

# A Roundtable on David F. Schmitz, *The Sailor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy*

Andrew Johnstone, Benjamin Coates, Autumn Lass, and David F. Schmitz

## Roundtable Introduction

Andrew Johnstone

Franklin Roosevelt's twelve-year term in office was not only one of the most dramatic presidencies in U.S. history, it was arguably the most transformative in terms of U.S. foreign relations. When Roosevelt came to office in the depths of the Great Depression, his primary focus was domestic politics. By the time of his death in 1945, the place of the United States in world affairs had changed almost beyond recognition. Just four years earlier, the nation struggled over how to respond to war in Europe and Asia. Now, it approached the end of the Second World War as the world's most powerful nation, and one that was setting the terms of the postwar order. More than anyone else, Franklin Roosevelt enabled that transformation.

Unsurprisingly, historians have spent the last eighty years debating America's rise to power and Roosevelt's role in that process between 1933 and 1945. Was Roosevelt an "isolationist" in his first term as he prioritized domestic affairs? How did Roosevelt react to the growing presence of fascism in Germany, Italy, and Japan as the 1930s progressed? How did he try to persuade a non-interventionist nation to play a more international role prior to 1941? How successful was the wartime Grand Alliance? Did Roosevelt "sell-out" Eastern Europe to Stalin at the Yalta conference? More generally, did Roosevelt move in a reactive style from crisis to crisis, or did he have a broader foreign policy vision?

David Schmitz's portrayal of Roosevelt in *The Sailor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy* is one of a president who held a consistent worldview and foreign policy. While the direction of policy travel may not always have been straight, the destination was always clear: a role for the United States "as a world leader with its power and influence extended globally" (ix). Using the nautical analogy invoked in the book's title, Schmitz argues that Roosevelt's inconsistencies were examples of "tacking," or necessary changes in direction in order to achieve an ultimate goal. There were rhetorical and policy diversions, but they were undertaken in order to navigate the United States to its rightful place on the world stage. For Schmitz, Roosevelt's destination was one that entailed multilateral cooperation with other nations, and that followed the path charted by the Good Neighbor Policy, the Four Freedoms, and the Atlantic Charter.

Unsurprisingly, there is an enormous literature on Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy. Yet as Schmitz notes, "it is surprising that there is only a single, one-volume study of FDR's foreign policy, Robert Dallek's *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*" (x). Schmitz clearly sees *The Sailor* as a successor to Dallek's 42 year-old book, and the books certainly have their differences.

Dallek's book, which still holds up well, is more dense and encyclopaedic and less overtly argument-driven than *The Sailor*, which in turn is more digestible. As Benjamin Coates notes in his review, Schmitz's easily readable book offers "an accessible and engaging portrait of an important era." They are however, less different in argument that Schmitz suggests. Schmitz's opening assessment of Dallek's book attempts to put clear water between the two works, with Schmitz claiming that Dallek "sets out the prevailing view that Roosevelt was an isolationist who became, due to pressures outside the Western hemisphere, a reluctant interventionist in world affairs" (x). However, Dallek's 1995 afterword states, "in his approach to foreign challenges, Roosevelt was a model of consistency," and the book's subheadings make it clear that Dallek saw Roosevelt as an internationalist throughout his presidency.<sup>1</sup> Still, *The Sailor* is definitely a different book, as it offers a more positive interpretation of Roosevelt's diplomacy than Dallek, or most other historical works on Roosevelt for that matter.

The two reviewers differ overall but both find material to commend in *The Sailor*. Autumn Lass's review is extremely positive and describes *The Sailor* as both a "comprehensive evaluation of President Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy" and "a must read for scholars of U.S. foreign policy in the 20th century." Lass highlights Schmitz's focus on Roosevelt's foundational beliefs of internationalism and American exceptionalism as well as the importance of his experiences during the Great War. Lass also praises Schmitz's emphasis on the Good Neighbor policy in revealing continuity in Roosevelt's vision. She also acknowledges Schmitz's main criticism of Roosevelt: that he relied too heavily on personal diplomacy, which made it all too easy for the Grand Alliance to collapse after FDR's death.

