

**What was the Relationship between Military Power and International Order  
in the 1920s and 1930s?\***

Joseph A. Maiolo  
King's College London

The classic story of the relationship between military power and international order in the 1920s and 1930s is one of failure. According to this interpretation, the Paris peacemakers of 1919 imposed a draconian peace on their defeated enemies, above all Germany, and yet failed to put into place the military might and security alliances necessary to enforce it. As the French historian Jacques Bainville put it, the peace of 1919 was 'too gentle for what is in it that is harsh'.<sup>1</sup> The international stability of the 1920s was thus premised on an optimistic illusion about the future military balance. It rested on the temporary weakness of Germany, the German government's willingness to abide by the severe restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, and the false promise of the League of Nations and ill-conceived plans for disarmament to guarantee peace.<sup>2</sup>

According to the classic interpretation, the reluctance of the Paris peacemakers to face up to the necessities of military power was compounded by similar strategic and geopolitical failures in the 1930s. When Germany, Italy and Japan challenged the international status quo with threats of force and war, the statesmen of Britain, France and United States did too little too late to win the arms races of Europe and East Asia and, thereby, failed to deter the Axis powers from starting the Second World War. As one noted historian put it, the 1930s teaches us 'the danger of not arms racing'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For surveys of the historiography, see Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser, eds., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and more recently Robert Gerwarth, 'The Sky beyond Versailles: The Paris Peace Treaties in Recent Historiography', *The Journal of Modern History* 93/4 (2021), 896-930.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918-1933* second edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) and her, 'Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany and the Versailles Treaty, 1918-1921', *Journal of Modern History* 85/3 (2013), 632-59.

<sup>3</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London: Allan Lane, 1998), 82-3.

This essay reassesses the relationship between armaments and world order in the era of the world wars and challenges the classic interpretation. It also offers a critique of recent studies of the League of Nations. Many historians now interpret the foundation of the Geneva-based institution and the rise of various internationalisms in the 1920s as the decisive moment of inception of the institutions of global governance as we know them today.<sup>4</sup> My chief criticism of this more positive interpretation of 1920s internationalism is that it neglects the strategic dimensions of international order and thus misinterprets the goals of the peacemakers of 1919. As I will argue, it is impossible to explain why the international system of the 1920s and 1930s was unstable without analysing the uneasy relationship between the changing military balance and world order.<sup>5</sup>

This essay is divided into two parts. Part one will analyse the role of military power in international order in the 1920s. I will argue that the post-war peacemakers had a more coherent and sophisticated approach to perpetuating their supremacy than scholars have often assumed. That approach failed because the Great Depression of the early 1930s shattered its foundations. In the second part, I will explore how the onset of a global arms race destabilised international politics in the 1930s and how it shaped the military strategies of the great powers in the run up to the Second World War. Contrary to the conventional historical wisdom, France, Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States armed early enough and with sufficient resources in response to the threat posed by the Axis powers. However, winning the arms race did not prevent war.

The place to begin is the coming of war in the summer of 1914. What began as a diplomatic dispute in the Balkans that many statesmen had hoped would be resolved with few quick victories evolved into a global conflict among all the great powers. The stalemate on the battlefield turned the conflict into a protracted contest of competitive economic and social mobilisation – the mobilisation of people, farms, factories, and raw materials. As this ‘total war’ escalated, the combatants slowly built huge bureaucratic organisations to maximise economic mobilisation and to allocate resources efficiently. Germany’s

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<sup>4</sup> The positive shift in assessments of the League of Nations was prompted by Susan Pedersen’s essay ‘Back to the League of Nations,’ *American Historical Review* 112/4 (2007), 1091-117. Also see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> For a general study of importance of armaments in global politics, see Barry Buzan and Eric Herring, *The Arms Dynamic in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

opponents always had an edge in productive capacity, which grew once the US entered the war. That edge alone, however, did not bring victory. What was decisive for the allies was their collective dominance of the global economy. Britain's centrality to the preceding half century of economic globalisation offered the allies the ability to shift resources and to share the burden of the attrition warfare while denying their foes access to international credit, commodities, and shipping. Although the German war economy became the post-war model for a 'modern' centrally planned economy, above all for Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks, it was in fact superior inter-allied economic management as well as access to superior resources that won the war.<sup>6</sup>

The spectre of total war cast a long shadow over the 20th Century. It shaped the rules, norms, and organisation of international politics in ways that are often overlooked. The 1914-18 war confirmed a geopolitical trend that had preoccupied many politicians, economists, and intellectuals well into the Cold War – the idea that the globe was dividing into a few giant economic-imperial blocs. As the historian Sven Beckert has shown, this trend was first articulated by Europeans alarmed at what they described as the 'American Danger'. From the 1870s, the transformation of United States into a single continent-spanning market, self-sufficient in raw materials, food, fuel, and a flourishing industrial base convinced many in Europe that the continent had to unite with colonial Africa into a giant economic bloc to match America or accept terminal decline.<sup>7</sup>

The expectation that the territorialization of industrial capitalism would promote the formation of a few continent-sized empires expressed itself with brutal clarity in the war aims of the major combatants. Famously, the historian Fritz Fisher sparked a public debate in 1961 by claiming that Germany's aim of turning continental Europe into a German ruled economic bloc (*Mittleuropa*) was uniquely aggressive. Subsequent research has shown that rather than driving Germany to start a war in 1914, thoughts of economic security only came to dominate thinking in Berlin once the war began. And that

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<sup>6</sup> Theo Balderston, 'Industrial Mobilization and War Economies', in John Horne, ed. *A Companion to World War I* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 223-24; Mark Harrison, 'Why the Wealthy Won: Economic Mobilization and Economic Development in Two World Wars', *The Economics of Coercion and Conflict* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2015), 67-98; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-8, 87-102.

