
FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

planned arms build-up could enable him to ditch the linkage strategy he has endorsed—permitting the United States to pursue arms control pacts on their merits and meet Soviet nonnuclear military challenges with prudent, yet credible threats of force.

*FDR's Covert
'Peace Plan'*

"A Presidential *Démarche*" by Richard A. Harrison, in *Diplomatic History* (Summer 1981), Department of History, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt is generally portrayed by scholars as a watchdog who couldn't bark much during the 1930s—an internationalist by inclination who was constrained by staunch isolationism at home. But Harrison, a Pomona College (Calif.) historian, writes that FDR once tried to organize a world peace conference where the democracies would unite to confront Hitler's "grievances."

In 1936, Roosevelt believed that it was up to the great democracies to present a unified front and keep the peace, by diplomatic, economic and even limited military means. Unable to take the lead himself, he considered England, economically strong and politically secure, the logical European alternative. But Britain's Conservative leaders preferred appeasement over resistance to Hitler's ambitions. Only by convincing London that it had a reliable silent partner could Roosevelt hope to "put some steel into the British spine." FDR's encouragement took several forms. He tried to defuse Anglo-U.S. trade disputes by promising closer political ties; he reached a currency-stabilization agreement with Britain and France; and he endorsed Britain's naval pre-eminence.

Several weeks after Germany's occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, Roosevelt launched his peace initiative. The conference he proposed, rather vaguely, would focus on economic themes (his way of securing U.S. involvement without inciting isolationist protest). If the final terms failed to satisfy the aggressor nations, he figured, most Americans would at least see clearly who the villains in Europe were. Roosevelt melted the skepticism of key British officials—even after he angered them by floating his plan to Hitler first.

Yet two obstacles remained. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, unaware of FDR's strategy, was vigorously pushing for trade concessions in bilateral Anglo-U.S. talks and irritating the British. Moreover, in November 1936, Neville Chamberlain was chosen Britain's new Prime Minister. Roosevelt cautiously tried to win over the anti-American, pro-appeasement leader. But a vaguely worded feeler was misinterpreted as a call for British disarmament and only convinced London of his unreliability. The idea was dropped.

Soon, appeasement's failure became increasingly clear to all. London and Washington finally drew together—not to preserve peace, but to prepare for the war even Chamberlain realized was inevitable.