

## 2. Under Secretary of State: The Welles Plan and Reorganizing the Department, 1937-1938

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Welles's experience promoting the Good Neighbor Policy reinforced his commitment to collective action and underscored the importance of Washington's leadership in the Western Hemisphere. Yet his elevation to under secretary in the spring of 1937 enabled him to push for American leadership in the world at large. Immediately after his appointment, he moved to reorganize the State Department and endeavor to have Washington play a more active role in the coming world crisis through his promotion of the "Welles plan" of autumn 1937. He also grew even closer to the president, quickly emerging as a kind of alter ego on matters of foreign affairs.

Yet Welles's promotion to under secretary almost never happened. In the summer of 1936, when the position of under secretary became vacant upon the retirement of William Phillips, three assistant secretaries—Welles, Walton Moore, and Wilbur Carr—as well as their respective surrogates, aggressively vied for the job. The press described the behind-the-scenes infighting for the position as the "battle of the century," but Roosevelt loathed making decisions and the position remained vacant for almost a year. [1](#)

Within the State Department, factions split along the Welles vs. Hull fault line. Roosevelt clearly favored the appointment of Welles, but he was unsure how far he could push Hull, who remained hostile to the idea of the president's longtime friend becoming his immediate subordinate. United States ambassador to Italy Breckinridge Long noted in his diary that, "It seems to be the impression that Cordell wants Judge Moore as Under-Secretary and that the President wanted Sumner Welles. ... the President has probably ceased his advocacy of Welles and left it up to Hull, but [Welles and Moore] seem to have threatened to resign in case the other is appointed." [2](#) Carr, a diplomat largely associated with the Republican era now serving in a Democratic administration, was for the most part a serious candidate only in his own mind, while many observers assumed that the 76-year-old Moore had the obvious advantage. A former member of Congress from Virginia and a strong isolationist, he was considered one of the most loyal "Hull men" in the department. Thus Hull, and many of his most loyal lieutenants, enthusiastically backed Moore. William C. Bullitt, the former ambassador to the Soviet Union, now serving in Paris, also passionately backed Moore, whom he considered a mentor and father figure. Bullitt even undertook an expedition to Roosevelt's winter retreat at Warm Springs, Georgia, to plead Moore's case in person. [3](#)



Roosevelt settled the matter with one of his characteristic (if



less than satisfactory) compromises, sending two nominations to Capitol Hill in May 1937. Welles would take the prize of under secretary and Moore would revive the defunct position of state department counselor. The president believed he had achieved a solution that would soothe the passions of both factions, and he publicly announced that both men would occupy positions of equal rank and that they would receive equivalent salaries of \$10,000. But in reality, Moore gradually disappeared from the centers of power in the department soon after, his influence waning from the moment the president announced the appointments. Perhaps that was Roosevelt's intention all along. [4](#)

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Moore's backers, well aware that Welles would now wield immense power in the administration, tried to put the best possible face on the decision. "I congratulate you on your appointment as Under Secretary of State," Bullitt wrote to Welles from the Paris Embassy. "I had hoped that the post would go to Judge Moore who has been as kind to me as a father; but I am sure you know that you will have my fullest and heartiest cooperation and that I shall do everything I can to assist your work." [5](#)

To some Welles supporters, such as former Brain Truster Adolf Berle, Welles's ascendancy and Moore's virtual exile to oblivion represented a step toward a more effective and activist state department. "If Walton Moore is mildly sidetracked as counselor," Berle wrote, "we shall have systematic relations restored at all events." [6](#) Yet not everyone agreed with Berle's optimistic assessment—certainly not Moore and his most enthusiastic partisans. Cordell Hull fretted over Welles's close relationship with the Roosevelts. In a letter to Bullitt, Moore expressed his displeasure with the new arrangement and predicted that Welles would find a way to expand his power in every area of the department and take over as acting secretary in Hull's absences. [7](#)

Moore's concerns were well founded. Welles took quick advantage of his new power and strove to muscle Moore out of his way. With Roosevelt's acquiescence, Welles's promotion gave him new and broad responsibilities, and he immediately moved to expand his control over the department by purging it of real and imagined opponents. Much of this occurred over the protestations of Hull, who continued to resent Welles's eagerness to bypass the normal chain of command. [8](#) Prominent New Dealer Rexford Tugwell recalled that "FDR saw more of Sumner Welles than Hull," and that the president "confided in the younger man and entrusted him with missions and maneuvers he would not allow Hull even to know about." [9](#)