<sup>7</sup> Sven Beckert, 'American Danger: United States Empire, Eurafrika, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism, 1870-1950', *American Historical Review*, 122/4 (2017), 1137-70. Also see Joshua Derman, 'Prophet of a Partitioned World: Ferdinand Fried, "Great Spaces," and the Dialectics of Deglobalization, 1929-1950', *Modern Intellectual History* 18/3 (2021), 757-81.

was true of the other great powers. As the French historian Georges-Henri Soutou argued, economic security was the core war aim of all the combatants. Indeed, the twenty-one demands that Japan presented to China in January 1915 were part of the larger scramble for economic security initiated by the crisis of 1914. President Woodrow Wilson's administration focused on US economic dominance in the western Hemisphere and feared that American exporters would be shut out of global markets if the war in Europe ended in the formation of two great protectionist economic blocs, one dominated by Britain and France and their allies and the other by Germany and its allies.<sup>8</sup>

The American fear that the war might end in a military stalemate but continue with undiminished intensity as an economic war between two powerful imperial blocs was real enough. In June 1916, at a meeting in Paris the allies declared their intention to control the post-war trade in raw materials and to implement discriminatory trade measures against *Mitteleuropa*. Although Russia and Italy still wanted access for their farmers to German markets once peace returned, British and French officials agreed to wage what British officials described as the economic 'war after the war'.<sup>9</sup>

In 1917 the American entry into the war and Russia's exit from it a year later sharpened French thinking about a post-war alliance to contain the German empire, which had made huge gains at Russia's expense. The French hoped to attract the Americans into an 'economic union of free peoples' founded on the June 1916 Paris Declaration. That union – or Atlantic community as some French officials called it – would see wartime allied economic cooperation in the form of inter-allied committees and commodity cartels continue in peacetime to keep in check German economic and military power.<sup>10</sup> As we know, this Atlantic community (arguably precursors to NATO and the European Union) did not materialise. A prime reason why it did not form was that in 1918-19 the German empire – along with the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires –

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<sup>8</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'Or et le sang: les buts de guerre économiques de la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order 1916-1931* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 46-67; Guoqi Xu, *Asia and the Great War: A Shared History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 38-45.

<sup>9</sup> Soutou, *L'Or et le sang*, 233-305; Richard A. Smith, 'Britain and the Strategy of the Economic Weapon in the War against Germany, 1914-18' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Newcastle, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, "A New Economic Order": Etienne Clémentel and French economic diplomacy during the First World War', *French Historical Studies* 10/2 (1977), 315-41; Peter Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 173-77.

collapsed. Once the threat of a German *Mitteleuropa* was removed and the continental empires fell apart, the principal incentive for the victorious maritime empires to form a permanent Atlantic alliance to wage economic war was also removed.

Another important reason why an Atlantic community to enforce the peace failed to materialise was American policy. President Woodrow Wilson took the US into the war not as an ally of Britain, France, Russia, and Italy - but an 'associated' power; he declared American policy as one of 'peace without victory'; and sought to remove all barriers to US trade and finance in the post-war world. Rather than making the wartime alliance of victors a permanent institution, a new international forum – the League of Nations – would be responsible for promoting peace through arbitration and collective security.<sup>11</sup> The classic interpretation of the period blames the instability of the 1920s and 1930s on Woodrow Wilson's naïve conception of international politics, particularly his faith in the force of world public opinion as expressed through the League to halt future wars. Some scholars have portrayed Wilson as much more of a Machiavellian politician who aimed to secure American world supremacy and 'open door' access to overseas markets through the exercise of overwhelming US financial power.<sup>12</sup> His failure stemmed from his inability to convince the US Congress to ratify American entry into the League of Nations and to commit the United States to French security against future German aggression.

Each of these interpretations has some truth to it. But the problem with all of them is a preoccupation with Woodrow Wilson. I argue that scholars need to look beyond the American President's lofty rhetoric and contradictory goals and instead focus squarely on the concrete outcomes of peace making. After all, the building of a new global order did not begin and end in 1919: it continued well into the 1920s and encompassed the Washington Conference of 1921-22, the Franco-German *détente* of 1925 and, most importantly, the rebuilding of the global economy. And, despite disputes among the British, French, and American officials over war debts and reparations, the map of Europe and France's security needs in the 1920s, the outcome of the peace-making process did much to entrench the imperial and economic supremacy of the big three victors.

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<sup>11</sup> Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order 1916-1931* (London: Allan Lane, 2014), 3-67; Ross A. Kennedy, 'Four New Takes on Wilson, World War I, and the Making of the Post-war Order', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41/7 (2018), 1058-70.

In terms of outcomes, the first point to appreciate is that Britain and France succeeded in achieving their aim of curbing German economic power by stripping it of people, territory, and its pre-1914 commercial advantages. When combined with the cap set on the size of the German military, these economic disadvantages curtailed German rearmament in the 1930s. Second, although Italy was an ally in the anti-German coalition, the British, French and Americans did not hesitate in 1919 to curb Rome's ambition to build an economically self-sufficient formal and informal empire stretching from Georgia in central Asia, the Black Sea, to the Balkans and parts of Anatolia.<sup>13</sup> The Paris Peace was primarily designed to contain German power, but much to the frustration of the Fascist regime in the 1920s, Italy too was successfully contained. Third, the 1919 settlement confirmed that if indeed the future of global order belonged only to a few great imperial-economic blocs, then the three victorious liberal empires would be among them. Britain and France expanded their colonial empires and legitimised that expansion through the mandate system of the League of Nations. And, the Monroe Doctrine, US supremacy in the western Hemisphere, was recognised in the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Some scholars who agree that the victors achieved a geo-political and strategic triumph in 1919 usually argue that that victory was squandered because the allies failed to remain united in the face the post-war crises. Some suggest that the French proposal to form an 'Atlantic community' based on the inter-allied economic committees formed in the war could have provided the basis for an enduring alliance, one that would have given the French the confidence they needed to reconcile with the Germans and greatly reduce its demand for war reparations from Germany. Again, these scholars focus on President Wilson. They criticise him for insisting that the allies repay their American war debts, and for rapidly dismantling the machinery of inter-allied economic cooperation. While those criticisms of American foreign policy are certainly valid, ending the analysis with them overlooks a much more fundamental point about how the post-war settlement sustained the power of the big three winners of the 1914-18 war.

