

it before then—he outlined his scheme at one of his breezy, off-the-cuff press conferences. How did he propose to eliminate the root of the debt difficulty?

It is possible—I will put it that way—for the United States to take over British [war] orders, and, because they are essentially the same kind of munitions that we use ourselves, turn them into American orders. We have got enough money to do it. And thereupon, as to such portion of them as the military events of the future determine to be right and proper for us to allow to go to the other side, either lease or sell the materials, subject to mortgage, to the people on the other side. That would be on the general theory that it may still prove true that the best defense of Great Britain is the best defense of the United States, and therefore that these materials would be more useful to the defense of the United States if they were used in Great Britain than if they were kept in storage here.

Now, what I am trying to do is to eliminate the dollar sign. That is something brand new in the thoughts of practically everybody in this room, I think—get rid of the silly, foolish old dollar sign.

Well, let me give you an illustration: Suppose my neighbor's home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire. Now, what do I do? I don't say to him before that operation, "Neighbor, my garden hose cost me \$15; you have got to pay me \$15 for it." What is the transaction that goes on? I don't want \$15—I want my garden hose back after the fire is over. All right. If it goes through the fire all right, intact, without any damage to it, he gives it back to me and thanks me very much for the use of it. But suppose it gets smashed up—holes in it—during the fire; we don't have to have too much formality about it, but I say to him, "I was glad to lend you that hose; I see I can't use it any more, it's all smashed up." He says, "How many feet of it were there?" I tell him, "There were 150 feet of it." He says, "All right, I will replace it." Now, if I get a nice garden hose back, I am in pretty good shape.

In other words, if you lend certain munitions and get the munitions back at the end of the war, if they are intact—haven't been hurt—you are all right. If they have been damaged or have deteriorated or have been lost completely, it seems to me you come out pretty well if you have them replaced by the fellow to whom you have lent them.

[After the United States entered the war, supplies provided by foreign countries to U.S. forces were credited to their account as reverse lend-lease. The total value of U.S. lend-lease was over \$50 billion, less some \$7 billion in reverse lend-lease. Some cash was involved in the final settlement of accounts.]

2. Senator Burton Wheeler Assails Lend-Lease (1941)*

Like the interventionists, Roosevelt believed that the salvation of Britain through large-scale military aid was crucial for the defense of the United States. But so strong was isolationist opposition that the proposed Lend-Lease Act could not be entitled

*Reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 77th Cong., 1st sess. (speech of January 12, 1941), Appendix, pp. 178-179.

"An Act to Intervene in World War II for the Defense of Britain." The official title was "An Act Further to Promote the Defense of the United States." As finally passed, the new law virtually pledged the United States to the full extent of its economic resources to provide military supplies for those who were fighting aggression. Fiery Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, "a born prosecutor" who had run for vice president on the left-wing La Follette Progressive ticket of 1924, was one of the most vehement isolationists. In the following radio speech, how prophetic is he?

The lend-lease policy, translated into legislative form, stunned a Congress and a nation wholly sympathetic to the cause of Great Britain.... It warranted my worst fears for the future of America, and it definitely stamps the President as war-minded.

The lend-lease-give program is the New Deal's Triple-A foreign policy; it will plow under every fourth American boy.

Never before have the American people been asked or compelled to give so bounteously and so completely of their tax dollars to any foreign nation. Never before has the Congress of the United States been asked by any President to violate international law. Never before has this Nation resorted to duplicity in the conduct of its foreign affairs. Never before has the United States given to one man the power to strip this Nation of its defenses. Never before has a Congress coldly and flatly been asked to abdicate.

If the American people want a dictatorship—if they want a totalitarian form of government and if they want war—this bill should be steamrolled through Congress, as is the wont of President Roosevelt.

Approval of this legislation means war, open and complete warfare. I, therefore, ask the American people before they supinely accept it, Was the last World War worth while?

If it were, then we should lend and lease war materials. If it were, then we should lend and lease American boys. President Roosevelt has said we would be repaid by England. We will be. We will be repaid, just as England repaid her war debts of the first World War—repaid those dollars wrung from the sweat of labor and the toil of farmers with cries of "Uncle Shylock." Our boys will be returned—returned in caskets, maybe; returned with bodies maimed; returned with minds warped and twisted by sights of horrors and the scream and shriek of high-powered shells.

