

**'Franklin D Roosevelt and democracy promotion' in Michael Cox, Timothy Lynch and Nicolas Bouchet (eds) *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion*, Routledge, 2013**

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Franklin Roosevelt was no stranger to democracy promotion in its broadest sense. He was a member of Wilson's two administrations from 1913 to 1921 as Assistant Secretary of the Navy – a position that his distant cousin, former president Theodore Roosevelt, had occupied during the Spanish-American War of 1898. Needless to say, FDR was a very pro-active and ambitious Assistant Secretary who favoured a big navy and who, during the First World War, was an early advocate of aid to Britain and France. In 1920, helped by his illustrious name, he was chosen by the Democrats as their candidate for Vice President in the election of that year. A strong supporter of international cooperation, he campaigned vigorously for American membership of the League of Nations but went down to defeat in the Republican landslide associated with the US 'return to normalcy'. The Republicans remained in the ascendancy for the rest of the decade until the onset of the economic depression brought the Democrats back to power, led by Franklin Roosevelt. **(1)**

In February 1932, soon after declaring himself a candidate for the presidency, Roosevelt had been attacked by the Hearst press as an internationalist who would not stand up for American interests abroad. Fully aware of his political vulnerability during the upcoming election campaign as a member of the Wilsonian wing of the Democratic party, he made it clear in a speech to the New York State Grange that he no longer supported American membership of the League. 'The League of Nations today is not the League conceived by Woodrow Wilson', he said. Instead of dealing with issues of world peace it had become 'a mere meeting place for the political discussion of strictly European national difficulties' in which 'the United States should have no part'. The League had not developed in the way that Wilson had hoped and therefore, he said, 'I do not favour American participation'. Roosevelt's disavowal of the League upset Wilsonians in the Democratic party but it was an important step in his gaining the presidency. **(2)**

As president, Roosevelt - like Wilson and Bush - has had plenty of critics in terms of his contribution to democracy promotion. However, the most common criticism of FDR has not been that he intervened abroad too much but rather that he did not intervene enough, especially to assist the democracies of Britain and France in countering the rise of the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan in the 1930s. While few historians would deny FDR's central role in the victory of the Allies over the Axis powers in the Second World War, his early foreign policy has been roundly criticised by many as lacking in international vision. A common view is that he pandered to isolationism during his first administration and that it was not until his Chicago speech in October 1937, in which he talked about a 'quarantine' of aggressor states, that he began to show some leadership in international affairs and even

then, rather fitfully. **(3)** In view of Roosevelt's Wilsonian credentials and his pivotal role in the emergence of the USA as the leader of the free world by 1945, his presidency clearly constitutes an important case-study in terms of American democracy promotion and its place within the US foreign policy tradition. **(4)**

### **The Roosevelt Doctrine of 1936**

When Franklin Roosevelt became president in March 1933 his focus was very much on the the economic depression that had descended upon the USA and the rest of the world since 1929. In his Inaugural Address in March 1933 he mentioned the international dimension of the crisis but he said that he would deal with 'first things first' and that the emergency at home was his top priority. **(5)** In his now legendary One Hundred Days he launched the New Deal which involved an unprecedented burst of detailed legislation aimed at dealing with the banking crisis and combating unemployment. In July 1933 he sent his infamous 'Bombshell' message to the World Economic Conference meeting in London, thereby torpedoing negotiations for an international currency agreement. John Maynard Keynes may have called the president's policy 'magnificently right' but, for the governments of Britain and France, FDR's actions simply confirmed their views about US unreliability – views that had become commonplace following the Senate's rejection of the League of Nations in 1920. **(6)**

However, in a significant speech in honour of Wilson's birthday on 28 December 1933, he showed that he had not entirely forsaken Wilson or the League. Addressing the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Dinner in Washington DC, he began with an amusing reference to his time as Assistant Secretary of the Navy under Wilson. He also referred to Wilson's Mobile speech in March 1913 in which the president had said that 'the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest'. Roosevelt himself went further still and declared that 'the definite policy of the United States from now on is one opposed to armed intervention', particularly in relation to Latin America. More generally, Roosevelt lamented the continuing threats to world peace and – in contrast to his New York Grange speech – he praised the League for providing at least a forum for peace and for the work of its social and economic agencies. 'We are not members and we do not contemplate membership', he continued, but: 'We are giving cooperation to the League in every matter which is not primarily political'. **(7)**

Roosevelt's New Deal reforms continued to be the main focus of his presidency in his early years and formed the centrepiece of his State of the Union messages in 1934 and 1935. **(8)** But by the beginning of 1936 the international situation had become distinctly bleak and the reputation of Britain and France - the two leading European democracies and the backbone of the League of Nations – had fallen to its lowest ebb for many years. This was the context of FDR's third State of the Union Address on 3 January 1936 in which, for the first time, he focused on the threat to democracy at home and abroad. Whereas his Inaugural Address in 1933 and his first two State of the Union Addresses in 1934 and 1935 – overshadowed by

the great depression and focused on the New Deal - had said very little about world affairs, his 1936 address began with the international situation and devoted twenty paragraphs – almost half the speech – to this issue. The terms ‘democracy’ and ‘democratic’ were explicitly mentioned on five occasions, while their political opposites – ‘autocracy’ and ‘autocratic’ – were also referred to repeatedly. **(9)**