Officials in London, Paris and Washington understood that it was allied economic superiority that won the war. They knew that their future power would rest on

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<sup>13</sup> Stefano Marcuzzi, *Britain and Italy in the Era of the First World War: Defending and Forging Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Antonio Varsori and Benedetto Zaccaria, eds., *Italy in the New International Order, 1917-1922* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020).

perpetuating that dominant position. The question – and it was a deeply ideological question - was how? For French officials the idea of harnessing state power to command the global economy to archive security was compatible with economic liberalism and constituted a type of ‘organised liberalism’. French political and economic elites saw the state as a vehicle of progress. On a pragmatic level, the French also had to consider their relative economic and demographic weakness vis-à-vis Germany and the loss of their ally in the east, Imperial Russia. In June 1916 the British had been willing to contemplate a perpetual economic offensive against Germany waged in cooperation with its allies but the collapse of the German empire and US entry into the war shifted British thinking back to what we now strongly associate with classical liberal economics – a world shaped by free markets, free trade, and private business.<sup>14</sup> The Americans saw the June 1916 Paris declaration as a threat to their global trade. Given their relatively short but divisive experience of state intervention in the economy during the war, the US also wished for a swift return to what President Harding famously called ‘normalcy’.<sup>15</sup>

From the Anglo-American perspective, the French idea of an Atlantic community would make the supremacy of the victors formal, overbearing, and antagonistic to other states. It would permanently militarise the world economy. And, to work it would require inter-governmental institutions and coordination – something that Britain and the US sought to avoid. While no politician at the time stated it this plainly, the strategy of London and Washington was to make the economic-military supremacy of the victors informal and latent rather than conspicuous and burdensome. If wealth won the last war, then restoring the conditions of global trade and finance that had made the liberal empires wealthy made good strategic sense. Of course, it is important to emphasize that in 1919-20 the peacemakers of Britain, France and the US sought to prevent future total wars, not to wage them.<sup>16</sup> In an international crisis, their financial, commercial, and maritime strength could be swiftly mobilised under Article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant to

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<sup>14</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, “libéralisme organisé”: un programme national et international’, in Marie Christine Kessler and Guy Rousseau, eds., *Etienne Clementel (1864-1936): politique et action publique sous la Troisième République* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018), 355-74; Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Hannigan, *The Great War and American Foreign Policy, 1914-24* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Sakiko Kaiga, *Britain and the Intellectual Origins of the League of Nations, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

sanction an aggressor. Before 1914, a blockade was an act of war. After 1919 economic sanctions became a legitimate tool to enforce order.<sup>17</sup> It was no coincidence that the victors were also commanded the largest navies – in other words the only powers capable of policing the international order with the new economic weapon.

To make sanctions work, the big three victors possessed another source of latent strength. The global distribution of commercially available raw materials favoured the US, Britain and (less so) France. As commentators at the time pointed out, the uneven distribution of natural resources including iron ore, coal, oil etc. constituted the ‘resource hierarchy’ in world politics. In the 1920s geographers, economists, and journalist wrote many studies of the strategic implications of the ‘resource hierarchy’, illustrated with tables showing which powers were among the so-called ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, and the League of Nations undertook efforts to make international markets work to make the hierarchy irrelevant in peacetime.<sup>18</sup> Wartime of course was a different matter. As many of the interwar academic studies showed, only the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union had the industrial potential, secure access to natural resources and food to wage total war successfully and to be among the world’s future superpowers.<sup>19</sup>

While French officials had wanted to organise a coalition to wage an ‘economic war after the war’ to contain Germany, it was the Anglo-American policy of drawing a clear line between war and peace and rebuilding the pre-1914 global economy that won the day. Achieving economic stability was a long, arduous, and ultimately a flawed process that climaxed with the Great Depression. A post-1919 boom was followed by bust, deflation, hyper-inflation in some places, and an unstable recovery in the newly formed Soviet Union and in East Asia. Restoring free flows of trade and finance was not simply a

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<sup>17</sup> For a compelling analysis of the reconceptualization of blockade to sanctions, see Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Erich W. Zimmermann, ‘The Resource Hierarchy of Modern World Economy’, *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 33 (1931), 431-63; Karl W. Kapp, *Memorandum on the Efforts Made by the League of Nations towards a Solution of the Problem of Raw Materials* (Geneva: Geneva Research Center, 1937).

<sup>19</sup> For a contemporary analysis of the strategic divide in raw material distribution, see Brooks Emeny, *The Strategy of Raw Materials: A Study of America in Peace and War* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 1-37. See also William E. Rappard, *The Common Menace of Economic and Military Armaments* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1936). For a more comprehensive analysis between economics and the origins of the war, see Richard J. Overy, ‘Economics and the Origins of the Second World War’, in Frank McDonough, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War: An International Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 482-506.



technical problem that could be solved by the application of textbook formulas. It was a deeply ideological process that defined itself in opposition to what most political elites in London, Paris, Washington and beyond saw as the principal threats to liberal capitalism and liberal imperialism: namely, experiments in international economic control (often described pejoratively as ‘global socialism’) as advocated by some League of Nations enthusiasts and the spread of the Bolshevik revolution.