Despite every effort to restrain Welles's growing power, Hull's various ailments soon forced him to turn the department over to Welles for long periods at a time, despite Moore's futile attempts to serve as acting secretary. [10](#) And as Hull's health continued to decline during the second

term, Roosevelt increasingly relied upon Welles to run the department and carry out his aims. While convalescing, Hull would receive occasional briefings over the telephone from Welles, nothing more. Many outside the administration soon took notice of this remarkable state of affairs. "The State Department has two actual bosses," noted a *Newsweek* story in 1938. "A strange team, these co-bosses differ in type as much as they differ in philosophy." [11](#)

In his new role as under secretary Welles established daily contact with the president, sending Roosevelt frequent memos and speaking with him regularly on matters related to the department and the world. With his enhanced responsibilities, he and Roosevelt began having informal daily meetings, either in the president's office or residential study, or over dinner at the White House or at Welles's home. As correspondence and memoranda flowed back and forth between the two men on a daily basis, the bonds of loyalty grew stronger. The president encouraged such personal contacts and, as Welles continued to operate independently with the president, he became a more powerful figure in the administration, exerting increasingly greater influence. [12](#)

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The promotion to under secretary also took his relationship with the president to another level. He and Roosevelt deepened and enriched a remarkably harmonious and productive partnership, one that would continue for the next six tumultuous years until Welles's resignation in 1943. In Welles, Roosevelt found an eager conspirator in his effort to sidestep Cordell Hull and provide for more flexibility in his foreign policy options. Yet Welles also became a bold, experimental, hardworking, and creative talent as under secretary. Also crucial to the president was his long experience in foreign affairs, which was unrivaled among Roosevelt's closest associates. Welles could be discreet and, perhaps most important, he would almost always seek some means to accommodate his own aims to those of the president. Roosevelt felt a philosophical and perhaps even cultural kinship with him that enabled a closeness between the two men that was lacking between Roosevelt and Hull. After all, their lives—with their New York, Groton, Harvard, and Wilson-era Washington chapters—paralleled in innumerable and remarkable ways.

Welles's friendship and compatibility with the first lady also aided his efforts. When Eleanor Roosevelt felt that something needed the attention of the State Department, she communicated directly with him, bypassing Hull. "It was only with the president's promotion of Welles to the under secretaryship," recalled Eleanor's friend Joseph Lash, "that Eleanor began to feel a genuinely sympathetic presence in the department." [13](#) His position also gave him new opportunities to serve as a valued source for influential members of the Washington press corps such as Pearson, Walter Lippmann, Anne O'Hare McCormick, and James Reston. "Sumner Welles is an extremely satisfactory man to interview," noted Henry Luce. "His mind is clear and precise. He has not the slightest hesitancy in telling you exactly what he thinks—or at any rate, what he says he thinks. He never hurries you, but you

feel you should not waste a minute of the time of a man who wastes so little himself." [14](#)

After his confirmation by the Senate, Welles immediately moved to reorganize the State Department, playing bureaucratic hardball to reward allies and punish potential enemies while putting his personal stamp on the departmental bureaucracy. He folded the Latin American and Mexican Divisions into one American Republics Division to be headed by his loyal assistant Laurence Duggan, whose appointment would allow Welles to continue by proxy his domination of Latin American policy. He next ousted Robert Kelley, who for years had been chief of the Eastern European Division and a staunch anti-Soviet who had influenced policy toward Russia for nearly two decades. Welles combined Kelley's division with the Western European Division and created a new creature to be headed by his friend and former Groton schoolmate, J. Pierrepont Moffat. Welles exiled Kelley to a post in Turkey.

Welles also sought to protect and promote his favorites in the State Department, and he asked the president to find posts for his staunchest allies. He further cleared his own path in the department by orchestrating the removal of other officials, banishing several to postings abroad, and demanding that all embassy personnel submit their public statements to him for prior approval. Seeking to maximize his influence over foreign economic policy, he endeavored, despite threats of resignation by Secretary of Commerce Daniel Roper, to have the Commerce Department stripped of its Bureau of Domestic and Foreign Commerce, which had served as a springboard for Herbert Hoover's intrusion into foreign affairs in the Harding and Coolidge administrations. [15](#)

He further extended his power in the department by arranging senior appointments for outside allies such as Adolf Berle and Norman Davis. The Anglophobic Berle, a precocious former member of the Brain Trust who graduated from Harvard with honors at the age of seventeen, had a reputation for arrogance. The short, white-haired Norman Davis was a lifelong diplomat and an old friend of Welles. Their relationship dated back to when Davis was under secretary of state during the last years of the Wilson administration. Both Berle and Davis would prove to be valuable allies in the years ahead. [16](#)