The reason for FDR’s new found emphasis on democracy was not difficult to discern. As Roosevelt himself said at the start of his 1936 speech, when he had delivered his Inaugural Address in March 1933 the crisis facing the USA was seen as almost an entirely domestic one. ‘The world picture was an image of substantial peace. International consultation and widespread hope for the betterment of relations between the nations gave to all of us a reasonable expectation that the barriers to mutual confidence, to increased trade, and to peaceful settlement of disputes could be progressively removed’. However, since the summer of 1933 the international situation had deteriorated so that ‘the people of the Americas must take cognizance of growing ill-will, of marked trends toward aggression, of increasing armaments , of shortening tempers – a situation which has in it many of the elements that lead to the tragedy of general war’. **(10)**

Hitler’s accession to power in Germany in January 1933 had led to a worsening of relations with France and had also accelerated the breakdown of the Disarmament Conference in Geneva in October 1933. This was followed by German withdrawal from the League of Nations and accelerated German rearmament in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. At first the growing military threat from Hitler had at least been tempered by the fact that Germany appeared isolated in Europe and at odds with Japan, the other main threat to global security in the early 1930s. But Japanese expansionism at the expense of China following the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 was now matched by the desire of Mussolini to create an Italian empire in North Africa. By August 1935 Mussolini’s designs on Ethiopia were clear for all to see and in October 1935 Italian forces launched an invasion of the country, which was a member of the League. **(11)**

Like many others, Roosevelt was greatly concerned by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia because it obviously increased the likelihood of a war in Europe that might eventually involve the United States, as had occurred in 1917. He was initially reassured when the British Government appeared ready to stand up to Italian aggression and to lead the League of Nations in employing economic sanctions against Italy. In his Geneva speech in September 1935 Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, appeared to underline Britain’s commitment to the League and to the principle of collective security. However, once war broke out the British Government became increasingly alarmed at the prospect that sanctions against Italy that might force Mussolini into a ‘mad dog’ act. It was in these circumstances that Hoare met Pierre Laval, his opposite number, in Paris in December 1935 and agreed to a ‘compromise’ plan whereby Ethiopia would make large territorial concessions to Italy in return for peace. When news of the so-called ‘Hoare-Laval pact’

became public on 9 December there was a worldwide reaction against it and Hoare was forced to resign. **(12)**

In the wake of the worsening international situation Roosevelt used his State of the Union Address on 3 January 1936 to deliver an outspoken attack on the dictator nations of Italy, Germany and Japan. Making it clear that he believed the threat to world peace came from nations 'dominated by the twin spirits of autocracy and aggression', he said: 'I recognise that these words which I have chosen with deliberation will not prove popular in any nation that chooses to fit this shoe to its foot'. But he thought they would be welcomed by what he called the 'peace-loving nations' of the world who were caught up in 'the kaleidoscopic jockeying for position characteristic of European and Asiatic relations today'. Roosevelt then went on to say (author's italics): *'The evidence before us clearly proves that autocracy in world affairs endangers peace and that such threats do not spring from the nations devoted to the democratic ideal'*. **(13)**

Roosevelt's declaration on behalf of democracy did not cause any great surprise in the USA at the time because very few Americans disagreed with it as a statement of fact. The main issue was how far the President would try to seek powers from Congress to discriminate between belligerents in a conflict in order to favour the democracies of Britain and France against the dictator states. It was well known that FDR wanted some degree of discretion in controlling the arms embargo introduced by Congress as a result of the resolution of August 1935 that sought to uphold US neutrality by banning the export of 'arms, ammunition and the instruments of war' to any belligerent in an armed conflict. In the event, FDR was persuaded by his allies in Congress that this would not be possible so he had to settle for a neutrality law passed in February 1936 that gave him very little discretion to discriminate against Italy. **(14)**

Unable to turn his rhetoric into reality, Roosevelt's State of the Union address in January 1936 has received relatively little attention from historians in terms of its significance for his foreign policy. This is despite the fact that he turned the event into an act of political theatre by delivering it in person in the evening surrounded by lights and microphones and much of the media. As one historian has written, 'Roosevelt transformed the usually dull occasion of the State of the Union message into a national spectacle'. **(15)** The only other occasion when a President had addressed Congress in the evening was on 2 April 1917, when Woodrow Wilson had asked for a declaration of war against Germany. Roosevelt's message contained obvious echoes of Wilson's assertion that 'the world must be made safe for democracy' but, unlike Wilson in 1917, Roosevelt perhaps showed more understanding towards the European democracies in achieving this goal. **(16)**