The principles and practices of this restored liberal capitalism were agreed at two international meetings of economists, bankers, and officials from thirty countries, the 1920 Brussels and the 1922 Genoa world economic conferences. The resolutions of the two meetings proclaimed a new world order of balanced budgets, free trade, and stable exchange rates to be achieved through the swift resurrection of the gold standard system. A rebuilt global monetary order would push governments out of domestic and world markets and reassert the independence of central banks from national treasuries and politicians. Budgetary rigour and financial orthodoxy went hand in hand with calls for states to slash military spending and to abandon ‘uneconomical’ practices such as food, fuel, and transportation subsidies. Balancing public finances had to come before social welfare.<sup>20</sup> The rebuilding of the international gold standard was central to implementing the Genoa vision of small governments, free markets, free trade, and austerity. As you may know, during the war only the US dollar remained fixed to gold. All the other combatant powers suspended gold exports and issued paper (fiat) money to pay for the war. In the 1920s, the return to the global network of gold backed money took place in several waves, with Britain returning in 1925, France in 1926 and Italy in 1927. American loans and financial expertise helped Germany back to gold in 1924. League of Nations financial experts in cooperation with US, British and French bankers orchestrated the return to gold for Poland, Austria, Hungary, and other small European states.<sup>21</sup> For the victors, rebuilding the gold standard system had several advantages. Its operation created

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<sup>20</sup> Michel Fior, *Institution globale et marchés financiers: la Société des Nations face à la reconstruction de l'Europe, 1918-1931* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008); Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, 11-24; Clara E. Mattie, ‘The Guardians of Capitalism: International Consensus and the Technocratic Implementation of Austerity’, *Journal of Law and Society* 44/1 (2017), 10-31.

<sup>21</sup> Barry Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System* Second Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 6-90; Patria Clavin, ‘Men and Markets: Global Capital and the International Economy’, in Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms*, 97-101; Nathan Marcus, *Austrian Reconstruction and the Collapse of Global Finance, 1921-1931* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

a single transnational marketplace which they would dominate. Just like the nineteenth century gold standard system, the interwar gold-based monetary order did not require a world bank or monetary hegemon to work: instead, a de-politicised network of central bankers (financial technocrats) kept it functioning. Through deflation and austerity, the return to gold also reinforced existing social and political hierarchies in the capitalist world. Finally, gold-backed money inhibited excessive military spending by forcing the gold countries to adhere to a strict budgetary discipline. In that light, it is not surprising that the only successful agreement on arms control – the 1922 Washington naval treaty – placed limits on the most expensive weapons of the period.<sup>22</sup>

I do not want to convey the impression that everything in the 1920s was unfolding smoothly according to a grand design agreed by the big three victors. In 1923 for example the Republic of Turkey successfully challenged the Paris Peace by negotiating a new settlement with Paris, London, and Rome. Relations with the Soviet Union in the 1920s was antagonistic. The Washington system in East Asia was becoming unstable because of the clash between Chinese nationalism and Japanese imperialism. Disputes about war reparations and war debts embittered relations between France and Germany and divided the victors. The 1927 world economic conference criticised the persistence of high tariffs and other barriers to trade and investment, and a lack of international cooperation in making the machinery of the gold standard system work.

Still, there were also signs that the renewal of global capitalism according to the Genoa consensus reinforced the supremacy of the victors. In the 1920s France, Britain, and the US controlled a preponderant share of the global economy. Together, they accounted for one quarter of the world's economic activity, made 60% of the world's manufactured goods, conducted one third of world trade, and supplied seventy percent of the world's factory-produced exports. In the late 1920s the big three provided nearly all the world's lending and investment capital and by 1929 they held 60% of the world's gold.<sup>23</sup> In spite of Benito Mussolini's bellicose rhetoric, Italy was thoroughly contained financially in the gold system and geopolitically by France and its allies in Eastern Europe

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<sup>22</sup> For a deep analysis and appreciation of how the gold system shaped global politics in the 1920s and early 1930s, see Mark Metzler, *Lever of Empire: The International Gold Standard and the Crisis of Liberalism in Prewar Japan* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 3-10.

and the Balkans.<sup>24</sup> German nationalists railed against reparations and the Treaty of Versailles, but the leading statesmen of the Weimar Republic saw Germany's path to full sovereignty through cooperation with the victors and envisaged Germany's future as a leading industrial power in a global capitalist order.<sup>25</sup> To import industrial technology and export grain to pay for it, the Soviet Union also traded in the 1920s with a gold-backed ruble.<sup>26</sup> Some observers saw market reforms in the Soviet Union as a positive sign that the revolution was petering out. In East Asia, Japanese governments of the 1920s sought to form a regional hegemony within the post-1919 order dominated by Washington and London, and advocates of an early return of the yen to the gold standard regarded the monetary system as a tool to leverage that regional hegemony.<sup>27</sup>

Had the Great Depression not arrived in the early 1930s it is possible to imagine a counterfactual history of international relations. One can imagine a stable post-1919 order led by the US, Britain, and France, with Germany, Italy and Japan integrated into it. Perhaps, as the French proposed in 1929, Paris and Berlin would have formed a European Union to counterbalance the US and British bloc economies? Perhaps that counterfactual world would have witnessed a protracted Cold War between the Soviet Union and the liberal capitalist world? Perhaps the focus of international conflict would have shifted to the global south, with a mushrooming of wars of national liberation?

The Great Depression, however, did come. Ironically, the anonymous forces of global capitalism that the victors had counted on to make the world safe for liberal imperialism instead delivered a paralysing shock to the entire world order. Just when they needed to cooperate most, the big three victors fell out in bitter disputes over war debts and reparations, the malfunctioning gold standard, rising barriers to trade, and the bank failures sweeping through central Europe. The decision of the government of Prime Minister Hamaguchi to align Japan with the western powers by pegging the yen to gold

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<sup>24</sup> Marianna Astore and Michele Fratianni, 'We Can't Pay: How Italy Dealt with War Debts after World War I,' *Financial History Review* 26/2 (2019), 197-222; John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 121-87.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, 'Global Money and Bolshevik Authority: The NEP as the First Socialist Project,' *Slavic Review* 78/3 (2019), 694-716; Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, 'Depression Stalinism: The Great Break Reconsidered,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15/1 (2014), 23-49.