Otherwise, both reviewers comment on the generally sympathetic portrayal of Roosevelt presented in *The Sailor*. Lass and Coates acknowledge how Schmitz generally defends Roosevelt on the most controversial issues of his administration (the internment of Japanese Americans being the one indefensible exception), notably the Pearl Harbor attack, his policy towards the Holocaust, and his negotiations with Stalin over Poland. Other controversial issues where Schmitz takes a positive view of Roosevelt's policies include Roosevelt's deception of the American public regarding the 1941 attack on the *USS Greer*, and the American deal with Nazi collaborator Admiral Jean Darlan in 1942 to ease the invasion of North Africa. Yet Coates is almost certainly correct when he writes, "it is difficult to dispute Schmitz's claim that Roosevelt 'made the correct decisions on the major issues.'"

Beyond that, Coates asks questions of the broader implications of the book's positive view of Roosevelt's legacy. In particular, with an eye on subsequent history and

current affairs, Coates raises the issue of tension between Roosevelt's foundational beliefs of internationalism and American exceptionalism. What happens when other nations are unwilling to go along with an American vision? How did Roosevelt envisage dealing with such cases? In his response, Schmitz reaffirms his strong belief that Roosevelt did not see internationalism as a willingness to use armed forces unilaterally. He also argues that Roosevelt's foreign policy cannot be reduced to a desire for global dominance. Of course, other Americans with similar internationalist worldviews struggled with that tension before, during, and after the war. Some became world federalists, while others became staunch supporters of containment and the Truman Doctrine. How Roosevelt's policies would have evolved through 1945, 1946, and 1947, we will of course never know.

Coates raises other criticisms, notably of Schmitz's rather generous view of the Good Neighbor policy (which saw the United States support some dubious authoritarian regimes), and the way he "explains away" some of Roosevelt's inconsistencies as "simple tactical maneuvering." Indeed, what one observer might see as frequent tacking another might see as policy inconsistency (and there was a lot of tacking in Roosevelt's first term). More broadly, Coates sees Schmitz's sympathetic portrait of Roosevelt as "one unlikely to fully persuade those who do not already share this faith." In response, Schmitz defends his overall conclusion that Roosevelt was the "most successful foreign policymaker in the nation's history." Whomever you ultimately agree with, the nature of the exchange shows how Schmitz is correct when he says, "the postwar world was, in numerous ways, Roosevelt's world" (242). It also shows that the debate over Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy shows absolutely no signs of abating. This is of course no surprise. After all, in many ways we all still live in Franklin Roosevelt's world.

Note:

1. Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (Oxford, UK, 1995): 550. The book's subheadings include "An American Internationalist" for the Prologue, "The Internationalist as Nationalist" for Part One, and "The Internationalist as Isolationist" for Part Two.

## Trusting Franklin with the Tiller

*Benjamin Coates*

David Schmitz's *The Sailor* has a clear message for readers: "Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the most important and most successful foreign policymaker in the nation's history" (242). In Schmitz's view, FDR managed to blend idealism and realism into a pragmatic optimism that could achieve principled ends. Even as he continued to operate within the constraints of domestic and international politics, Roosevelt transformed America's global role, led the nation through a victorious war, and lay the groundwork for a peaceful postwar world.

Schmitz harvests metaphors from FDR's long experience with sailing to describe his ability to adapt to political winds. Roosevelt's "ability to tack" taught him "at a young age patience and flexibility, and that there was more than one route to a final destination" (2). Roosevelt changed course frequently without deviating from his ultimate goal, Schmitz contends: a United States secure in a world that reflected its power and expressed its values. To say that FDR, despite his inconsistencies, had a consistent foreign policy is not especially controversial.<sup>1</sup> But at a moment when the

American-led "liberal world order" is increasingly tenuous, it is worth returning to the time of its birth. Schmitz delivers a defense of FDR as "internationalist" that uses FDR's own faith in himself to iron out the contradictions in his foreign policy. It is an appealing portrait, but one unlikely to fully persuade those who do not already share this faith.