Considered on its merits and stripped of its emotional appeal to our sympathies, the lend-lease-give bill is both ruinous and ridiculous....

It gives to one man—responsible to no one—the power to denude our shores of every warship. It gives to one individual the dictatorial power to strip the American Army of our every tank, cannon, rifle, or anti-aircraft gun. No one would deny that the lend-lease-give bill contains provisions that would enable one man to render the United States defenseless, but they will tell you, "The President would never do it." To this I say, "Why does he ask the power if he does not intend to use it?" Why not, I say, place some check on American donations to a foreign nation?...

I say in the kind of language used by the President—shame on those who ask the powers—and shame on those who would grant them.

C. War in the Atlantic

[Talk of "plowing under every fourth American boy" spurred Roosevelt into declaring at his press conference of January 14, 1941, that this was "the most untruthful, the most dastardly, unpatriotic thing that has ever been said. Quote me on that. That really is the rottenest thing that has been said in public life in my generation." What measure of truth was there in Wheeler's charge?]

War in the Atlantic

I. Framing the Atlantic Charter (1941)*

Roosevelt finally met with Prime Minister Winston Churchill in deepest secrecy off the coast of Newfoundland in August 1941. Major items of discussion were lend-lease shipments, common defense, and the halting of Japanese aggression. Churchill later wrote that for Roosevelt—the head of a technically neutral state—to meet in this way with the prime minister of a belligerent state was “astonishing” and amounted to “warlike action.” The most spectacular offspring of the conference was the unofficial Atlantic Charter, which in 1942 became the cornerstone of Allied war aims. An admixture of the old Wilson Fourteen Points (see p. 557) and the New Deal, it held out seductive hope to the victims of the dictators. What aspects of the Atlantic Charter come closest to “warlike action”?

The President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being met together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned [self-determination, one of Wilson's Fourteen Points; in part Points V and XII of the fourteen];

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them [territorial restoration, Points VI, VII, VIII, XI of the fourteen];

Fourth, they will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all states, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity [Point III of the fourteen];

Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security [a combination of the objectives of the League of Nations and the New Deal];

*Department of State Bulletin 5 (August 14, 1941): 125–126.

Sixth, after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;

Seventh, such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance [freedom of the seas, Point II of the fourteen];

Eighth, they believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons, must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea, or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security [the United Nations, replacing the League of Nations], that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments [Point IV of the fourteen].

2. The Chicago Tribune Is Outraged (1941)*

A highly influential mouthpiece of midwestern isolationism was the Chicago Tribune, self-elected "The World's Greatest Newspaper." Violently anti-Roosevelt and anti-intervention, it resorted to extreme measures, including the publication of Washington's secret war plans three days before Pearl Harbor. To what extent does the Tribune's editorial on the Atlantic Conference confirm Churchill's later observation that the deliberations amounted to "warlike action"?

Mr. Roosevelt's dangerous ambition always to do what no other President ever did, and to be the man who shakes the world, led him to meet Mr. Churchill, as is now disclosed, at sea. There, he, the head of a nation which is not at war, and the head of the British empire, which is at war, signed their names to an eight-point war and peace program, as if both countries not only were fighting side by side but saw their way to victory....

For Mr. Churchill the event would be, he could hope, that last step which would bring him what he has awaited as his salvation—the final delivery on Mr. Roosevelt's commitments, the delivery of the United States with all its man power into the war at all points. Mr. Churchill would appreciate that Mr. Roosevelt in the eyes of the world became his full ally....

Mr. Roosevelt himself had that end in view. As head of a nation at peace he had no right to discuss war aims with the ruler of a country at war. He had no right to take a chair at such a conference. He had no regard for his constitutional duties or his oath of office when he did so. He not only likes to shatter traditions, he likes to shatter the checks and restraints which were put on his office. He is thoro[ughly] unAmerican. His ancestry is constantly emerging. He is the true descendant of that

*Editorial against Atlantic Charter (August 15, 1941) as quoted in *A Century of Tribune Editorials* (1947), pp. 129–130.

James Roosevelt, his great-grandfather, who was a Tory in New York during the Revolution and took the oath of allegiance to the British king.*...