<sup>27</sup> Metzler, *Lever of Empire* and Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

in January 1930 and signing the London Naval Treaty just when global capitalism went into meltdown had disastrous results, including paving the way in September 1931 for the war in Manchuria. In Germany, the economic crisis enabled an anti-democratic clique of conservatives in Berlin to appoint Adolf Hitler as Germany's Chancellor. The economic crisis and the Nazi seizure of power also opened the way for Mussolini to begin diplomatic and military preparations for the invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935.<sup>28</sup>

The events of the 1930s are well known and I will not dwell on them. What I want to do is underscore just how critical the Great Depression was to the onset of the arms races and the international crises of that decade. The collapse of the gold standard, rising protectionism, and other aggressive nationalistic commercial policies re-energized the economic 'war after the war' that the peacemakers of 1919 had hoped to prevent. In the 1930s a new model of a compartmentalised planet of distinct regional orders came into sharp focus. For those who had long craved for that fractured world of rival imperialisms or who had seen its coming as an inescapable geopolitical fact, the moment had arrived. The crisis of capitalism opened the way for Japan, Italy, and Germany to pursue illiberal, anti-communist visions of modernity premised on the formation of self-sufficient empires that could only be acquired at the expense of China, the colonial empires, and the Soviet Union.

Let me begin my analysis of the arms races of the 1930s by defining the term: an arms race is a system of intense military competition beyond the control of any single participant. To put it another way, arms races have their own dynamism. They become an independent factor in international relations. Political scientists often describe arms races as waves of action and reaction that ripple through the international system. In periods of acute political tension, so runs the argument, one state races ahead to win a military edge over its rivals, who in turn respond to the threat by arming too, and a perilous cycle of actions and reactions ensues, which ends either in war or an uneasy stalemate. Before 1914, the European great powers raced against each other by building ever more powerful battleships and by equipping mass conscript armies that could be

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Boyce, 'Economics', in Robert Boyce and Joseph A. Maiolo, eds., *The Origins of World War Two: The Debate Continues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 247-72.

mobilized for attack faster than their rivals. In the Cold War the superpowers spurred each other on to stockpile nuclear weapons far beyond the point of overkill.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1930s and early 1940s, arms races were not primarily focused on certain weapon systems or force structures, but on entire economies and societies. This was the chief legacy of total war in 1914-18. The lesson that political theorists, scholars, and military planners the world over drew from the great conflict was repeated time and again in scholarly studies and at staff colleges: winning the next war would require extensive pre-war planning to mobilize the totality of the nation's industrial and human resources, as well as self-sufficiency in food and in key raw materials such as iron ore, coal, and oil. In other words, the definition of 'armament' had expanded to encompass not only front-line forces (so-called arms in breadth), but also the readiness and the capacity of entire economies and societies to wage total war (or arms in depth).<sup>30</sup>

The expansion of the concept of 'armament' to encompass whole societies and economies helps to explain why efforts by the League of Nations to negotiate general disarmament by setting a maximum size for each national army, navy and air force or banning certain types of offensive weapons failed. In an era when the step from great industrial potential to military might was only a question of time, resources, and planning, that approach served to reinforce the strategic advantage of the victors. Some scholars argue that an opportunity was squandered in February 1932 when the World Disarmament Conference convened in Geneva. Had Britain offered France a security guarantee, so runs the logic, then France would have accepted a limited German military build-up. Had Germany's last republican chancellor Heinrich Brüning won that victory in Geneva, perhaps he might have continued to win the favour of German voters and aristocratic elites. There are many problems with this lost-opportunity thesis. A key one is that it would have only resulted in a short-lived agreement to regulate Germany's military build-up, not general disarmament. Such a deal would have done little to contain escalating military tensions outside of Europe.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of arms races as a concept see Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, and David Stevenson, eds., *Arms Races in International Politics: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-9, 61-87. The following part of my paper is based on Joseph A. Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: How The Arms Race Drove The World To War, 1931-1941* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> The terms in breadth and depth were coined by General Georg Thomas, see *Geschichte der deutschen Wehr- und Rüstungswirtschaft, 1918-1943/45* (Boppard: Boldt, 1966), 489.

<sup>31</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 75-9.

In any case, the most important check on aggressive national arms build-ups put into place by the peacemakers was the balance-of-payments discipline imposed by the gold standard, and not the League of Nations. It was for example no coincidence that Stalin inaugurated his policy of ‘socialism in one country’ as a reply to the pressure that the gold standard placed on the Soviet trade balance.<sup>32</sup> In the late 1920s falling commodity prices made it difficult to export enough wheat to import the foreign technology needed to expand industry. In 1928, Stalin’s solution, which entailed a break from the gold system and international money markets, was to extract more grain from the peasants with collectivisation and to begin the first Five Year industrialisation Plan. Like his military advisors, who learned the lessons of total war, Stalin saw turning the Soviet economy into a vast military-industrial complex as essential to the Soviet Union’s survival.<sup>33</sup> It was equally no coincidence that the Japanese soldiers who conspired to annex Manchuria did so in the wake of Japan’s gold crisis. They not only saw Manchuria as a secure source of raw materials that Japan lacked, but also as the location to build a new centrally controlled military-industrial complex in reply to Moscow’s first Five-Year Plan.<sup>34</sup>

In this paper I cannot present each twist and turn of the various arms races. I will instead focus on the level of national economic mobilisation – or armaments in depth – which to my mind is the most important in explaining the escalating global conflict and the timing of the war. If we want to date the point at which the great powers fell into a spiralling arms race, then 1936 is certainly the year. By then both Britain and France had begun their rearmament in reply to German unilateralism and Italy’s war in Ethiopia. According to the League of Nations, global military spending from 1933 to 1936 had tripled. In part because of the rising demand for armaments, industrial activity everywhere increased rapidly. The output and price of raw materials shot up too. Governments, first under the pressure of the Great Depression, and then the arms race, began to intervene more vigorously and continually into industry, trade, and finance. President Roosevelt’s national economic recovery programme, the New Deal, allocated only a small budget to build naval vessels; in contrast German spending on creating jobs

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<sup>32</sup> Sanchez-Sibony, ‘Depression Stalinism: The Great Break Reconsidered’, 23-49.