Can FDR's statement in January 1936 be regarded as a Roosevelt Doctrine on democracy promotion? Clearly it has not been recognised as such by historians in the same way that, for example, the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and the Truman Doctrine of 1947 have been recognised as presidential doctrines. Nor was Roosevelt's statement particularly original as

it obviously owed much to the legacy of Woodrow Wilson, amongst others. In fact, it could easily be referred to as the Wilson Doctrine except that historians have neglected to do so. It is also a classic statement of democratic peace theory, first championed by Immanuel Kant in 1795. **(17)** Notwithstanding these caveats, as an early declaration of the grand strategy that was to underpin the rest of his presidency Roosevelt's 1936 statement deserves much more attention from historians and political scientists than it has generally received. Not only does FDR's statement show that he was more concerned about the fate of democracy in Europe during the first term as president than is usually supposed but it also provided the basis for the development of his ideas on democracy promotion during the rest of his presidency. **(18)**

While FDR was not a great theorist he had a strong sense of history and of strategy. An examination of his annual messages to Congress and of other key documents such as the Atlantic Charter reveals that democracy was a constant theme in his rhetoric, especially from 1936 onwards. In fact, it is possible to identify at least four main aspects of democracy promotion that grew out of his 1936 message and therefore constitute a fuller version of the 'Roosevelt Doctrine'. Firstly, after 1936 he began to portray the Good Neighbour policy towards Latin America as an exercise in democracy promotion, in direct contrast to events in Europe and Asia. Secondly, he was not blind to the weaknesses of democracy and often referred to the need for economic and social reform at home as well as abroad, leading to his concept of the Four Freedoms. Thirdly, from 1936 onwards, as well as stressing the danger to peace from the dictator states, he increasingly implied the need for the USA to support the democracies of Europe who shared American values, especially Britain. The Atlantic Charter was an agreement between the two democracies on war aims but one that was mainly reflected New Deal thinking. Finally, when the USA joined the war at the end of 1941 Roosevelt began to call for a democratic and permanent peace based on the cooperation of the wartime allies in the form of the United Nations. In so doing he was very mindful of the fate of Wilson's League and determined that the lessons of the past would be learned.

### **Democracy and the Americas – the Good Neighbour policy**

If there is one area of the world where American presidents have felt free to promote their own version of democracy it is Latin America. But, at the very outset of his presidency, FDR explicitly rejected interventionism in 'America's back yard'. In his 1933 Inaugural Address he said: 'I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbour – the neighbour who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others'. **(19)** Hoover had also talked about being a good neighbour but during his presidency the US had refused to commit to a declaration of non-intervention. In December 1933, at the Montevideo conference, Cordell Hull, Roosevelt's Secretary of State, formally signed up to such a commitment in the Convention of Rights and Duties of States, albeit with a clarifying reservation. Thus in his 1934 address Roosevelt was able to say: 'We have, I hope, made it

clear to our neighbours that we seek with them future avoidance of territorial expansion and of interference by one Nation in the internal affairs of others. **(20)**

In his address on 3 January 1936, he went further and contrasted the state of the Americas with the rest of the world, especially Europe and Asia. 'At no time in the four and a half centuries of modern civilisation in the Americas has there existed – in any year, in any decade, in any generation in all that time - a greater spirit of mutual understanding, of common helpfulness and of devotion to the ideals of self-government than exists today in the twenty-one American Republics and their neighbour, the Dominion of Canada', said Roosevelt. 'There is neither war, nor rumour of war, nor desire for war. The inhabitants of this vast area, two hundred and fifty million strong, spreading more than eight thousand miles from the Arctic to the Antarctic, believe in, and propose to follow, the policy of the good neighbour.' **(21)**

Shortly after his annual address Roosevelt wrote to the presidents of the Latin American republics suggesting a conference to discuss ways of preventing wars in the Western hemisphere. The conference was held in Buenos Aires in December 1936 and Roosevelt, who had been greeted by rapturous crowds in Latin America, gave the opening address. The delegates adopted 'the Convention for the Maintenance, Preservation and Reestablishment of Peace' and as well as a protocol that broadened the meaning of non-intervention beyond the 1933 convention. **(22)** Roosevelt's 1937 address explicitly linked the happy state of the Americas with the democratic spirit he discerned during his Latin American trip. 'The very cordial receptions with which I was greeted were in tribute to democracy', he declared. 'In a very real sense', he continued, 'the Conference in Buenos Aires sent forth a message on behalf of all the democracies of the world to those nations which live otherwise. Because such other governments are perhaps more spectacular, it was high time for democracy to exert itself'. **(23)**