At its heart, *The Sailor* is a crisp chronological narrative history of U.S. foreign relations between 1933 and 1945. Focusing on presidential decision making and rhetoric, it covers familiar ground with light and eager steps. Schmitz begins with a background chapter tracing FDR's early life and his entrance into national service, first as the assistant secretary of the navy under Wilson and subsequently as a candidate for vice president. During WWI and after, Roosevelt was a strong supporter of the U.S. war effort and the League of Nations.

Schmitz explains that Roosevelt's "sense of American exceptionalism was the source of his internationalism" (26), and suggests that his unwavering belief in America reflected a secular faith.<sup>2</sup> FDR condemned European imperialism as backward and defended America as "an unselfish nation" (25). Aside from a brief mention of Roosevelt's "paternalistic outlook" (25), Schmitz does not dwell on the hypocrisy of America's simultaneous military occupations of multiple Caribbean nations (FDR famously bragged that he had written Haiti's constitution [25]). Schmitz does show how, during his first presidential term, FDR proclaimed a Good Neighbor Policy toward Latin America, ended the U.S. occupation of Haiti, and abolished the Platt Amendment in Cuba.

Schmitz helpfully highlights the role of economics in FDR's early policies. Roosevelt held an essentially liberal world view: market relations, properly regulated by the state, left everyone better off. Like his secretary of state, Cordell Hull, he believed that economic competition and irrational arms races underlay most world conflicts. Careful diplomacy and free trade would show even Hitler and Mussolini that cooperation offered more benefits than war. Accordingly, FDR embraced a policy of economic appeasement toward the dictators during his first term. But for the Germans, the appeal of power overrode any promise that long-term cooperation might have held. "These trade treaties are just too god-damned slow, the world is marching too fast," FDR complained (86).

By the end of 1930s FDR had abandoned his view of fascists as frustrated victims of a botched Versailles peace. They were instead menaces to international society. Hitler was "the enemy of mankind" (124), and American security depended on halting the Nazis. But the American people weren't ready, and so FDR embarked on a twin program of increasing U.S. aid to Britain while laying the rhetorical groundwork for American participation in European war. Schmitz's narrative hits the familiar highlights: the destroyers-for-bases deal, the congressional fight over Lend-Lease, the expanding definition of the Western Hemisphere to encompass "security patrols" and a base in Iceland, and so on.

By December 1941 the United States was a co-belligerent in all but name, and FDR had convinced a majority of the American people that U.S. security required a Nazi defeat, though they still hoped that might be accomplished without the United States officially joining the war. At the same time, FDR believed that economic coercion could discourage Japanese imperialism without leading to war. The attack on Pearl Harbor proved this faith misguided.

Schmitz's coverage of the 1941 to 1945 period emphasizes wartime strategy and postwar planning. He provides a detailed description of American disagreements with Churchill over the desirability of a cross-channel

invasion. Clear accounts of the meetings at Casablanca, Tehran, and Yalta show how FDR, Stalin, and Churchill hashed out the terms of the postwar military settlement and global governance (more on this later). FDR's public speeches helped to define the war as one not only for the present but also for the future. "It was Roosevelt more than anyone who provided a unifying purpose to the fighting for the American people as, throughout the war, he consistently invoked the Four Freedoms and the idea of the United States," Schmitz writes (140). He portrays FDR as simultaneously optimistic (he never doubted that the Allies would win the war) and pragmatic (he believed it necessary to compromise with Britain and the Soviets).