<sup>33</sup> David Stone, *Hammer & Rifle: The Militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926-1933* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000); Lennart Samuelson, *Plans for Stalin’s War Machine: Tukhachevskii and Military-Economic Planning, 1925–1941* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013); Michael A. Barnhart, ‘Japan’s Economic Security and the Origins of the Pacific War’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 4 (1981), 105-24.

focused primarily on military schemes, including new highways and other infrastructure projects. It is important to emphasise that everywhere military advisors lobbied political leaders to restructure national economies and societies for military purposes. They saw disciplined societies, state-managed industries, and the suppression of market forces, as the logical necessity of modern warfare. As we know, the military men did not always get their way. Red Army officers had far more success convincing the Kremlin to implement industrial mobilisation plans than their US Army counterparts had in lobbying the White House. However, as the arms race intensified and diplomatic crises came with greater frequency, the political and competitive pressure to shift from a market economy to a controlled economy and then to a fully mobilised war economy grew.<sup>35</sup>

At this point I think it will be useful to analyse the strategies of powers by dividing them into two groups, those who embraced the competitive pressure to adopt total mobilisation (what would be called totalitarianism) and those that adopted strategies of deterrence to avoid taking that fateful step. And, of course, ideology played a key role in how different powers reacted to the arms race. It was far easier for those regimes that espoused the totalising ideologies that had been shaped by the First World War – specifically, Soviet communism, and fascism/authoritarian militarism – to transform their economies and societies before war was declared than for the liberal powers.

Of the powers that embraced total mobilisation, it is also useful to distinguish the Soviet Union from the three nations that formed the Axis alliance in September 1940. I have already discussed why the Soviet leadership adopted the radical strategy of breakneck industrialisation and militarisation in the late 1920s and that trend continued apace. From 1932 to 1937, the period of the second Five-Year Plan, defence spending climbed by 340% and military production nearly quadrupled. By 1936-37, the men in the Kremlin felt confident enough about the security of the Soviet Union to engage in a proxy war against the Axis powers in Spain and East Asia. The performance of Soviet tanks and aircraft in Spain impressed intelligence analysts in western Europe. In 1937-38, the Soviet leaders felt confident enough to shift resources away from warfare to welfare (or

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<sup>35</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 141-2, passim. For a contemporary view of the close link between ideas of total mobilisation and future war, see Norman Angell et al., eds, *What would be the Character of a New War?* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933).

guns to butter) in the third Five Year Plan, and to indulge a murderous purge of the officer corps to remove any top commanders whose loyalty was suspect.<sup>36</sup>

Although war planners in the Axis powers belittled the offensive power of the Red Army, they often pointed to the Soviet Union as a model of how a totalitarian state should organise its industry and regiment its people. This admiration is easy enough to explain. The Soviet Union possessed the natural resources, command economy, and continent-spanning empire that Germany, Italy, and Japan sorely lacked. To put it another way, the Axis powers attempted to arm for total war without the economic autarky and resources (or depth of armament) essential to victory. Of the three, Germany had the largest industrial base, but its rearmament was thwarted by the limits of the German economy. One of the reasons why the German military welcomed the Nazi regime was that Hitler had promised to arm for total war at top speed and restore Germany's political power in Europe. In terms of spending, he kept that promise: by 1936 military spending would consume 11 percent of the German national income. However, despite enormous efforts at import substitution (specifically the production of synthetic textiles, rubber, and oil etc.) with the adoption of the Four-Year Plan in August 1936 and a squeezing of consumer consumption (guns before butter), Germany was forced to export steel – dearly needed for ships, tanks, and aircraft – to pay for imports. And by the end of 1937 German rearmament had plateaued as other powers armed in earnest.<sup>37</sup>

Even more so than Germany, the lack of a resource-rich empire frustrated Italian and Japanese efforts to prepare for total war. In both cases the immediate demand to wage war – in Italy's case in north Africa and Spain, and in Japan's case in China and on the Manchurian-Mongolian frontier – consumed limited resources that war planners in both states had hoped to devote to building autarkic military-industrial complexes. In the 1930s Mussolini's regime took ownership of heavy industry and introduced a multi-year economic plan to achieve autarky, but that goal defied the reality of Italy's reliance on metal and coal imports by sea to feed and fuel its factories. On the eve of the European

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<sup>36</sup> Robert W. Davies and Mark Harrison, 'The Soviet Military-Economic Effort Under the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-1937)' *Europe-Asia Studies* 49/3 (1998), 369-406; Peter Whitewood, *The Red Army and the Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Adam Tooze, 'The Economic History of the Nazi Regime', in Jane Caplan, ed., *Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 168-95; Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allan Lane, 2007).



war in 1939, Italy was dependent on Britain for coal.<sup>38</sup> In contrast with Italy's north African empire, Japanese controlled Manchuria was rich in resources, but the five-year plan to convert the region into an army run military-industrial complex fell well short of its targets. The Kwantung army officers and reform bureaucrats who had masterminded the annexation of Manchuria had understood that a long period of peace would be required to prepare the Japanese empire for total war. But the pace of events, most crucially the Sino-Japanese war of July 1937, derailed that long term goal.<sup>39</sup>