He comes of a stock that has never fought for the country and he now betrays it, altho[ugh] it has repudiated his program and him with it....

The American people can rest assured that Mr. Churchill was paying little attention to the rehash of the Wilsonian futilities, to the freedom of the seas and the freedom of peoples such as the [British-ruled] people of India, for instance. What he wanted to know of Mr. Roosevelt was: When are you coming across? And it is the answer to that question that concerns the American people, who have voted 4 to 1 that they are not going across at all unless their government drags them in against their will.

One phrase in the statement would have Mr. Churchill's complete approval—"after final destruction of the Nazi tyranny." To that he committed the President of the United States in circumstances as spectacular and theatrical as could be arranged. Mr. Roosevelt pledged himself to the destruction of Hitler and the Nazis. In the circumstances in which this was done Mr. Churchill would insist that it was the pledge of a government, binding upon the country.

The country repudiates it. Mr. Roosevelt had no authority and can find none for making such a pledge. He was more than outside the country. He was outside his office. The spectacle was one of two autocratic rulers, one of them determining the destiny of his country in the matter of war or peace absolutely in his own will, as if his subjects were without voice.

The country rejects that idea of its government.

3. FDR Proclaims Shoot-on-Sight (1941)[†]

Lend-Lease carried an implied commitment that the United States would guarantee delivery of arms, although the law specifically forbade "convoying vessels by naval vessels of the United States." Roosevelt got around this restriction by setting up a system of patrols by U.S. warships working in collaboration with the British. On September 4, 1941, the U.S. destroyer Greer in Icelandic waters trailed a German submarine for three and one-half hours while radioing its position to nearby British aircraft. The U-boat finally fired two torpedoes (which missed), whereupon the Greer retaliated with depth bombs (which also missed). Seven days later, after presumably taking time to verify the facts, Roosevelt went on the radio with this sensational shoot-on-sight speech. What liberties did he take with the truth? Did the crisis justify his doing so?

The Navy Department of the United States has reported to me that, on the morning of September fourth, the United States destroyer *Greer*, proceeding in full daylight toward Iceland, had reached a point southeast of Greenland. She was

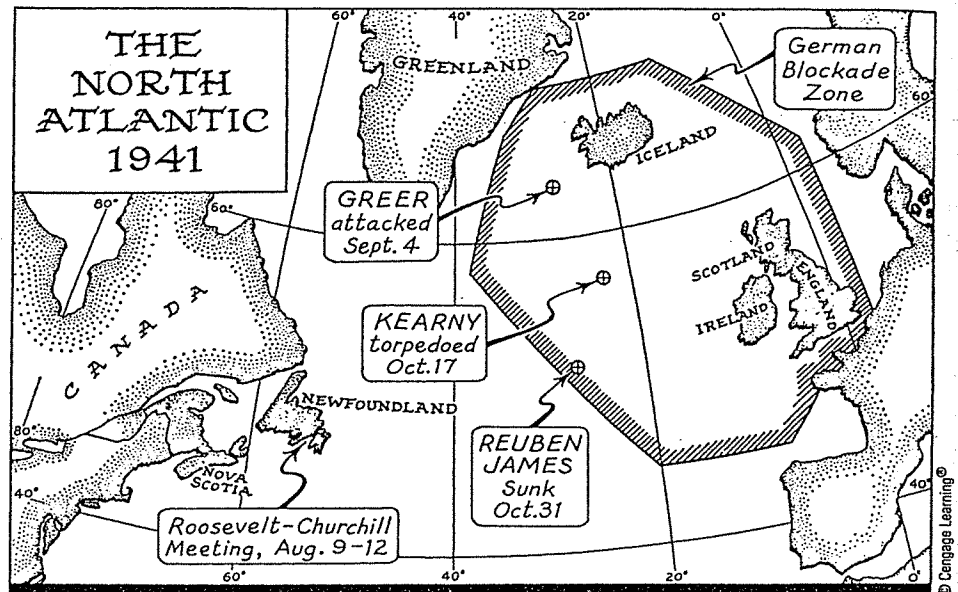
*James Roosevelt, only fifteen years old when the fighting began, was a student at Princeton from 1776 to 1780. His father, a staunch patriot, was forced to flee New York City. There is no evidence that young James took the alleged oath; the probabilities are strong that he did not. (Information provided by Elizabeth B. Drewry, director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.)

