatic, to the point and would be understandable to nearly any reader. Dramatic reports on German might, however, were the last things Roosevelt wanted to reach the public.

Indeed, alarming reports of the huge air power in Germany could incite panic in the United States. The political weight of air superiority at the time cannot be underestimated. Just before World War II, the world was transitioning into a time when, as Lindbergh stated: “We can no longer protect our families with an army. Our libraries, our museums, every institution we value most, are laid bare to bombardment.”⁶⁸ Considering the vast concern and fear surrounding air power, the President did not want any shocking news to develop and panic the public.

⁶⁶ Truman Smith, 111.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 92-94.

A prime goal of the President was to keep the public calm. He “deliberately sought, with the collaboration of the mass media, to avoid controversy and to stifle national debate.”⁶⁹ Roosevelt ultimately wanted to stifle any shocking news, and he pushed propaganda that tried to illustrate that the government leaders in America were more than capable of handling any complex foreign policy decisions that came their way. Rather than pushing the public into anxiety over the unsettling events of the world, Roosevelt succeeded in producing a “dull, steady, pervasive drum of preparedness information emanating from every popular source of public education.”⁷⁰ Roosevelt manipulated the press in order to essentially “sell” his administration.

Roosevelt’s interference in the media went as far as to force the removal of press figures that were critical of his administration’s foreign policy stances. One of the most notable instances of the President’s influence on the media was when the White House caused the removal of one of CBS’s most popular news commentators, Boake Carter, for being critical of the Roosevelt administration. In contrast, figures that were far more derogatory towards the President’s rivals than Carter was against the administration, like Walter Winchell, were praised.⁷¹ Ultimately, the President saw foreign policy issues leading up to World War II to be too serious to be up for debate. Roosevelt thought he knew what was best for the United States and aimed to influence the public into offering the least amount of resistance to his agenda as possible.⁷² Considering the President’s attitude, the motive for covering up Smith’s reports is clear. In his effort to impress German buildup on American leadership, Smith actually doomed his own reports,

⁶⁹ Richard Steele, "The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940-1941," *The Journal of American History* 171, no. 1 (June, 1984): 69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1899834>.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 92.

because they were too alarming and unpalatable to be utilized in the Roosevelt administration's agenda.

Smith ultimately found himself at constant odds with the Roosevelt administration. If his reports being contrary to the agenda of the administration were not enough, Smith's association with Lindbergh ultimately caused him to be dragged into a fierce political battle. The rivalry between Lindbergh and Roosevelt had a deeply polarizing impact in the United States population. The rhetoric on both sides was radically misrepresentative of the other side, and Smith was made a target for his relationship with Lindbergh.

1939-1940 – Political Strife

Starting heavily in the summer of 1940, Smith began being attacked by several members in the Roosevelt administration as a Nazi sympathizer. Though labeled as a sympathizer, these accusations were fueled less by actual suspicions of Nazi sympathy and more so by a political grudge. The impact Smith's relationship with Lindbergh had on these attacks cannot be underestimated. Smith was dragged into a confrontation that started as early as 1934. In early 1934, after an investigation into corruption in commercial air lines and their contracts involving air mail, Roosevelt ordered an immediate halt on all commercial air mail. The task of transporting airmail he handed entirely to the Army. This order turned out to be a tremendous mistake by the President, and one of which Lindbergh quickly became a vocal opponent. Lindbergh, who at the time possessed fame and influence not matched by even the most famous of celebrities today, immediately spoke out against the President's painting of all commercial airlines with the same brush. Most of all, Lindbergh warned against the policy and predicted that

Roosevelt's hasty action compromised the safety of untrained Army airmen who were being volunteered for the airmail service.⁷³

Between February 1934, when Roosevelt instituted his ban on commercial airmail, and April 1934, twelve airmen had been killed due to their lack of training. By the summer, Roosevelt's ban on commercial airmail had effectively been lifted, and the entire situation "constituted a personal defeat for Roosevelt in the court of public opinion."⁷⁴ This interaction between Lindbergh and Roosevelt proved to be the beginning of a conflict which soon tore much of the country apart.

Roosevelt generally discredited any of his opposition as either ignorant or unpatriotic. Lindbergh certainly received this treatment. The President's priority through it all was to eliminate forces that would undermine his sway on public opinion. Roosevelt was extremely concerned with "not getting ahead" of public thought. In general, the President's agendas were fairly open-ended.⁷⁵ Rather than push detailed plans, Roosevelt tried to steer public opinion to where he thought it should be. This typical political strategy was not compatible with conflicting viewpoints. Alarming forces that could disrupt his efforts were either covered up, like Smith's reports, or combatted, like Lindbergh's rhetoric. When Lindbergh began giving his isolationist speeches, he was even approached with a bribe from the President. If Lindbergh decided to halt his speeches, the President would create a new Cabinet position for him.⁷⁶ Whether through bribery or smear campaigns, Roosevelt did everything he could to silence or discredit his opposition. These methods aimed at Lindbergh ultimately spilled over onto Smith.