Of course, the republics of Latin America were by no means all model democracies living in peace with each other, as liberal critics of Roosevelt's Good Neighbour policy such as Carleton Beals were quick to mention. To Beals, the policy of the Roosevelt Administration towards Latin America was both hypocritical and patronising as at least some of the rulers of Latin America such as Trujillo in the Dominican Republic were as much tyrants and dictators, albeit on a smaller scale, as Mussolini or Hitler. Nor were the American republics slow to resort to arms against each other, as Beals pointed out. There was obviously much truth in such criticisms of the Good Neighbour policy and Roosevelt's lauding of the American republics no doubt owed a great deal to security concerns and the fear of Nazi or Fascist propaganda turning one or more of the republics against the United States. **(24)**

'Fortunate it is', Roosevelt declared in his 1939 address, 'that in this Western Hemisphere we have, under a common ideal of democratic government, a rich diversity of resources and of peoples functioning together in mutual respect and peace'. Then, referring directly to the security aspect of US policy in the Americas, he said: 'That Hemisphere, that peace and that

ideal we propose to do our share in protecting against storms from any quarter'. **(25)** Similarly, in his 1940 address he said: 'Twenty-one American Republics, expressing the will of 250 million people to preserve peace and freedom in this Hemisphere, are displaying a unanimity of ideals and practical relationships which gives hope that what is being done here can be done on other continents'. **(26)** In his 1941 address he stressed the danger to the Western hemisphere from Axis agents, many of whom, he argued, were already in Latin America preparing for an invasion. 'That is why the future of all the American Republics is today in serious danger', he said. **(27)**

Clearly security concerns were a major factor in FDR's policy towards Latin America and these increased yet further after the United States formally joined the world war in December 1941. Democracy promotion was an important element in the Good Neighbour policy but it took the form of promoting regional agreements amongst the American republics and accepting the principle of non-intervention by the United States in the government of individual states. Roosevelt maintained this principle throughout his presidency, unlike many American presidents before and since. The declaration he made against armed intervention in his Woodrow Wilson speech in December 1933 was a direct rejection of the Roosevelt corollary put forward by his namesake in 1908. **(28)** Thus the evidence of the Good Neighbour policy clearly suggests that FDR was opposed to military intervention in the affairs of the Latin American republics and preferred instead to focus on democratic co-operation between them. **(29)**

### **Democracy and reform – the Four Freedoms**

Although a great advocate of democracy in the Americas FDR was certainly not blind to its weaknesses in practice, not least in the United States where he was engaged in a constant struggle during his presidency to realise the aspirations of his New Deal programme of reform. He was also very conscious of the view – common in the 1930s – that liberal democracy could not cope with a major crisis such as the economic depression and that a dictatorship of the right or left was the most efficient method of government in such circumstances. He confronted these doubts in his first Inaugural address when he famously said to his fellow citizens that 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'. With the American political system seemingly on trial he declared: 'We do not distrust the future of essential democracy.' The people of the United States had not failed, according to Roosevelt, but their politicians had been found wanting and new leadership was required. **(30)** The need for reform at home was also a major theme in Roosevelt's 1934 and 1935 addresses. **(31)**

In his landmark 1936 address Roosevelt went further still by explicitly linking the situation in Europe and Asia with the need to embrace New Deal reforms at home in order to avoid the economic and social inequalities that led to the rise of dictators pledged to change the status quo, by force if necessary. In particular, the battle against autocracy abroad was linked to the struggle against economic autocracy at home. 'Within democratic nations the

chief concern of the people is to prevent the continuance or the rise of autocratic institutions that beget slavery at home and aggression abroad,' said Roosevelt. 'Within our borders, as in the world at large, popular opinion is at war with a power-seeking minority'. This was no new thing, according to Roosevelt. Rather it was the continuation of battles fought by previous presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. **(32)**

Roosevelt's address in January 1937, after his landslide re-election as President, continued this theme. Mentioning the word 'democracy' or 'democratic' no fewer than twenty times in a relatively short speech, he argued that social and constitutional reform was required at home. Referring to the crisis of 1933 he said: 'Ours was the task to prove that democracy could be made to function in the world of today as effectively as in the simpler world of a hundred years ago' And, echoing Lincoln, he declared that: 'The United States of America, within itself, must continue the task of making democracy succeed'. **(33)** He continued to stress the domestic threat to democracy shortly afterwards in his Second Inaugural Address when he referred to 'one third of a nation' being 'ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-fed'. **(34)** His 1938 address also restated the need to move ahead with the New Deal agenda. **(35)**

Roosevelt's 1939 address again included numerous references to the threat to democracy in the USA from abroad, which he now linked directly with American freedoms. 'Where freedom of religion has been attacked, the attack has come from sources opposed to democracy. Where democracy has been overthrown, the spirit of free worship has disappeared. And where religion and democracy has vanished, good faith and reason in international affairs have given way to strident ambition and brute force'. Roosevelt also linked this external threat to the need for internal reform in order to produce a united nation. 'A dictatorship may command the full strength of a regimented nation. But the united strength of a democratic nation can be mustered only when its people, educated by modern standards to know what is going on and where they are going, have conviction that they are receiving as large a share of opportunity for development, as large a share of material success, and of human dignity, as they have a right to receive'. **(36)**