[†]Department of State Bulletin 5 (September 13, 1941): 193, 195, 197.

carrying American mail to Iceland. She was flying the American flag. Her identity as an American ship was unmistakable.

She was then and there attacked by a submarine. Germany admits that it was a German submarine. The submarine deliberately fired a torpedo at the *Greer*, followed later by another torpedo attack. In spite of what Hitler's propaganda bureau has invented, and in spite of what any American obstructionist organization may prefer to believe, I tell you the blunt fact that the German submarine fired first upon this American destroyer without warning, and with deliberate design to sink her.

Our destroyer, at the time, was in waters which the Government of the United States has declared to be waters of self-defense—surrounding outposts of American protection in the Atlantic.



In the north, outposts have been established by us in Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, and Newfoundland. Through these waters there pass many ships of many flags. They bear food and other supplies to civilians; and they bear [lend-lease] matériel of war, for which the people of the United States are spending billions of dollars, and which, by Congressional action, they have declared to be essential for the defense of our own land.

The United States destroyer, when attacked, was proceeding on a legitimate mission....

Generation after generation, America has battled for the general policy of the freedom of the seas.* That policy is a very simple one—but a basic, fundamental one. It means that no nation has the right to make the broad oceans of the world,

*The traditional American concept of freedom of the seas did not include the armed conveying of gift Lend-Lease munitions through German-proclaimed war zones to the enemies of Germany.

at great distances from the actual theater of land war, unsafe for the commerce of others....

It is no act of war on our part when we decide to protect the seas which are vital to American defense. The aggression is not ours. Ours is solely defense.

But let this warning be clear. From now on, if German or Italian vessels of war enter the waters, the protection of which is necessary for American defense, they do so at their own peril.

[Patrolling led to convoying by presidential edict, despite the express terms of the Lend-Lease Act, and convoying led to shooting. In October 1941 the U.S. destroyer Kearny suffered torpedo damage and a loss of eleven lives in a battle with German submarines southwest of Iceland. Later that month the U.S. destroyer Reuben James was torpedoed and sunk while on convoy duty. An undeclared shooting war with Hitler was now being waged in the Atlantic.]

D. Blowup in the Pacific

I. Harold Ickes Prepares to "Raise Hell" (1941)*

New Japanese aggression in south Indochina, despite warnings from Washington, finally prompted Roosevelt to clamp down a complete embargo on shipments going to Japan when he froze all Japanese assets in the United States on July 25, 1941. Faced with the loss of critical oil supplies, the Tokyo warlords were confronted with agonizing alternatives: yielding some of the fruits of their aggression in the Far East or fighting the United States and its allies. The United States was by no means ready for war in the vast Pacific, and the administration seriously considered a three-month truce; Roosevelt favored six months. But this proposal was never formally presented to Japan. The outspoken secretary of the interior, Harold Ickes, recorded in his secret diary the story as he heard it. What does this account (written on November 30) reveal of the inner workings of the federal government? Why did the truce scheme fail?

Our State Department has been negotiating for several days with Saburo Kurusu, the special envoy sent over from Japan, and with Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura. I have had a suspicion for a long time that the State Department would resume a policy of appeasement toward Japan, if it could get away with it.

Our State Department, according to a story that I have heard, had actually proposed what it called a "truce" for three months with Japan. We were to resume shipments of cotton and other commodities, but the most important item on the list was gasoline for "civilian" purposes. Now anyone who knows anything about Japan and about the situation there knows that there is very little, if any, civilian use of gasoline....Then a strong protest came in from General Chiang Kai-shek

*From *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, Vol. III: The Lowering Clouds, 1939-1941* by Harold L. Ickes. Copyright © 1954 by Simon & Schuster, Inc. Copyright renewed © 1982 by Simon & Schuster, Inc.

[Jiang Jieshi] to the effect that to do this would destroy the morale of the Chinese. It was the intention of the State Department to crowd the thing through without even giving Halifax [British ambassador] a chance to refer it to Churchill. However, the British fought for and obtained a sufficient delay to consult Churchill, and he was strongly opposed.

The strong opposition of China and Britain caused the appeasers of the State Department to pause. They went to the White House, and in the end the President refused to go through with the deal.