As the months passed, Welles and Hull executed an unofficial division of departmental responsibilities. Welles would run the day-to-day operations of the department, handle most personnel matters and relations with the press, oversee inter-American affairs, and have the upper hand over European matters. Hull attempted to direct American policy in East Asia (although Welles intruded even there), desired to lead the department's relations with Congress, and struggled to keep pace with Welles in the rest of

the world. Thus, Welles had succeeded in achieving the kind of unequal division of the spoils that Hull, Moore, and Bullitt had originally feared. [17](#)

Welles immediately began seeking a way for Washington to play a more assertive diplomatic role in averting the growing world crisis. He feared that continued threats to the global equilibrium would be injurious to American interests. This goal anticipated and dovetailed with Roosevelt's halting attempts during the first half of 1937 to pursue a more active foreign policy. To that end, Welles thought the administration should make clear to the world that the United States would not stand aside, but would instead act affirmatively to avert another war. [18](#)

After a number of conversations with the president, he proposed ways of restoring a sense of international order during a nationally broadcast speech from the University of Virginia on July 7, 1937. The very day of this address, the world crisis escalated when fighting broke out between Japanese and Chinese troops ten miles west of Peking. [19](#) In his remarks, Welles outlined methods for the United States to contribute to world peace without violating the provisions of the neutrality laws. He expanded upon the concept of America's vital interests by reminding his audience that if war broke out anywhere in the world, the United States could not long stay clear of its consequences. Implying that the inter-American system offered a suitable model for emulation, he laid down four areas in which the United States might take the lead. These included the establishment of a set of vaguely Wilsonian "international standards," the reduction of global trade barriers, the limitation of armaments, and the regular convening of international conferences. [20](#)

Throughout 1937, Roosevelt and Welles resolved to focus the nation's attention on the increasing perils of the global situation. The president told Welles he had been immensely pleased by the active role of the U.S. at the December 1936 Inter-American conference in Buenos Aires, where the delegates pledged collective action to safeguard the hemisphere. Roosevelt thoroughly enjoyed what had amounted to his debut on the international stage. He and Welles shared the desire to pursue a more assertive role in world affairs, and during his first summer as under secretary he and the president began discussing the possibility of erecting a naval barrier, or "quarantine," around Japan if it continued its threatening behavior toward China. When Welles departed for his annual visit to Europe in the late summer of 1937, Roosevelt asked him to broach secretly with various European officials their receptivity to a possible U.S. peace initiative. Roosevelt was still smarting over the hostile reaction to his court-packing fight. He wanted to avoid further controversy in the immediate future, but he continued to seek avenues for a larger U.S. role on the international stage. [21](#)

A presidential address in Chicago in the autumn of 1937 offered just such an opportunity. With Welles still overseas, Norman Davis prepared a speech for Roosevelt that hinted at the possibility of a firmer foreign policy. On October

5, at the dedication ceremonies for Chicago's Outer Link Bridge, Roosevelt called upon the United States to play a leading role in organizing the other nations of the world to secure peace by placing a quarantine around aggressor nations, making this address—hereafter known as the "quarantine speech"—one of the most controversial he had ever delivered. The president warned that, because another war would "engulf states and peoples remote from the original scene of hostilities," Washington must become active in the search for peace. These seemingly innocuous words had great significance, for it seemed to mark a break from his previous statements virtually endorsing the isolationist cause. [22](#)

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Welles returned from Europe only a few days before the quarantine speech and endorsed it enthusiastically, later describing it as "something you could get your teeth into." [23](#) Yet Roosevelt was somewhat surprised by the degree of criticism the address provoked, and Welles lamented that within the cabinet only Harold Ickes, Henry Morgenthau, and Henry Wallace expressed their support. Welles thought the speech offered an opportunity to restore international equilibrium and henceforth sought to maintain the momentum by drafting a more specific plan of action. [24](#)

The following day, October 6, he proposed that the president demonstrate American leadership by hosting diplomatic representatives from all nations at the White House on Armistice Day—only one month away—and then urge adherence to "basic standards of international law" which would restore "world order." The president should then call for sweeping arms reductions, the lowering of international trade barriers and the unity of the neutral powers in quarantining aggressor nations. The suggestions followed the points made in his July 1937 speech in Charlottesville. He hoped the proposal would send a message to the world that the United States was prepared to play a more assertive role in world affairs, even going so far as to seek a revision of the Versailles settlement. [25](#) Yet his proposal provoked opposition from Hull, who said he would soon offer his own alternative suggestions for pursuing the aims expressed in Roosevelt's speech. Hull believed the president should avoid doing anything that might alarm the great powers or disturb domestic opinion. [26](#)