In his 1940 address Roosevelt continued to stress the link between foreign and domestic policies. 'The social and economic forces which have been mismanaged abroad until they have resulted in revolution, dictatorship and war are the same as those which we here are struggling to adjust peacefully at home', he said. 'Dictatorships', he argued, 'have originated in almost every case in the necessity for drastic action to improve internal conditions in places where democratic action for one reason or another has failed to respond to modern needs and modern demands'. The peoples of other nations had the right to choose their own form of government, he continued. 'But we in this nation still believe that such choice should be predicated on certain freedoms which we think are essential everywhere'. Then, adding what could be seen as a corollary to his 1936 statement that associated democracy with peace and autocracy with war, he said: 'We know that we



ourselves shall never be safe at home unless other governments recognise such freedoms.’  
**(37)**

Roosevelt’s 1941 address has become known as the Four Freedoms speech. Declaring that the foundations of a healthy and strong democracy included economic and social rights such as employment for those who were able to work, he then linked those rights to ‘a world founded upon four essential human freedoms’ - freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear. **(38)** He also referred to these four freedoms in 1943. ‘The blessings of two of them’, he said, ‘freedom of speech and freedom of religion ...are an essential part of the very life of this nation; and we hope that these blessings will be granted to all men everywhere’. He then referred to the third freedom – freedom from want – which in domestic terms he equated with full employment after the war. He also said that it was necessary to strive for the fourth freedom – freedom from fear – which he said meant achieving a just and lasting peace through the United Nations. **(39)**

FDR’s concept of the Four Freedoms was an important part of his contribution to the promotion of democracy in its broadest sense. As with his Good Neighbour policy, it evolved gradually during his presidency, especially after his 1936 address, Although regarded as a statement of international policy, applicable ‘everywhere in the world’, it obviously had its roots in the New Deal and FDR’s view that economic and social reform was a prerequisite to the health of democracy at home as well as abroad. After FDR’s death the concept of the Four Freedoms was championed by Eleanor Roosevelt and was incorporated into the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. No doubt with FDR’s 1941 annual address in mind, this stated that ‘the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed the highest aspiration of the common people’. **(40)**

### **Democracy abroad – the Atlantic Charter**

When Roosevelt became president in 1933 few could have foreseen the emergence within less than a decade of an Atlantic alliance under his leadership. Such was the strength of isolationism at that time that any American involvement in the political affairs of Europe was out of the question, as Roosevelt acknowledged in his Woodrow Wilson speech in December 1933. Moreover, Britain and France, the two leading European democracies, had fallen out with the US over financial policy at the London Economic Conference in July 1933 and had defaulted on their war debts. **(41)** However, in his 1934 annual address Roosevelt made it clear that although the United States could not take part in any political arrangements in Europe, participation in economic and disarmament negotiations would be welcomed. **(42)** Later, in his 1935 address, mindful of German rearmament and Japanese expansion and anxious for regime change, he said he hoped for ‘the coming of new and more practical forms of representative government throughout the world’. **(43)**

Roosevelt's 1936 address went much further and made a clear distinction between what he termed the 'peace loving' democracies of Britain and France and the autocracies of Germany, Italy and Japan. It also implied a willingness to support the former against the latter as far as this was possible given the constraints of American isolationism. **(44)** With his re-election safely achieved, Roosevelt followed up his moral support for the democracies in his 1937 address, pointing out that 'in oligarchies, militarism has leapt forward, while in those nations which have retained democracy, militarism has waned'. **(45)** In his 1938 address he stressed the need for increased American defence spending and again attached the blame for worsening international relations to the autocracies. 'Disregard for treaty obligations seems to have followed the surface trend away from the democratic representative form of government' he said. 'It would seem, therefore, that world peace through international agreements is most safe in the hands of democratic representative governments – or, in other words peace is most greatly jeopardized in and by those nations where democracy has been discarded or has never developed'. **(46)**

During 1938 the democracies of Britain and France, desperate to avoid a European war, continued their policy of appeasement, resulting in the notorious Munich agreement that ceded the Czech Sudetenland to Germany. Roosevelt, like many other observers, suspected that the respite obtained from Munich would not last long. 'A war which threatened to envelope the world in flames has been averted', he said at the start of his 1939 address. 'But it has become increasingly clear that world peace is not assured'. Still constrained by the US Neutrality law he stressed the danger to US security posed by events in Europe. 'We have learned that God-fearing democracies of the world which observe the sanctity of treaties and good faith in their dealings with other nations cannot safely be indifferent to international lawlessness anywhere'. He then declared that: 'There are many methods short of war, but stronger and more effective than mere words, of bringing home to aggressor governments the aggregate sentiments of our people'. **(47)**