Schmitz offers brief asides that address FDR's most controversial policies. He acknowledges the internment of Japanese Americans as "Roosevelt's greatest failure" (147) but otherwise defends the president against his critics. There is no evidence, he notes, to sustain the charge that FDR "manipulated Japan into war" or purposefully left Pearl Harbor undefended (136). On the Holocaust, Schmitz endorses the argument of Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman that "FDR was neither a hero of the Jews nor a bystander to the Nazi's [sic] persecution and then annihilation of the Jews" (178). Roosevelt might have taken a stronger stand (incurring political risks in the process), but doing so would have made little impact in any case. Defeating Hitler was the only way to stop the killing.

Finally, Schmitz defends FDR's actions at Yalta against those who have alleged that the president "was duped by Stalin, appeased Russia, and gave away Eastern Europe" (221). All sides made compromises, he insists, and while FDR was forced to implicitly acknowledge the reality of Soviet control over the areas occupied by the Red Army, the Declaration of Liberated Europe at least established "a principle" of self-determination "as an aspiration . . . even if it did not change anything immediately" (228). Most importantly, negotiations at Yalta maintained Big Three unity and cooperation to finish a war whose end was still not yet guaranteed, especially in Asia. FDR sought to maintain a productive relationship with Stalin in the hope that continued partnership would assuage the Soviet Union's fears and, in the words of Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, "influence its evolution away from dictatorship and tyranny" (227).

Schmitz's research relies heavily on FDR's public speeches, supplemented (especially in later chapters) by documents from relevant FRUS volumes. He occasionally includes sources from the FDR Library. In putting FDR at the center of his study, for the most part Schmitz ignores how other actors shaped the world in which the president acted.<sup>3</sup> Experts will find little that is new. But I suspect that undergraduates will love this book. Its extensive quotations of the president and succinct explanations make for an accessible and engaging portrait of an important era.

What are scholars to make of Schmitz's interpretation of FDR? When it comes to wartime strategy or his political inclinations, it is difficult to dispute his claim that Roosevelt "made the correct decisions on the major issues" (240). The president maintained an approval rating above 70 percent during the war (152)—a war that resulted in total victory and relatively few American casualties. (That the victory came at a great cost to Soviet, Japanese, and German civilians as well as soldiers is a fact that gets less attention here).

More contentious is the debate over just what sort of world order FDR built. Stephen Wertheim has recently argued that the significance of FDR's leadership lies not in the creation of the UN and other multilateral organizations

but in the establishment of a commitment to American primacy: the belief that U.S. and world security required American military dominance worldwide. In his telling, WWII birthed not a "liberal world order" but rather America's "Endless Wars." The United Nations, Wertheim contends, was simply a fig leaf for American power, one that "imbue[d] postwar American supremacy with a legitimacy it could not have otherwise obtained."<sup>4</sup>

Schmitz disagrees. He sees FDR as a pragmatic leader seeking to build a cooperative world order in which U.S. leadership would be the means of preventing war rather than enabling it. The Good Neighbor Policy serves as a key example. Roosevelt trumpeted it as "proof that an internationalist approach to national security could work" (49) and held it up as a model for the world. Built on "cooperation, nonaggression, and multilateral exchange," U.S. relations with Latin America showed how to "replace empire with collective security. . . . There was no balance of power in the Western Hemisphere, yet there was no imperial empire either" (156). This statement nicely encapsulates FDR's exceptionalist beliefs in the beneficence of America even as it downplays the economic and diplomatic hegemony that continued to characterize U.S.-Latin American policy in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

Schmitz's description of the Good Neighbor Policy is also an example of what I find most frustrating about this book: a tendency to uncritically adopt the categories of historical actors and to use vague terms in obfuscating ways. When FDR asserted, in Schmitz's paraphrase, that "only American leadership could bring postwar peace, prosperity, and stability," or that "permanent peace and continuous prosperity could only be secured in a world where the United States took up its rightful role and responsibilities," what exactly did he mean?

Depending on how the terms are defined, "leadership" can be exercised through negotiation or coercion. A nation's "rightful role and responsibilities" could mean providing a good example and giving material aid, or it could mean exercising military domination. "Internationalism" has often been used to imply multilateral cooperation when in practice it has really meant the willingness to use armed force unilaterally.