⁷³ Kenneth Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years 1933-1937* (New York: Random House, 1986), 357-360.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁷⁵ McJimsey, 191.

⁷⁶ Lindbergh, 257.

In his memoirs, Smith lists influential gossip columnist and radio broadcaster Walter Winchell among his antagonists.⁷⁷ Winchell was opposed to everything isolationist. As he accused Lindbergh, who he named the “Lone Ostrich,” of being a Nazi, Winchell also sent messages to Roosevelt claiming that Smith was an “advisor on the Lindbergh speeches” and called Smith a “terrific Pro-Nazi.”⁷⁸ Famous broadcaster and journalist Dorothy Thompson, who like Smith was one of the earliest voices to speak out against Hitler, was openly skeptical of Smith as well.⁷⁹ The popular columnist and critic of public figures Drew Pearson was also outspoken about the questions surrounding Smith’s allegiances.⁸⁰

Smith was effectively lumped into the isolationist group which was being blasted in the media. Though some columnists directly attacked Smith, he also felt the pressure of the polar media war occurring in the United States. From gossip columnists to news broadcasters to even cartoonists, the media lost all objectivity. Even Dr. Seuss took merciless shots at Lindbergh. In his cartoons, Dr. Seuss repeatedly portrayed isolationists with the popular image of ostriches with their heads in the sand. Further than this, however, Seuss had multiple images published portraying Lindbergh as being in league with Nazi Germany.⁸¹

In addition to these influential members of the press who openly doubted Smith’s patriotism, many more columnists simply lumped Smith in with their criticisms of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁸ “Rose Bigman to Miss Lehand” July 8, 1940, Copy from Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, 12538.

⁷⁹ James Duffy, *Lindbergh vs. Roosevelt: The Rivalry that Divided America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2010), 190.

⁸⁰ Truman Smith, 30.

⁸¹ Richard H. Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 28-34.

Lindbergh. Shortly after Smith returned to the United States, Lindbergh began a long campaign to spread isolationism, in which he delivered speeches that were broadcasted across the nation and internationally in many instances. These opinionated broadcasts quickly became surrounded in controversy as the nation became split down the middle between isolationists and interventionists. Many columnists, particularly ones who had more liberal stances, were quick to point out how fond the Germans were of Lindbergh, and how all of his speeches were broadcasted and cheered for by Nazis.⁸² The extensive smearing of Lindbergh eventually created a perception of Smith that essentially made him “guilty by association” and made him receive most of the “echoed accusations that were hurled at Lindbergh.”⁸³

Smith was similarly associated with Lindbergh by prominent members of the Roosevelt administration. Among those whom Smith called the “New Dealers who wanted his scalp” were figures like Supreme Court Justice and personal friend of Roosevelt, Felix Frankfurter, who Smith claimed was fueling some of the press attacks.⁸⁴ White House Press Secretary under Roosevelt, Stephen Early, also spoke out against Smith.⁸⁵ Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, another critic, even approached General George Marshall to request that Smith be discharged from the Army.⁸⁶

Likely the most vocal opponent of Smith from the Roosevelt administration, however, was Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. Smith recalls an instance in 1940

⁸² "Within the Gates," *The Nation* 151, no. 10 (September 7, 1940): 193-194.

⁸³ James Duffy, *Lindbergh vs. Roosevelt: The Rivalry that Divided America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2010), 190.

⁸⁴ Truman Smith, 31, 34.

⁸⁵ Duffy, 190.

⁸⁶ Charles Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 352.

where Ickes, along with Justice Frankfurter, suggested to the President that Smith should be court-martialed.⁸⁷ Ickes helped to lead a unit in the Roosevelt administration which tracked the President's rivals.⁸⁸ Lindbergh described Ickes' actions as "spreading misinformation" in the "cheapest and most inexcusable sort of way."⁸⁹ The pressure being put on Smith was intense enough that Smith and his wife Kay became convinced they were being spied on and had their phones tapped.⁹⁰

The 1940 press attacks on Smith did not end until Bernard Baruch convinced the President to order a halt on the smear campaign. Baruch did this in league with General Marshall.⁹¹ Ickes did not give up, though; shortly after the President ordered a halt on members of the administration fueling press attacks on Smith, Ickes orchestrated a new attack. Smith soon found himself the subject of an investigation, because it had been reported Smith insulted and questioned the intelligence of the President at a cocktail party. This fabrication was later discovered to have been devised by Ickes, and was utterly disproven.⁹²

The heightened aggressiveness of Ickes was largely due to his staunch opposition to racism. Ickes was a vocal opponent of racial discrimination of all kinds,⁹³ and as history has documented well, much of Lindbergh's rhetoric was racially charged. Lindbergh was quite vocal in blaming Jews for trying to agitate the American public into

⁸⁷ Truman Smith, 31.

⁸⁸ Duffy, 182.

⁸⁹ Lindbergh, 518.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 405-406.