The president nevertheless took a keen interest in Welles's plan and encouraged him to proceed. This was a remarkable turn of events. Roosevelt's decision in favor of Welles further underscored his growing influence in the administration, while demonstrating Hull's increasing irrelevance. Welles proceeded apace. He told Roosevelt that, while the plan would "definitely strengthen the hands of the powers that are seeking to avert world anarchy," its references to "the probable need for readjustment of the settlements arrived at after the conclusion of the World War would, I think, almost inevitably create a favorable reaction on the part of Germany." [27](#)

The president endorsed Welles's plan because it appeared to offer a middle

way to continue the quest for peace without military or political commitments that could antagonize Congress and the isolationist elements of the press and public. "From the standpoint of public opinion at home," he wrote to Roosevelt, "I would think that your making this proposal four days before the opening of the Special Session of Congress would put a very definite quietus upon those individuals who have been deliberately attempting to misinterpret your Chicago speech." <sup>28</sup> He drafted an address for the president to deliver at the Armistice Day gathering, laying out the plan's essential points. <sup>29</sup> "If we get out of this business without a war," Adolf Berle confided in his diary, "it will be principally due to Sumner. He is the only one who apparently keeps his head working aside from his emotions." <sup>30</sup>

Welles understood that the plan still had numerous obstacles to overcome, particularly within his own department. To bring Hull around to his point of view, Welles enlisted the help of his friend Norman Davis, who also enjoyed Hull's confidence. Welles hoped that Davis's support and encouragement might induce Hull to lessen his opposition. Welles thus arranged to have Davis sit with Hull during his presentation to the secretary on the details of the plan. <sup>31</sup> Hull expressed no opposition to the plan during Welles's briefing, but privately thought the plan "thoroughly unrealistic" and "illogical and impossible," and labored to obstruct it by demanding that Welles first secure British backing. Hull worried that to "spring" the plan on London and Paris without warning might seriously jeopardize their efforts to appease Hitler and Mussolini. As Hull later remarked, "Welles kept pushing the President on, while I kept urging him to go slow." <sup>32</sup>

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Hull's objections succeeded in momentarily stalling Welles's plan, and several weeks passed before the president would once again give it his full consideration. <sup>33</sup> After being lobbied by Norman Davis in January 1938, Roosevelt, while keeping Hull's misgivings in mind, decided to revive a slightly amended version of Welles's plan. Hull still opposed calling a conference of any kind and instead pushed for a new trade treaty with Britain. Welles objected to Hull's approach, arguing that it overlooked the fact that the political questions involved were just as important as the economic ones. But Hull stuck to his position that, if the economic problems were resolved, the political questions would soon follow. To Hull's increasing dismay, Roosevelt once again sided with Welles. "I understand the President backs Sumner's plan," Berle wrote. "I agree with Sumner in this, though it is not a clear case: there are dangers either way, but I think less by following Sumner's plan than by taking the Secretary's view." <sup>34</sup>

To obstruct the latest version of Welles's proposal, Hull repeated his demand that Welles seek the support of London before proceeding with any plans for an international conference. Welles abhorred the involvement of the British and feared that Prime Minister Chamberlain would block his plan, but he nonetheless proceeded to arrange a series of meetings with British Ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay. Welles knew it would be difficult to sell the

plan to the British. Writing to Bullitt in Paris, Welles had already warned that "Lindsay told me in a confidential vein, which, as you know, is a vein quite rare with him, that he felt his own Foreign Office had for some little time been verging upon a state of hysteria, and that Chamberlain was more than ever determined to conduct foreign policy himself without the intromission of the F.O." [35](#)

In an effort to win British support for his proposal, Welles dined with Lindsay on the evening of January 11 and explained Roosevelt's enthusiasm for the plan. He told Lindsay of the president's concern over the deteriorating world situation and his desire to work more closely with London to align world opinion behind the proposal. Welles said Roosevelt believed that the international situation was now sufficiently perilous to offer the opportunity to change American opinion through public diplomacy. Lindsay, apparently convinced, cabled the Foreign Office that Welles's plan offered "a genuine effort to relax the tension of the world, to stop the prevalent deterioration and to restore the influence of the democracies." Lindsay hoped his government would get behind the proposal as a way of gently influencing American public opinion. [36](#)