Schmitz too often lets these terms stand uncritically, but he does acknowledge FDR's inconsistencies. He notes that despite his nominal embrace of multilateralism, FDR rejected Churchill's suggestion that the Atlantic Charter include a call for an "effective world organization." This might come eventually, FDR suggested, but only after a period "during which an international police force composed of the United States and Great Britain had had an opportunity of functioning" (127). Roosevelt's later actions indicate that he believed such a period would last indefinitely.

The United Nations may have projected an image of multilateral cooperation, but FDR saw the General Assembly as "an investigative body only" (235). "[T]he real decisions," FDR explained, "should be made by the United States, Great Britain, Russia and China, who would be the powers for many years to come that would have to police the world" (173). FDR also explicitly warned Americans on multiple occasions that future peace would require a willingness to use force (196, 209). Careful readers will note the limits of Roosevelt's commitment to cooperative internationalism.

Schmitz at one point notes that FDR considered jettisoning multilateral cooperation altogether. While he hoped that the Grand Alliance would continue after the war and create peace through great power cooperation,

he was also willing to seek peace “based on American power and unilateral planning by the West” (197). This is why he refused to share the secret of the atomic bomb with the Soviets. Schmitz explains it this way: “With his characteristic optimism, the president believed that time would allow him to unite his two courses and overcome the conflicts through personal diplomacy” (8). He thus explains away FDR’s conditional commitment to cooperation as simple tactical maneuvering: “Roosevelt did not care about the exact route taken as long as he sailed the ship of state to a secure port that would protect American interests and values, prevent future wars, and secure the necessary balance to produce postwar peace and prosperity” (7).

The precise nature of that destination port requires more critical attention. Roosevelt’s internationalism was instrumental. It accepted cooperation when useful but relied on unilateralism when necessary. In the end the American “ship of state” found a fortified harbor from which it launched an endless series of deadly projectiles into peasant villages around the world. Had he lived, perhaps Roosevelt might have found more pacific waters, but it is important to recognize that this violent outcome lay within the parameters of the course that FDR set. Launching an armed flotilla made war a constant possibility, even if Roosevelt’s internationalist vocabulary implied a more peaceful heading.

#### Notes:

1. Warren F. Kimball dismisses the claim that FDR lacked a consistent policy as an “old canard.” Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ, 1991), 7.
2. Schmitz says little about Roosevelt’s religious background. According to Andrew Preston, “Many of those around [FDR] observed that his legendary self-confidence, geniality, and serenity rested upon a bedrock of faith.” Eleanor Roosevelt thought that “he felt guided in great crises by a strength and a wisdom higher than his own.” Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of the Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, 2012), 316–17.
3. For a recent article demonstrating the benefits of a wider approach in capturing the shift in American attitudes about foreign policy, see Andrew Buchanan, “Domesticating Hegemony: Creating a Globalist Public, 1941–1943,” *Diplomatic History* 45, no. 2 (April 2021): 301–329.
4. Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 164.
5. It also overlooks the importance of Latin American organizing and pressure that made non-intervention a hemispheric norm. See, among others, Greg Grandin, “Your Americanism and Mine: Americanism and Anti-Americanism in the Americas,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (November 2006): 1042–1066, esp. 1054. *The Sailor* briefly acknowledges the role of dictators in maintaining order during the Good Neighbor period (42), and Schmitz himself has written about the topic more extensively elsewhere. See David Schmitz, *Thank God They’re on Our Side: The United States & Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999), chaps. 2–3.

### Unwavering Commitment to Internationalism & Exceptionalism: A Review of David Schmitz’s *The Sailor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy*.

Autumn Lass

David Schmitz’s *The Sailor* provides a comprehensive evaluation of President Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy. While many historians – Warren Kimball is one example – have examined FDR’s wartime foreign policy, not since Robert Dallek, with his *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, has a historian examined FDR’s entire approach to foreign policy.