If it had not been for the strenuous intervention of Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, the appeasers in the State Department, with the support of the President, would have resumed at least a partial commercial relationship with Japan, as the result of which we would have sent Japan cotton and gasoline and other commodities....

If this negotiation with Japan had been consummated, I would have promptly resigned from the Cabinet with a ringing statement attacking the arrangement and raising hell generally with the State Department and its policy of appeasement. I have no doubt that the country would have reacted violently. As a matter of fact, some of the newspapers indicated that they were uneasy and printed editorials deprecating any attempt at even a partial resumption of relationship with Japan. I believe that the President would have lost the country on this issue and that hell would have been to pay generally.

Now matters are very tense indeed so far as Japan is concerned. The morning papers carry headlines announcing that Japan has solemnly declared her determination "to purge American and British influence from East Asia for the honor and pride of mankind." So it may be, after all, that there will be a clash in the Pacific.

2. Tōgō Blames the United States (1952)*

Instead of appeasement, Secretary of State Hull presented stern terms to the two Japanese envoys in his note of November 26, 1941. Japan would have to withdraw its armed forces from China, after four years of aggression, and from Indochina as well. In return, the United States would unfreeze Japanese assets and make some other secondary concessions. Such loss of face was so abhorrent to the Japanese warlords that Hull had little hope that the terms would be accepted. The next day he told Secretary of War Stimson, "I have washed my hands of it, and it is now in the hands of you and [Secretary of the Navy] Knox—the Army and Navy." Here, the reaction of Japan is described by the foreign minister, Shigenori Tōgō, who later died in prison while serving a twenty-year sentence as a war criminal. Where did he lay the blame for the breakdown of negotiations?

Ambassador Grew, then in Tokyo, later said that when the note of 26 November was sent, the button which set off the war had been pushed.

On the 26th and 27th Secretary Hull held special press conferences at which he gave a full account of the Japanese-American negotiations; the American press

*From *Cause of Japan* by Shigenori Tōgō. Translated by Fumihiko Tōgō and Ben Bruce Blakenly. Copyright © 1984 by Fumihiko Tōgō.

responded by reporting almost unanimously that it was Japan's choice whether to accept the Hull Note or go to war. Later—in wartime—an American chronicler wrote that even a Monaco or a Luxemburg would have taken up arms against the United States if it had been handed such a memorandum as that which the State Department presented to the Japanese government....

It is therefore no longer arguable at this time of day that the American authorities, having made all necessary preparations in the expectation that the negotiations would break down and a war ensue, delivered the Hull Note anticipating that Japan would reject it, thus compelling her to elect between total surrender and war. Indeed, remembering that the question of how to insure that Japan should fire the first shot had been in the forefront in the War Cabinet's discussions in Washington, it seems not unwarrantable to construe the note as going beyond the forcing of a choice—it is not too much to say that it was the throwing down of a challenge to Japan, or at the least constituted an ultimatum without time limit.

This we knew in Tokyo—though we could not then know of the words and acts of the high American officials which confirmed our deduction—from the drastic terms of the note and the inclusion among them of conditions never theretofore suggested. Our interpretation was confirmed by the reaction to Hull's disclosures by the American press—which played up, as if at the urging of the governmental authorities, the choice between the terms of the Hull Note and war—and by the plainly visible tightening of the encirclement of Japan.

So far as concerns my own state of mind upon receipt of the Hull Note, I can never forget the despair which overpowered me. I had fought and worked unflaggingly until that moment; but I could feel no enthusiasm for the fight thereafter. I tried as it were to close my eyes and swallow the Hull Note whole, as the alternative to war, but it stuck in the craw. In contrast to my dejection, many of the military men were elated at the uncompromising attitude of the United States, as if to say, "Didn't we tell you so?"—they were by no means easy to be patient with.

[The Japanese later argued that they were forced to break out of the economic encirclement resulting from Roosevelt's embargo-freezing order of July 25, 1941. This view found surprising support in 1944 from one U.S. ally, Captain Oliver Lyttleton, British minister of production. In a London speech he declared, "Japan was provoked into attacking the Americans at Pearl Harbor. It is a travesty on history ever to say that America was forced into the war.... It is incorrect to say that America was ever truly neutral." The subsequent uproar in the United States forced Lyttleton hastily to soften his remarks. (New York Times, June 21, 22, 1944.)]