Yet the plan continued to meet with considerable opposition in London, where British officials were already somewhat wary of Welles. The foreign office had recently protested what it interpreted as Welles's public characterizations of the British and French as being largely responsible for the current breakdown of international comity, and Chamberlain harbored concerns that Welles's plan had the real—if unstated—intention of eliminating Britain's imperial preference trade regime. Worse still, Germany and Italy might get wind of Welles's plan and seek to exploit its features that might be contrary to British interests. Chamberlain's suspicions may also have been aroused by the circulation of the Foreign Office's secret annex of its profile of Welles, which ominously described him as an "intriguer" and a "hard-boiled individual" who aimed to block British interests. [37](#)

The Welles plan exposed disagreements at the highest level of the British government. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden supported Welles's plan, fearing that its rejection would be a fatal setback to the cause of better Anglo-American relations. Eden feared the consequences if Chamberlain completely scuttled the plan, and he noted in his diary that one of the prime minister's "chief objections to Roosevelt's initiative was that with its strong reference to International Law it would greatly irritate the dictator powers." [38](#) Sir Alexander Cadogan, the deputy under secretary at the Foreign Office, noted that Chamberlain "hates" Roosevelt's plan, "but I tried to point out that we mustn't snub him." Writing to the prime minister, Cadogan added: "FDR's readiness to enter the arena is obviously a fact of the first importance, and I should say that we must not discourage him, although the prospects of the success of his system are problematical and the risks, maybe great." [39](#)

Chamberlain remained unmoved. He had Ambassador Lindsay tell Welles

that the British desired a postponement of his proposal, to which Welles protested vehemently. Yet he continued to have an ally in Eden. [40](#) The foreign secretary went to great lengths to promote Welles's plan. Pushing for support for the plan before the cabinet in late January, Eden warned against the "alienation of popular opinion in the U.S." But Chamberlain replied that the American plan offered "nothing new" other than merely "old principles" which the prime minister feared would "most likely be unpalatable to the Dictator States" and would undermine any attempt "to bring about world appeasement." [41](#)

Eden failed to sway the prime minister. "What a fool Roosevelt would have looked if he had launched his precious proposal," Chamberlain later wrote. "What would he have thought of us if we had encouraged him to publish it, as Anthony was so eager to do? And how we, too, would have made ourselves the laughing stock of the world." [42](#) Chamberlain's rejection of Welles's plan had important consequences in London. Within a few weeks, Eden resigned from the cabinet, ostensibly over the prime minister's appeasement of Italy, but perhaps also, as Eden claimed in his memoirs, due to Chamberlain's refusal to take Welles's plan more seriously. [43](#)

The prime minister's response dismayed Roosevelt and Welles, both of whom viewed it as a crippling setback to their effort to shape public opinion and have the U.S. play a larger role on the world stage. Welles later called Chamberlain's opposition a "douche of cold water," but after the war he would place most of the blame on Hull. "The truth is," Welles wrote a decade later to Roosevelt's assistant Samuel Rosenman, "the failure of that first attempt of President Roosevelt to exert American influence in Europe as a means of arresting the rapid disintegration that was then going on was due far more to Mr. Hull than to Mr. Chamberlain." [44](#)

Years later, Welles summarized his differences with Hull over the plan when he wrote that "the Secretary of State was temperamentally disposed to put off dealing with controversial issues as long as possible. He preferred not to cross the proverbial bridge until he came to it. A remedial policy was to him preferable to a preventive policy, even though, as events so often showed, a preventive policy adopted at the psychological moment and carried out with decision and dispatch might later save a world of remedy." [45](#)

Winston Churchill would later describe the Welles plan as the "last frail chance to save the world from tyranny otherwise than by war." [46](#) Yet Churchill's comment is exaggerated. Had Welles's plan proceeded, it most likely would have been disregarded by Berlin, just as was every other diplomatic proposal made during these years. Nevertheless, the plan might have had limited success by incrementally changing U.S. public opinion, and it might have allowed the president a greater role in pushing for U.S. leadership in efforts to avert the world crisis. Had Welles's plan gone forward and been rejected by Berlin, it might have had some success even if it had

only increased America's psychological commitment to Britain and France.