Schmitz laments this historiographical lacuna and seeks to rectify it in *The Sailor*. Schmitz argues Roosevelt’s approach to foreign policy was not only transformative

but consistent throughout his entire political career. His argument challenges the common historical interpretation that President Roosevelt was an opportunistic leader who lacked “continuity” in his foreign policy implementation (x). Instead, Schmitz maintains that Roosevelt was unflinching in his belief in internationalism and the United States’ place in the world.

Schmitz utilizes a plethora of sources to demonstrate that Roosevelt’s support for internationalism was longstanding. His thorough inspection of archival evidence is one of Schmitz’s greatest strengths, and his examination of the sources clearly shows that Roosevelt was neither fickle nor arbitrary in his world view. Instead, he had a definite picture of what the world should look like following World War I and how the United States fit into that world, and one of Roosevelt’s main goals as a public servant was to make his worldview a reality.

Throughout the book, Schmitz repeatedly links Roosevelt’s foreign policy approach to two foundational beliefs: American exceptionalism and internationalism (4). He argues that “Roosevelt believed that American values were universal.... He was an internationalist who consistently worked to expand America’s role in the world through multilateral institutions and collective security” (8). Schmitz claims that examining Roosevelt’s entire presidency (1933 – 1945) proves that his approach to international affairs was always consistent. He sought to advance about anti-imperial ideals, spread American values, and create international institutions to promote world peace throughout his presidency.

One of Schmitz’s most important contributions to Roosevelt scholarship is his analysis of Roosevelt’s early expressions of his foreign policy beliefs and the important lessons he learned from the Great War. First, Schmitz argues that FDR learned early on, as assistant secretary of the navy, that “domestic affairs and international relations were inseparable” (20). He saw firsthand the importance of having public opinion coalesce around foreign policy (14). When the U.S. public did not support Wilson’s goals, it prevented Wilson from achieving those lofty ambitions in 1918.

Roosevelt also concluded that in the aftermath of the Great War, Americans simply did not understand that the United States’ national interests were directly tied to assuming its place as a world leader. Nor did they fully comprehend that peace and prosperity were directly linked to the United States leading the world into the future (13). He felt, therefore, it was his job to “properly guide” them and show them that their best interests were connected to the United States assuming its role as a global power (19).

FDR saw the Great War “as a continuation of the fight for freedom at home that had marked the nation from the outset and an opportunity to create a new international system” (24). He was so committed to the ideas presented in the League of Nations that he helped to establish the Woodrow Wilson Foundation to help promote Wilson’s international vision. Even after the Great War, he promoted these ideas in his public speeches and published essays. For example, in a *Foreign Affairs* article published in 1928, he argued “that the United States was an exceptional nation destined for world leadership” (29). He pushed back against Republican interpretations of American exceptionalism, which he believed were rooted in unilateralism, imperialism, and neutrality. Instead, he outlined what he believed were the true tenets of American exceptionalism, tenets that would ultimately serve as the foundation of his foreign policy: international cooperation, anti-imperialism, and collective security (30–31).

After examining the underpinnings of Roosevelt’s foreign policy assumptions, Schmitz goes on to show how he began to implement those ideas early in his presidency with the Good Neighbor Policy. Even though his number-

one priority was addressing issues related to the Great Depression, he believed that improving U.S. foreign policy was still vital to securing long-term peace and prosperity, first in the Western Hemisphere and then eventually in the world.

Schmitz contends that through the creation and implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy, Roosevelt was able to “make concrete in the Western Hemisphere his principal conceptions about international relations that would guide American foreign policy through World War II” (36). He took steps to bring about hemispheric cooperation, end imperialistic policies in Latin America, foster multilateral institutions, and promote collective security (38). And he used the policy not only to bring about bold changes to U.S. foreign policy, but also to begin the process of educating the public about the “proper role of the United States in the world” (38).