Amongst these methods short of war Roosevelt no doubt had in the mind the repeal of the US Neutrality law which prevented the belligerents in a conflict from obtaining 'arms, ammunition and the implements of war' from the USA. If a European war were to break out this would greatly handicap the democracies of Britain and France against Germany and Italy. He was unable to secure repeal before war began but shortly after, in November 1939, the arms embargo was replaced by 'cash and carry', which favoured Britain in particular. **(48)** However, there remained a strong body of isolationist opinion in and out of Congress and it was this group that Roosevelt challenged in his 1940 address. 'There is a vast difference between keeping out of war and pretending that this war is none of our business', he said. 'It is not good for the ultimate health of ostriches to bury their head in the sand.' **(49)**

Following the German blitzkrieg in May 1940 and the fall of France the following month FDR agreed to the destroyer-bases deal that gave Britain fifty over-age destroyers in return for

the use of bases in the West Indies and Newfoundland. **(50)** Roosevelt was taking a political risk in agreeing to this deal in a presidential election year but he went on to be re-elected for an unprecedented third term. In his 1941 address he argued that the democracies of Europe – primarily Britain – were the first line of defence for the United States and should therefore be supplied with the materials of war even when they had run out of money to pay for them. **(51)** This was a follow up to his ‘arsenal of democracy’ Fireside Chat a few days earlier and led to HR 1776, the Lend Lease Act, in March 1941. This allowed the flow of military aid to Britain and, subsequently, to the Soviet Union when it too was attacked by Germany in June 1941. In August 1941, before the USA had officially joined the war, Roosevelt and Churchill met on the USS Augusta, in Placentia Bay off the coast of Newfoundland, and produced a statement of democratic war aims that became known as the Atlantic Charter. **(52)**

In his remaining annual addresses FDR spoke in glowing terms of the role of Churchill and Britain in defending democracy, making specific mention of the Atlantic Charter in his last address in 1945. Referring to the incorporation of the principles of the Atlantic Charter into the Declaration of the United Nations in January 1942, he said: ‘It is a good and useful thing – an essential thing – to have principles toward which we can aim.’ **(53)** Historians have rightly attached great importance to the Atlantic Charter in the development of liberal internationalism after Woodrow Wilson. But the principles it advanced – such as ‘the right of all peoples to choose the government under which they will live’ and ‘assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want’ – were not new. They had evolved out of the New Deal domestic and foreign policies of the 1930s and had been set out in FDR’s State of the Union addresses since 1936. **(54)**

### **Democracy and peace – the United Nations**

When Roosevelt delivered his ninth State of the Union address in January 1942 the United States was at war with Germany, Italy and Japan and in alliance with Britain, Canada, the other countries of the British Commonwealth and also the Soviet Union. In the remaining annual addresses of his presidency, he therefore referred less to US support for the democracies and focused more on international co-operation in general, especially amongst what had already become known as the United Nations. In his 1942 address Roosevelt referred to the recent UN declaration. ‘Gone forever are the days when the aggressors could attack and destroy their victims one by one without unity of resistance’, he said. ‘We of the United Nations will so dispose our forces that we can strike at the common enemy wherever the greatest damage can be done him’. The ultimate result, Roosevelt declared, would be a victory for democracy, freedom and religion and for all of the values that Americans held dear. **(55)**

In his 1943 address Roosevelt, encouraged by the military progress of the United Nations during the previous year, looked forward to a peace settlement that would be informed by the lessons of the past, especially those associated with the League of Nations. ‘After the

first World War we tried to achieve a formula for permanent peace, based on a magnificent idealism', he said. 'We failed. But, by our failure, we have learned that we cannot maintain peace at this stage of human development by good intentions alone'. It was therefore vital that the United Nations remained united in order to prevent the rearmament of the Axis powers and to ensure that they abandoned their militaristic philosophy. To underline the need for regime change Roosevelt returned to the theme of democracy versus dictatorship that he had first highlighted in his 1936 address. 'The issue of this war is the basic issue between those who believe in mankind and those who do not – the ancient issue between those who put their faith in the people and those who put their faith in dictators and tyrants.' **(56)**

The need for Americans to enjoy a lasting peace after the sacrifices of the war was also highlighted by Roosevelt in his 1944 address. 'We are united in determination that this war shall not be followed by another interim which leads to new disaster – that we shall not repeat the tragic errors of ostrich isolationism – that we shall not repeat the excesses of the wild twenties when this Nation went for a joy ride on a roller coaster which ended in a tragic crash'. The mistakes of the last war had to be avoided, he said, including the mistake of not discussing the peace with leaders of other countries until the war was over. This was a major purpose of the recent wartime conferences with Churchill and Stalin. 'The one supreme objective for the future, which we discussed for each nation individually, and for all the United Nations, can be summed up in one word: Security". To achieve this security, said Roosevelt, a 'just and durable system of peace' was required. **(57)**