⁹¹ Truman Smith, 32.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹³ Harold Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes III: The Lowering Clouds 1939-1941* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 641.

moving towards war.⁹⁴ Ickes made it a priority to try to disrupt and nullify anything that had to do with Lindbergh. In his diary, Ickes expresses great jubilation when his smear campaign began to crawl under Lindbergh's skin.⁹⁵ In correspondence between Ickes and Roosevelt, Ickes described Lindbergh as a "ruthless and conscious fascist, motivated by a hatred for you personally and a contempt for democracy in general," to which the President responded: "What you say about Lindbergh and the potential danger of the man, I agree with wholeheartedly."⁹⁶ The seriousness of these feelings toward Lindbergh deeply impacted the perception of Smith in the Roosevelt administration. The FBI even kept a record of Smith in their file on Charles Lindbergh, in which they list Smith among potential threats as allegedly being "strangely pro-Nazi."⁹⁷ Ickes and his fellow critics felt they were doing their country a service by exposing those who, in their minds, were Nazi sympathizers.⁹⁸

The overall theme of Smith's career tends to be that an outstanding military man was dragged into politics against his will. Much like his patron General Marshall, who tried his hardest to remain separated from partisan politics, Smith maintained a marked aloofness to politics.⁹⁹ Even when he found himself being ridiculed and smeared, Smith kept his cool. During the attacks on him, Smith never once even responded. Throughout the attacks, Smith kept his head down and did his duty, and trusted General Marshall to take care of the attacks.¹⁰⁰ Though much of the small amount of history that includes

⁹⁴ Lindbergh, 538.

⁹⁵ Ickes, 581.

⁹⁶ Duffy, 211.

⁹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation: Freedom of Information-Privacy Act, "Charles Lindbergh," part 2C, <http://webharvest.gov/peth04/20041015230716/http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/lindberg.htm>

⁹⁸ Ickes, 581.

⁹⁹ Cray, 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ Truman Smith, 33-35.

Smith will remember him as “that guy” who brought Lindbergh to Germany, Smith’s career offers a variety of learning opportunities.

Conclusion

While contemporary sources try to isolate reasons why Smith’s reports were covered up, the reality remains that the poor reception of his reports was due to a diverse collection of domestic political factors. Smith was swept into political rivalries, and the value of his intelligence efforts was diminished. Smith’s case and the fate of his reports remind us that the polarized nature of politics in the early 21st century is hardly unique.

Even today, opinions vary concerning the events surrounding Smith’s career. Many of these differences relate directly to the diversity in views on the rivalry between Roosevelt and Lindbergh. The majority of research conducted specifically on Smith’s career tell a story of a dutiful officer who was treated unfairly by the Roosevelt administration; however, not all contemporary sources agree. Though the research focused on Smith is limited, examinations of the rivalry between Lindbergh and Roosevelt are not. In these works, Smith is often mentioned in passing, but these brief glimpses of his career are skewed based on the biases of the author concerned. In the majority of contemporary work, Smith is paired with Lindbergh; thus, the perception of Lindbergh is key in the portrayal Smith receives. Some authors praise Lindbergh’s contributions to Smith’s intelligence effort and subsequently admire Smith’s performance. Others label Lindbergh as the Roosevelt administration did, as a Nazi sympathizer, and include Smith in their accusations.

Charles Lindbergh stands as one of the most polarizing public figures in American history. Even today, historians bicker on whether or not he contributed to the United States or was little more than a traitor. These issues were magnified in the years leading up to World War II and ultimately caused Smith's intelligence work to be pushed aside in the midst of debates about matters other than the substance of his reports.

Looking back, Smith is not shy to admit his shortcomings. In his memoirs, Smith describes how his intelligence office completely overlooked the development of German missile technology. In addition, Smith recalls that through much of the early stages of German military buildup, the nature of German air tactics escaped him. Air forces had never before been utilized to support ground forces, and Smith did not realize the Nazi regime planned to use their mighty Luftwaffe in this way until late 1937. Smith considers this oversight a massive blunder in his memoirs.¹⁰¹

Despite these failures, the successes of Smith's intelligence efforts cannot be underestimated. Though his work on the German Luftwaffe is generally the focus of research due to Lindbergh's involvement, Smith also reported on German ground forces. The intelligence turned into the United States government regarding German ground forces by Smith was profoundly accurate. In addition to this, the work Smith accomplished on German air developments, with the help of Lindbergh, remained unprecedented. Smith was not without faults during his service, but his utilization of Lindbergh caused his intelligence to yield much more meaningful results than his foreign counterparts in Berlin. Despite the stellar content of Smith's reports, the United States government remained aloof to the gravity of Germany's military expansion.

¹⁰¹ Truman Smith, 164-165.

In the early 21st century, politics remain one of the most polarizing topics in existence. Vicious political disputes often take center stage in American politics over meaningful events occurring both domestically and internationally. Smith's story clearly shows this dividing effect is hardly a new occurrence. In addition, this case study offers as a cautionary tale about the importance of listening to opposing viewpoints, and it also gives insight into the dangers of allowing policy making to hinge on political agendas.

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