Let me now turn to Britain, France, and the US. As I argued above, the liberal victors of 1919 had tried to entrench their latent economic-military power by rebuilding global capitalism. The coming of the Great Depression wrecked that project and divided London, Paris, and Washington in the first half of the 1930s. In Europe the arms race sparked by German rearmament presented London, Paris and eventually Washington with a series of dilemmas about how to respond to the rising threat. While together they possessed the industries, manpower and resources (armaments in depth) to win a total war against any combination of powers, mobilising that strength would take time. To do so as a first response would have meant switching from market economies to state-run war economies in 'peacetime'. As statesmen and officials in Britain, France, and the United States said time and again, to do so would have been tantamount to accepting defeat. It would, so they believed, have meant extinguishing the liberal way of life and succumbing to perpetual totalitarian dictatorship.<sup>40</sup>

To avoid that outcome, Britain and France adopted rearmament strategies premised on deterrence. Their goal was to arm enough to convince Berlin and Rome that they could not win a short war even if they had acquired a brief operational advantage by modernising their armies and air forces first. Since the two Axis powers could not win a long war, the only option Hitler and Mussolini would have would be to negotiate a new peace settlement in Europe, demobilise their economies and integrate their states into a new liberal order. The mastermind behind British rearmament was Neville Chamberlain. First as Chancellor of the Exchequer and after May 1937 as Prime Minister, he advocated

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<sup>38</sup> Vera Zamagni, 'Italy: How to Lose the War and Win the Peace' in Mark Harrison, ed., *The Economics of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 177-214.

<sup>39</sup> Barnhart, 'Japan's Economic Security and the Origins of the Pacific War', 105-24; Yoshiro Miwa, *Japan's Economic Planning and Mobilization in Wartime, 1930s-1940s: The Competence of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, passim.

building a huge bomber force, investing in the navy, and maintaining a strong economy as the tools with which to compel Hitler into negotiations.<sup>41</sup> French policy was similar. French war planners believed that their elaborate system of frontier defences, the notorious Maginot Line, combined with elite armoured units and a large air force, would deter Germany's generals from risking war in the hope of winning a quick victory.<sup>42</sup>

Several problems plagued the deterrence strategies of Britain and France. Intelligence officials in Paris and London often exaggerated the efficiency of dictatorships in preparing their economies and societies for war and overestimated the success of German rearmament, most crucially the growth of the *Luftwaffe*. In 1936-37, the Popular Front government nationalised the French aircraft industry to keep pace with German air force rearmament: that industrial restructuring paid off in 1939-40 with a sudden burst of production but the temporary disruption meant that the French air force had only a dozen modern fighter aircraft at the time of the Czechoslovak crisis in September 1938. An exaggerated image of German striking power, and persistent French weakness in air power, and a desire to avoid war, contributed to the British and French decisions to negotiate a peaceful end to that crisis.<sup>43</sup> But the crisis ended peaceful not because of British and French diplomacy, but because Hitler had been deterred from war. His generals warned him that while Germany might quickly crush the Czech army, Germany could not defeat the combined might of the British and French empires in a long war of attrition. Moreover, they argued that both the United States and the Soviet Union would join an anti-German coalition.<sup>44</sup>

Deterrence worked in September 1938 but not a year later when Hitler provoked a crisis over Poland. To understand why, we need to examine the role of the arms race, particularly the way in which perceptions of the shifting military balance shaped calculations of time and opportunity. Hitler had originally planned for a total war to

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<sup>41</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 159-64; Richard J. Overy, 'Airpower and the Origins of Deterrence Theory before 1939', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 15 (1992), 73-101.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Alexander, 'In Defence of the Maginot Line', in Robert Boyce, ed., *French Foreign and Defence Policy, 1918-40* (London: Routledge, 1998), 175-83.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy Making 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 207-387; Peter Jackson and Joseph A. Maiolo, 'Strategic Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Alliance Diplomacy in Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War', *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 65/2 (2006), 417-61.

<sup>44</sup> See for example the warning from the German army's chief of staff dated 5 May 1938 in Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *General Ludwig Beck: Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Taetigkeit des Generalstabschefs des deutschen Heeres 1933-1938* (Boppard: Boldt, 1980), 502-62.

conquer 'living space' by destroying the Soviet Union and reshaping Europe from Poland to the Ural Mountains into an autarkic German empire. He planned to begin that total war, in alliance with Italy, in the early 1940s. But with Germany's rearmament faltering and the other powers now arming, the records show that Hitler was feeling the burden of time and the opportunity for aggressive imperialism was slipping away from him.<sup>45</sup>

In anger at the opposition of France and Britain to the small war he had wanted against Czechoslovakia in 1938, Hitler ordered a fivefold increase in the size of the Luftwaffe and the construction of a huge fleet of battleships to destroy the British Royal Navy. But, as I noted above, at the end of 1937 German rearmament had reached the limits of what the German economy could sustain. It became apparent that the growth of Germany's forces had slowed down just when those of France, Britain, the Soviet Union, and the US were mushrooming with greater momentum. By the summer of 1939 German armaments expansion plans had failed. Hitler knew Germany was losing the arms race and that made him reckless in the crisis over Poland. Hitler's sense that time was working against him points to how the arms race worked as a factor driving the world to war. Like all historical processes, arms races occur over time. Once they get underway, there is no way to erase the unintended consequences of early actions. Escalating military rivalry erodes any advantages. Time itself becomes a player, working for some and against others. In the summer of 1939, the pressure of time compelled Hitler to go to war with Poland and in doing so to run the risk of the big war he and his generals knew Germany could not win. The pattern of now-or-never decisions for escalating the conflict would repeat itself. In June 1941, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in the hope of conquering its industries, raw materials, and oil before the growing Anglo-American air-sea alliance became overwhelmingly powerful. Although in September 1939 Italy had reneged on its alliance commitment to Germany and remained 'neutral' because of its weakness, in June 1940 Mussolini declared war on France and Britain before it was too late to assert itself as a great power. And, in December 1941, under the pressure of a declining economic situation, especially declining oil stocks, and an escalating global arms race, Japan's leadership decided to 'go south' and strike the US fleet at Pearl Harbor.<sup>46</sup>

Time shaped by the shifting arms balance played an important role in the British and French decisions to accept war in 1939. This worked in two ways. Escalating

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<sup>45</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 269-301.