Roosevelt returned to this issue in his 1945 address, shortly after his re-election to a fourth term. He talked of creating a 'people's peace' and said that the recent Dumbarton Oaks conference had gone some way towards developing a 'democratic and fully integrated world security system'. He then looked forward to the year ahead. 'This new year of 1945 can be the greatest year of achievement in human history', he said. Not only could it witness the final defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. 'Most important of all – 1945 can and must see the substantial beginning of the organisation of world peace. This organisation must be the fulfilment of the promise for which men have fought and died in this war. It must be the justification of all the sacrifices that have been made – of all the dreadful misery that this world has endured'. **(58)**

Thus Roosevelt, like Wilson, staked American democracy promotion and his own legacy in international affairs on the establishment of an international organisation dedicated to upholding world peace. As many writers have observed, the United Nations owed much to the League of Nations that Roosevelt – like Wilson – had championed at the end of the First World War but that the USA failed to join. Its structure and machinery were indeed similar but Roosevelt enjoyed the benefit of hindsight and sought to avoid the mistakes made by Wilson and his contemporaries in setting up the League. His determination to do so was shown by his establishment of a group in the State Department under Cordell Hull to begin

the process of planning a post-war peace organisation as early as September 1939, just a few days after the outbreak of war in Europe. Roosevelt called Hull the father of the United Nations and Hull was later awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. But Franklin Roosevelt was in a very real sense the UN's godfather. **(59)**

### **Conclusions – FDR'S legacy for democracy promotion**

In January 1945, at the end of his twelfth and last annual message, Franklin Roosevelt concluded with the words: 'We Americans of today, together with our allies, are making history – and I hope it will be better history than ever has been made before'. **(60)** Few historians or political scientists would doubt the contribution that Franklin Roosevelt made to America's standing as a global super power or to the promotion of American democracy. Since his death in April 1945, he has regularly been rated by American scholars in the top three US Presidents, alongside Lincoln and Washington. In a recent poll of British academics specialising in US history and politics he came first, doubtless because of his international reputation, especially in the field of transatlantic relations. **(61)**

Not the least of Roosevelt's strengths was his ability to communicate with the American people, whether on great state occasions or in his 'fireside chats'. His twelve annual addresses on the State of the Union – together with his inaugural addresses - constitute an authoritative source for the development of his thinking as President from the dawn of the New Deal in March 1933 to the twilight of his presidency in January 1945. Of particular significance for American democracy promotion is his annual message of 3 January 1936 when his presidency symbolically changed gear and moved from one primarily focused on the New Deal and domestic concerns to one that became increasingly influenced by events in Europe and Asia and their potential impact on the Americas. The choice for American diplomacy identified in that speech between aiding democracy or dictatorship constituted the basis of a Roosevelt Doctrine that was directly descended from the Wilson presidency, under which he served.

Roosevelt elaborated upon this doctrine in his subsequent annual messages in four main ways. Firstly, his *Good Neighbour* policy was based upon the conviction that it was in the economic and security interests of the USA to avoid any semblance of military intervention against the countries of Latin America. He may have exaggerated the democratic credentials of his southern neighbours from 1936 as part of his rhetoric aimed at the dictators in Europe and Asia but under his leadership the USA was a better neighbour than it had ever been before. Secondly, he never abandoned his own liberal convictions and his belief that democracies, not least the USA, had to reform in order to survive. Hence the *Four Freedoms* that he advanced in January 1941 and championed at home and abroad during his wartime presidency. Thirdly, while he may have been slow to aid the democracies of Britain and France in the 1930s, as has been alleged, he began to develop the principles that were to underpin the *Atlantic Charter* long before August 1941. Finally, like Wilson, he put his faith in an international organisation to keep the peace and, rather fittingly, the *United Nations*

emerged from the Second World War as a reformed League under American leadership and based in New York.

Roosevelt died before the onset of the Cold War that led to the Truman doctrine of March 1947, advocating the containment of the Soviet Union and aid to countries threatened by Soviet communism. **(62)** Therefore we cannot know how far he would have modified his views on democracy promotion under the pressure of post-war realities, although he was certainly aware of the difficulties that lay ahead, especially over the future of Eastern Europe and he referred to these in his wartime addresses. But he also cautioned that international co-operation was 'not a one-way street' and pointed out that no nation could assume that it had 'a monopoly of wisdom or of virtue'. 'In a democratic world, as in a democratic nation,' he said, 'power must be linked with responsibility, and obliged to defend and justify itself within the framework of the general good'. It was therefore necessary to achieve international cooperation through compromise with nations that 'did not see and think exactly as we do'. **(63)**

What then would Franklin Roosevelt have made of the recent American policy of democracy promotion in Iraq and Afghanistan and its putative links with Wilsonian internationalism? Does the Roosevelt Doctrine of 1936, based on a significant Wilsonian heritage but subsequently elaborated under the very different circumstances of the Second World War, have anything in common with the democracy promotion advanced in the Bush Doctrine of 2003? Clearly there are similarities, not least FDR's view, often repeated in his annual addresses, that democracy in the USA would never be safe while there were powerful enemies abroad that did not subscribe to this ideology. Furthermore, no American president could have refrained from action against the government of Afghanistan after 9/11. But given Roosevelt's adherence to the non-intervention principle of the Good Neighbour policy, together with his authorship of the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms, it is difficult to believe that he would have supported a doctrine of pre-emptive action, especially in the case of Iraq - a war that was based on incomplete intelligence and that proceeded without a clear resolution of approval from the United Nations organisation that FDR had done so much to establish.