3. Cordell Hull Justifies His Stand (1948)*

Isolationist Senator Vandenberg, writing in his diary just after Pearl Harbor, felt that the United States would have had to yield "relatively little" to pacify Japan, and feared that "we may have driven her needlessly into hostilities through our dogmatic

*From Cordell Hull, *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II. Copyright © 1948.

diplomatic attitudes." "We 'asked for it,'" he added, "and we 'got it.'" Secretary of State Hull, the soft-spoken Tennessean, here outlines three possible alternatives in his Memoirs. Assuming that the ultimate security of the United States required the halting of the Japanese, and knowing that the U.S. Navy was not ready for Japan, form conclusions regarding the wisdom of Hull's choice among the three possibilities. Were other courses open?

There were three methods to meet the danger from Japan. One was by a preventive attack. But democracies do not engage in preventive attacks except with greatest difficulty. Had I suggested to the President that he go to Congress and ask for a declaration of war against Japan at some time after the invasion of southern Indo-China, he could have made a good case concerning the dangers to us inherent in Japan's course of aggression. But, remembering the fact that on August 13, 1941, only three weeks after Japan invaded southern Indo-China, the House of Representatives sustained the Selective Service Act by a majority of just one vote, it seems most unlikely that the President could have obtained a declaration.

Nor would the military and naval authorities have been ready for a preventive attack. The fact that they pleaded for more time solely to prepare our defenses in the Pacific was proof in itself that they were not prepared to take the offensive.

A preventive attack, moreover, would have run counter to our determination to pursue the course of peace to the end, with the hope, however microscopic, that even at the last hour the Japanese might have a change of heart.

The second method to meet the danger was to agree to Japan's demands. This would have given us peace—that is, until Japan, after strengthening herself through the concessions we should have made, was ready to move again. But it would have denied all the principles of right living among nations which we had supported; it would have betrayed the countries [China, Britain] that later became our allies; and it would have given us an infamous place in history.

When we realize that Japan was ruthlessly invading peaceful countries, that the United States had pleaded with her from the beginning to cease her course of military conquest in partnership with Hitler, and that all problems in the Pacific would have practically settled themselves if Japan had adopted a policy of peace, it is evident that Japan had no right to make demands upon us. Japan negotiated as if we, too, were an aggressor, as if both countries had to balance their aggressions. Japan had no more right to make demands upon us than an individual gangster has to make demands upon his intended victim.

The third method was simply to continue discussions with Japan, to convince her that her aggressions cost her more than they were worth, to point out to her that her partnership with Hitler could be as dangerous to her as it was to the rest of the world, to lay before her proposal after proposal which in the long run would have given her in peace the prosperity her military leaders were seeking in conquest.

It was this third that we chose. Of the three, it was the only American method.

[The Tokyo warlords claimed that they had only two choices: surrender or war. Actually they had a third choice: accommodation. Considerable loss of face would have been better than loss of the war. The argument that Hull's note of November 26

D. Blowup in the Pacific

provoked the Japanese into an attack is weakened by two facts. First, the naval force that attacked Pearl Harbor had left its rendezvous in Japan twenty-four hours earlier. Second, early in November the imperial conference had unanimously decided on war, provided that diplomacy had not produced a satisfactory accord by December 1.]

Thought Provokers

1. What would have been the outcome of World War II in Europe (or in Asia) if the United States had been truly neutral? Would the results have been to the nation's best interests?
2. Have events since 1945 given support to the view that a democratic United States could exist as a kind of fortified island?
3. Lend-Lease was designed to defend the United States by helping others fight the United States' potential enemies with U.S. weapons. Was there an element of immorality in this policy? Would the United States have kept out of the war if the Lend-Lease Act had not been passed?
4. Assuming that the Atlantic Charter was a warlike step, was it justified? Roosevelt believed that a Hitler victory would be ruinous for the United States, and to combat isolationist pressures he repeatedly misrepresented facts (*Greer case*) or usurped powers (convoying). Was he justified in using such methods to arouse the American people to an awareness of their danger?
5. With regard to the diplomatic breakdown preceding Pearl Harbor, it has been said that both Japan and the United States were right if one conceded their major premises. Explain fully, and form a conclusion.