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Welles would later recall the late 1930s—and the administration's inability to act affirmatively in the international arena—as a "nightmare of impotence and of frustration." <sup>47</sup> He assumed Hitler's aims were not based upon long-term planning but upon case-by-case opportunism. Welles wanted Washington to act affirmatively because he thought Hitler would continue to carefully read the mood of the other great powers before determining how far he could advance. Welles held to the belief that a demonstration of allied unity might give Hitler some reason to pause. <sup>48</sup>

At a number of times during 1938 and 1939, Welles endeavored to revive his proposal for an international peace conference, particularly during the Munich crisis in September 1938 and again after Germany annexed Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939. But events in Europe now had their own momentum, and for the most part officials in Washington merely watched from the periphery. <sup>49</sup> The Welles plan thus represented the most concentrated effort by the United States to reduce world tensions prior to the outbreak of war.

On the night of September 2, 1939, only a day after Hitler had launched his invasion of Poland, British Ambassador Lord Lothian dined with Welles at Oxon Hill and told the under secretary that London would declare war the following day. Welles's immediate focus was not so much on Europe, but the Western Hemisphere, where he aimed to recast the Monroe Doctrine to safeguard the Americas. He acted at once to organize an inter-American conference in Panama, hoping to obtain hemispheric approval for policies designed to keep the war as far as possible from the Americas. Welles had received alarming intelligence reports of German work on a bomber capable of attacking the Americas from the Azores. In strategic terms, Welles believed the security of the United States was intimately linked to the safety of the entire Western Hemisphere and its adjacent waters. <sup>50</sup>

Borrowing a concept from Wilson's First World War diplomacy, the State Department created a hemispheric security zone to keep shipping lanes and lines of communication open, and the president called for an extension of the three-mile limit to one thousand miles. "It really does change the status of the New World," Berle wrote, "a kind of *pax Americana*." <sup>51</sup> Welles then attended the Panama Conference, and he saw its proceedings and the accompanying declaration that confirmed the United States' views on hemispheric security as the capstone of the Good Neighbor Policy. Welles thought the New World could teach the Old World a few lessons about reordering world politics. In his speech before the delegates at Panama, he called upon the neutral American republics, led by the United States, to show the way toward a "reestablishment of a world order based on morality and on law" that would restore peace to the Old World. "We have created an American system," he told the delegates, "an American way of life, which is our chief contribution to world civilization." <sup>52</sup>

Immediately after his appointment as under secretary, Welles had emerged as a driving force behind the administration's reorientation of its foreign policy. The main features of Welles's 1937 peace plan—asserting U.S. leadership for the promotion of collective security, free trade, and the calling of regular international conferences—had been the cornerstones of Welles's "American system" and the Good Neighbor Policy. By applying these principles to the international crisis, Welles had sought to demonstrate their utility on a larger stage. But he faced opposition from the British and a lack of enthusiasm at the top level of his own department. The plan also had other problems. Welles's aims needed to be tempered by political realities, for even if the British acquiesced there were no guarantees the American people would have given their support. Isolationist feeling remained strong.

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Yet while Welles and Roosevelt retreated for a time, they would continue to search for ways for Washington to play a more active role in the world crisis, and Welles would continue to speak publicly about creating "a new world order" modeled upon the Good Neighbor Policy and his "American system." What neither Roosevelt nor Welles realized—and failed to realize until the German invasion of France and the Low Countries in May 1940—was that the opportunity for a diplomatic or political solution to the crisis had long since passed.

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### Notes:

**Note 1:** "Undersecretary of State Welles," Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, Record Group 59, National Archives; Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 509-510; Graham H. Stuart, *The Department of State: A History of its Organization, Procedure and Personnel* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 328-329. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** Breckinridge Long Diary, February 15, 1937, box 5, Long Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. As a backup, Welles considered purchasing a newspaper in Baltimore, and he even contemplated running for the U.S. Senate from Maryland. Incumbent Democrat Millard Tydings, who was up for reelection in 1938, had earned the wrath of President Roosevelt for not sufficiently supporting the administration's legislative program. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 509-510; *New York Times*, March 20, 1937. The British foreign office, tracking the controversy, noted that Welles "has vanity and ambition and occasionally falls into the errors which these qualities may lead to. He has no sentimentality and his manner is stiff and reserved, but once the exterior is penetrated he is a good man to do business with." See FO 371/21541 "Records of Leading Personalities in the U.S.," January 12, 1937, PRO. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** *Congressional Record - Senate*, 1937, vol. 81, May 20, 1937; *Time*, May 31, 1937; Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 510. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** Bullitt to Welles, May 28, 1937, box 39, folder 12, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Berle Diary, April 26, 1937, box 210, Berle Papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** Orville H. Bullitt, ed., *For the President, Personal and Secret: Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 214-215. [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1972), 11-12. [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** Rexford Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 622 [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** FO 371/21541 "Records of Leading Personalities in the U.S.," January 12, 1937, PRO. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** Jesse H. Stiller, *George S. Messersmith: Diplomat of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 136; *Newsweek*, June 6, 1938. [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 546; "Undersecretary of State Welles," Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, Record Group 59, National Archives. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** Joseph Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship* (New York: Norton, 1971), 571 [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** John K. Jessup, ed., *The Ideas of Henry Luce*, (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 349. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** "Reorganization of the State Department, 1937," box 43, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, June 18, 1937, box 149, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles, "Draft Circular Telegram," July 7, 1937, box 149, folder 9, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** Raymond Moley noted that while Berle once may have been considered an infant prodigy, he continued to be an infant long after he had ceased to be a prodigy. Ted Morgan, *FDR: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 346. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** Graham H. Stuart, *The Department of State*, 328-330; "Summary," Under Secretary Welles file, Overall History of Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, War History Branch Studies, 4E3, 6/29/D, box 1, Record Group 59, National Archives. [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** Sumner Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History* (New York: Harper, 1950), 8. [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** Sumner Welles, "Present Aspects of World Peace," July 7, 1937, speech files, box 194, folder 10, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** FO 371/20808, July 9, 1937, minute by Eden, British Public Record Office [PRO]; FO 371/20666, Lindsay to Foreign Office, July 10, 1937, PRO. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** Welles to Sam Rosenman, June 17, 1949, box 140, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL; Sumner Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 71-72; *Washington Star*, September 13, 1937; *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 1937. [Back.](#)

**Note 22:** *New York Times*, October 6, 1937; Welles to Sam Rosenman, June 17, 1949, box 140, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL; "Outerlink Bridge Dedication," October 5, 1937, FDR Speech Files, #1093, FDRL; Chautauqua Address, August 14, 1936, FDR Speech Files, #889, FDRL; *New York Times*, October 6, 1937. [Back.](#)

**Note 23:** Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 13. [Back.](#)

**Note 24:** Memorandum by Welles, October 6, 1937, President's Secretary's Files 76, FDRL; Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 13-18. For an interpretation of the Welles plan that argues that it was an alternative to Roosevelt's quarantine speech, see Dorothy Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 412-413. For the view that the president had a specific plan in mind, one consistent with Welles's proposal, see John McVickar Haight, Jr. "Franklin D. Roosevelt and a Naval Quarantine of Japan," *Pacific Historical Review* 40:2 (May 1971): 203. [Back.](#)

**Note 25:** Welles later argued that the plan aimed to assist the ongoing Brussels conference (see Welles, *Time For Decision*, (New York: Harper, 1944), 65), but at the time Welles told the president that the plan "should be dealt with independently of any other conference, consultation, or exchange of views." See Welles to Roosevelt, October 9, 1937, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL. Arnold Offner and Frederick Marks see the Welles plan as part of a larger policy of American appeasement during these years. See Arnold Offner, "Appeasement Revisited: The United States, Great Britain, and Germany, 1933-1940," *Journal of American History* 64:2 (September 1977): 379; and Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (New York: Norton, 1969), 191-192; as well as Frederick Marks, *Wind Over Sand: The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 136-137. [Back.](#)

**Note 26:** Welles to Roosevelt, October 6, 1937, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, October 9, 1937, PSF 76, FDRL; Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 547-548; Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 23-27. [Back.](#)

**Note 27:** Welles to Roosevelt, October 26, 1937, PSF 76, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 28:** Welles to Roosevelt, October 26, 1937, PSF 76, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 29:** In the statement he prepared for the president to deliver, Welles wrote, "It is possible that before the foundations of a lasting peace can be secured, international adjustments of various kinds must be found in order to remove those inequities which exist by reason of the nature of certain of the settlements reached at the termination of the Great War." See Welles to Roosevelt, "Draft Proposal for Concerted International effort to Reach Common Agreement on the Principles of International Conduct Necessary to Maintain Peace," October 26, 1937, FRUS, vol. I, 668-670. [Back.](#)

**Note 30:** See Welles's original blueprints for the "Welles plan", October 1937, box 162, folder 5, Welles papers, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt: "Draft Proposal for Concerted International effort to Reach Common Agreement on the Principles of International Conduct Necessary to Maintain Peace," October 26, 1937, FRUS, vol. I, 668-670; Berle Diary, October 13, 1937, box 210, Berle Papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 31:** Sumner Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 20-21. [Back.](#)