## ENDNOTES

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**(2)** Robert Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 18-19

**(3)** *Ibid.* 23-168. For the 'Quarantine' speech, 5 October 1937, see Richard Heffner, *A Documentary History of the United States*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (Signet, New York, 2009), pp. 391-396

**(4)** Tony McCulloch, "Franklin Roosevelt as Founding Father of the Transatlantic Alliance", *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Volume 8, 3 (September 2010), pp. 224-235 includes a brief historiography of Roosevelt's foreign policy in the 1930s

**(5)** FDR, First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1933, paragraph 13, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)

**(6)** For the London Economic Conference see Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 35-58; David M Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1999), pp. 155-157; Anthony J Badger, *FDR: The First Hundred Days* (Hill and Wang, New York, 2008), pp. 135-150

**(7)** Speech at Woodrow Wilson Foundation Dinner, Washington DC, 28 December 1933, Edgar B Nixon (ed), *Franklin D Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs*, Volume 1, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 558-563

**(8)** FDR, Annual Messages, 3 Jan 1934 and 4 Jan 1935, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)

**(9)** *ibid.* FDR, Annual Message, 3 Jan 1936, paragraphs 3-22

**(10)** *ibid.*, 3 Jan 1936, paragraphs 4-7

**(11)** McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt as Founding Father', pp. 224-235; Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 59-97; BJC McKercher, *Transition of Power: Britain's Loss of Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999), pp. 216-223; George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 2008), pp. 505-508

**(12)** *Ibid.* pp. 98-117;

**(13)** FDR, Annual Message, 3 Jan 1936, paragraph 22, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)

**(14)** Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 117-121

**(15)** Freidel, *FDR*, pp. 195-196

**(16)** Woodrow Wilson, War Message to Congress, 2 April 1917, [www.ourdocuments.gov](http://www.ourdocuments.gov)

**(17)** Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (Cosimo Classics, New York, 2005); Steven W Hook (ed) *Democratic Peace theory in Theory and Practice* (Kent State University Press, Ohio, 2010)

**(18)** For American presidential doctrines see Cecil V. Crabb, *The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Role and Future* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 1982)

- (19) FDR's First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1933, paragraph 15, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)
- (20) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1934, paragraph 19; see also Robert Holden and Eric Zolov (eds) *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2000), pp. 130-148
- (21) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1936, paragraph 5
- (22) Holden and Zolov, *Latin America and the United States*, pp. 149-150
- (23) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1937, paragraphs 33-36
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- (25) FDR's Annual Address, 4 Jan 1939, paragraphs 13 and 14, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)
- (26) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1940, paragraph 32
- (27) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1941, paragraph 27
- (28) Roosevelt, Speech at Woodrow Wilson Foundation Dinner
- (29) For FDR and Latin America see Haglund, *Transformation*; Holden and Zolov, *Latin America*; Frederick Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbour Policy* (University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 1995); Irwin Gellman, *Good Neighbour Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (John Hopkins University Press, 1979); Paul Drake, 'From Good Men to Good Neighbours, 1912-1932' in Abraham Lowenthal (ed.), *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore, 1991)
- (30) FDR's First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1933, paragraphs 4 and 52
- (31) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Addresses, 3 Jan 1934 and 4 January 1935
- (32) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1936, paragraphs 23 and 24
- (33) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1937, paragraphs 6 and 38
- (34) *ibid.* FDR's Second Inaugural Address, 20 Jan 1937, paragraph 28
- (35) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1938, paragraph 73
- (36) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 4 Jan 1939, paragraphs 10 and 31
- (37) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1940, paragraphs 5, 6 and 31
- (38) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1941, paragraphs 64 and 81-85



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- (42) FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1934, paragraph 20, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)
- (43) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 4 Jan 1935, paragraph 48
- (44) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1936, paragraph 13
- (45) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1937, paragraph 32
- (46) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1938, paragraphs 9 and 10
- (47) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1939, paragraphs 3, 22 and 23
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- (49) FDR's Annual Address, 3 Jan 1940, paragraphs 15 and 29, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)
- (50) Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 243-247; McKercher, *Transition of Power*, 296-298
- (51) FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1941, paragraph 54, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)
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- (56) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 7 Jan 1943, paragraphs 86 and 90
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- (58) *Ibid.* FDR's Annual Address, 6 Jan 1945, paragraphs 133 and 177-180

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