<sup>46</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 315-96.

rearmament and the war of nerves in Europe was erasing the line between peacetime and war time in the minds of political leaders and the public. It was increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction of 'business-as-usual economies' in the shadow of total war. The shift to formal war in 1939 came as something of a relief to officials in London and Paris, who could now legally and legitimately switch their economies to wartime mobilisation. It is also important to underscore that a combination of improving arms production and more balanced (or accurate) intelligence assessments of German economic and military weaknesses also contributed enormously to the British and French decisions to live up to their guarantees to go to war for Poland. This is particularly true for France, where the armed forces benefitted from the sudden recovery of the French aircraft industry as well as rising deliveries of modern tanks and artillery.<sup>47</sup>

Counter to the received historical wisdom, Britain and France armed early enough and with sufficient resources to win the arms race. In every category of armaments Britain and France amassed greater strength than Germany in 1940. That year Germany put 5.4 million into uniform, with 3 million of them available in the west. France mobilised 6.1 million men; the army had 5.5 million, with about 2.24 million on the northwest front when Germany struck. By June 1940 Britain had put 1.65 million men into uniform and sent 500,000 of them to France. If the Dutch and Belgian armies are added, then 3 million Germans, or 135 divisions, faced 4 million allies, or 151 divisions. In artillery, the allies had 14,000 guns whilst the Germans fielded 7,378. The four western allies likewise outnumbered the Germans in tanks, 4,204 against 2,439. The allied air strength was greater too: 4,469 allied bombers and fighters against 3,578 German aircraft available for combat operations on 10 May 1940. French tanks out armoured and out gunned German machines, French and British aircraft were at least as good as German models; and the allies had a huge advantage in artillery. Recent research in French and German army records shows that when elite German forces met elite French or British units, the allies usually won the battle. The legend of a German doctrinal revolution (the so-called blitzkrieg), historians now agree, was a myth.<sup>48</sup> The defeat of France in the summer of 1940 was the result of a risky plan that the German general staff had agreed

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<sup>47</sup> Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12-25.

<sup>48</sup> Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The Campaign in the West, 1940* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005); Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (London: IB Tauris, 2000).

to implement because it believed the war was lost anyway - interacting with catastrophically bad decisions on the part of the French high command. As Carl von Clausewitz observed in his celebrated book *On War*, 'no other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance'. In modern war, superior armament does not always guarantee victory.<sup>49</sup> However, as the German high command quickly realised, the victories in Europe in 1940 did not change the balance of military-economic power. Through its actions, Germany had provoked the formation of an anti-Axis coalition that would steadily and surely amass a crushing level of armaments. In 1940 the Soviet Union and the US accelerated their rearmament programmes. And it is a remarkable fact that Russia made more munitions than Germany in every year of the war, including 1941.<sup>50</sup>

This takes me to the final issue, US rearmament. American military and economic strength, the lend lease programmes, and particularly US air power, were critical factors leading to the allied victory. But before 1938 the Americans showed little inclination to arm or to involve themselves in faraway wars. After the Munich crisis of September 1938, however, President Roosevelt decided to adopt a policy of containment based on the expansion of American air power. The United States would sell Britain and France the aircraft they needed to bomb Germany and Italy into submission. When the war in Europe broke out, Paris and London placed huge orders for aircraft with US firms, and a relaxation of American neutrality laws took a first step in recreating the western economic alliance that had won the war in 1919.<sup>51</sup> Obviously, the defeat of France in May-June 1940 blew a hole in US containment and Roosevelt came under increasing policy pressure to appoint an 'arms czar' to oversee the creation of 'fortress north America'. As we know, Roosevelt rejected the idea of fortress America entrenched and isolated in the western hemisphere. He instead adopted an increasingly interventionist policy in 1940-

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph A. Maiolo, 'To Gamble All on a Single Throw: Neville Chamberlain and the Strategy of the Phoney War', in Christopher Baxter, Michael L. Dockrill and Keith Hamilton, eds., *Britain in Global Politics Volume 1: From Gladstone to Churchill* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 220-41.

<sup>50</sup> Richard J. Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: W.W. Norton, 1995), 182-90; Mark Harrison, 'The USSR and Total War: Why Didn't the Soviet Economy Collapse in 1942?' in Stig Förster, Roger Chickering, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 137-56.

<sup>51</sup> Callum MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement, 1936-1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1981); Thomas Willem Bottelier, 'Associated Powers: Britain, France, the United States and the Defence of World Order, 1931-1943' (unpublished PhD dissertation, King's College London, 2018).

41, one of economic-military containment of Japan in the Pacific and support for Britain against German U-boats in the Atlantic. That intervention expanded to the programme of lend lease to help first Britain and then the Soviet Union fight on. Why? To answer that question, we need to go back to the political logic that shaped British and French strategies of deterrence. To arm like the totalitarian powers would mean succumbing to totalitarianism. President Roosevelt understood that if the US remained alone in a world dominated by the 'totalitarian powers' (to use the common phrase of the time), then the US would have to adopt a permanent state of war readiness. As he told the audience of his famous 'December 1940 Arsenal of democracy' speech, waging that cold war would destroy the American way of life from within. As he explained: 'We should enter upon a new and terrible era in which the whole world, our hemisphere included, would be run by threats of brute force. To survive in such a world, we would have to convert ourselves permanently into a militaristic power on the basis of war economy.'<sup>52</sup> After Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, President Roosevelt decided the only way to prevent that from happening was to destroy the Axis by converting the United States into a gigantic war machine (the Arsenal of Democracy) and – reviving the ideas of the peacemakers of 1919 - to rebuild the global economy as the foundation for a new liberal international order, but this time with the United States at its centre.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 303-13, 371-85.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen A. Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).