**Note 32:** Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 547-548; Donald Drummond, "Cordell Hull," in *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Graebner (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 200. [Back.](#)

**Note 33:** Berle Diary, December 2, 1937, box 210, Berle Papers, FDRL; Welles memorandum to Roosevelt, January 10, 1937 [actually 1938], FRUS, 1938, vol. I, 115-17. [Back.](#)

**Note 34:** Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 546-549; Berle Diary, February 7, 1938, box 211, Berle Papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 35:** Welles to Bullitt, December 1, 1937, box 39, folder 12, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 36:** Welles memorandum to Roosevelt, January 10, 1937 [1938], FRUS, vol. I, 115-17; Chamberlain to Roosevelt, January 14, 1938, *ibid*, 120-22; Welles draft of Roosevelt to Chamberlain, January 17, 1938, FRUS vol. I, 126-30; Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 624. [Back.](#)

**Note 37:** Memorandum by Welles, October 6, 1937, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL; CAB 23/92 (38) 1, January 24, 1938, PRO; FO 371 21541 "Records of Leading Personalities in the U.S." January 12, 1937, PRO. [Back.](#)

**Note 38:** Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 634-636. [Back.](#)

**Note 39:** *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, ed. David Dilks

(London: Cassell, 1972), 36; FO 371/21526, Cadogan to Chamberlain, January 12, 1938, PRO. [Back.](#)

**Note 40:** Eden later said of Welles that he had "known no man in the United States who had a clearer perception than he of the course of international diplomacy in the last years before the second world war" (sic). Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 645. [Back.](#)

**Note 41:** Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 624, 635; CAB 23/92 (38) 1, January 24, 1938, PRO; CAB 23/92 (38) 6, February 19, 1938, PRO. [Back.](#)

**Note 42:** Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1993), 3. [Back.](#)

**Note 43:** Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1948), 199; Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 560; for another account asserting that Chamberlain's opposition to Welles's plan led to Eden's resignation, see also Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, vol. 3, 1931-1963 (London: Collins, 1974), 298-299, 300, 302. Eden's efforts on behalf of Welles's plan established a bond of sorts between the two men, and in December of 1938, long after Eden had left the cabinet, Welles hosted a luncheon in Eden's honor at Oxon Hill Manor, inviting, among others, Henry Wallace, Henry Morgenthau, Woodrow Wilson's widow, Edith, and William C. Bullitt. Interestingly enough, the press in both Britain and the United States often referred to Welles as an "American Anthony Eden." [Back.](#)

**Note 44:** Welles, *The Time For Decision*, 66; Welles to Rosenman, June 17, 1949, box 140, folder 7, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 45:** Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 134-135. [Back.](#)

**Note 46:** Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1, 199. Eden put it somewhat more modestly: "The growing tendency for confidential Anglo-American discussions on a deteriorating world scene, which I had been doing my best to encourage, was clumsily nipped." Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 627. [Back.](#)

**Note 47:** Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 1. [Back.](#)

**Note 48:** Welles to Joseph E. Davies, March 21, 1938, box 45, folder 4, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 49:** Welles to Steve Early, March 29, 1939, President's Secretary File 76, FDRL; Welles to Roosevelt, March 29, 1939, President's Secretary's File 7, FDRL; Welles draft of Roosevelt speech on Czech crisis, March 29, 1939, President's Secretary's File 76, FDRL. For accounts arguing that Roosevelt's policies had almost no effect on German foreign policy during these years, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting the Second World War, 1937-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and E. M. Robertson, "Hitler's Planning for War and the Response of the Great Powers," in *Aspects of the Third Reich*, ed. H. W. Koch, (New York:

St. Martin's Press, 1985), 196-234. [Back.](#)

**Note 50:** Sumner Welles file, "Conferences and Missions: Conference at Panama," Overall History of the Department of State, 4E3, 6/29/D, Box 1, RG 59, War History Branch Studies, National Archives; Welles, "On the Margin of War," delivered at the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the American Republics, Panama, September 25, 1939, speech files, box 194, folder 13, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 51:** Berle Diary, August 26, 1939, box 210, Berle Papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

**Note 52:** Welles, "On the Margin of War," delivered at the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the American Republics, Panama, September 25, 1939, speech files, box 194, folder 13, Welles papers, FDRL. [Back.](#)

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