Roosevelt focused on two large goals in the years after the 1936 election and just prior to the start of World War II. First, he worked on implementing the successes of the Good Neighbor Policy globally to help create peace and prosperity, especially with conflict growing in Asia and Europe. Second, he set out to “redirect public opinion” in order to gain support for his internationalist foreign policy (64). To do this, he started a national conversation about America’s place in the world to sway the public away from neutrality to internationalism and to lead them to appreciate their position in the world, particularly in regard to international tensions especially in Europe (65). In his inaugural address in 1937, he claimed that the Good Neighbor Policy had brought peace to the Western Hemisphere and encouraged Americans to see that hemispheric peace was not all they should seek.

Schmitz identifies the Quarantine Speech of October 1937 as “the most significant statement of [FDR’s] internationalist understanding of world events to date” (77). In the speech, Roosevelt argued that the United States would not be able to avoid growing violence in Japan and Germany. He implored Americans to understand that they should help other countries that were standing up for peace and liberalism not only for the sake of U.S. national security but also because it was the moral thing to do. He ended the speech by reaffirming that while America had to actively search for paths to peace, it could not remain passive (79). This speech marked the start of a nearly four-year public campaign—often referred to as the Great Debate—to persuade Americans to support their allies.

Roosevelt also needed to change minds in Congress, where neutrality was strongly preferred to internationalism. He had some mild success when Congress finally agreed to amend the Neutrality Acts to allow his cash-and-carry proposal. Roosevelt saw this as a step in the right direction, because the provision would aid to Great Britain, increase American global influence, and implement an economic appeasement policy toward Germany (69 – 70).

Ultimately, Roosevelt believed that the way to European peace was to ease international economic tensions. This belief, Schmitz writes, was firmly rooted in the successes of the reciprocal trade agreements of the Good Neighbor Policy which had established peace and cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. While he acknowledged that issues related to the rearmament in Germany were significantly different from those in Latin America, FDR felt that the Good Neighbor Policy could and should be the model for achieving European peace.

Even with tensions continuing to mount in Europe, Schmitz argues Roosevelt and his advisors stood by the idea that a European strategy modeled after the Good

Neighbor Policy was the best pathway to peace. But the administration was divided on policy in the Pacific. Some advisors, like the U.S. ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew, believed harsh sanctions would hurt American interests in the region. Others, like Stanley Hornbeck, the State Department’s senior advisor on political relations, wanted Roosevelt to take a harder stance against Japan and issue harsh economic sanctions. Schmitz contends that FDR’s decision to pursue a middle-ground policy toward Japan illustrates his ability not only to understand the realities of the world in 1939, but also to work toward solving international tensions with peace and cooperation (87–89).

By 1939, Schmitz writes, American public opinion began to shift in favor of more internationalist policies. With that shift and mounting international crisis, Roosevelt engaged in a full court press to completely revise the United States’ foreign policy and change the public’s attitude toward America’s role in the world (95). With his reelection in 1940, Roosevelt had all the support he needed from the American public and Congress to complete his foreign policy transformation (106).

According to Schmitz, 1941 was the pivotal year for Roosevelt’s goal of transforming American foreign policy. The president’s public messaging shifted to the creation and promotion of his Four Freedoms – his foundational principles – and the Lend-Lease Policy. Schmitz contends that Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms provided the “ideological justifications” for the war and Lend-Lease was the policy to make the United States the defender of those freedoms abroad (96). The combination of these two, he writes, served as Roosevelt’s “fulcrum” to launch his internationalist policies.

Schmitz claims that the Four Freedoms created the justifications for a just war and provided the foundational concepts for Roosevelt’s postwar world. Lend-Lease then provided the early methods, short of war, to defend the values embodied in the Four Freedoms overseas. The program allowed the administration to claim publicly that it was trying to keep the nation at peace while simultaneously standing for freedom abroad. Roosevelt linked Lend-Lease to the Good Neighbor Policy. Both policies were used to promote cooperation and internationalism, champion democratic ideals, and protect American interests. The message created overwhelming support from Americans by the mid-spring of 1941 (100 – 101).

From 1941 onward, Roosevelt also focused on developing his Grand Strategy. He wanted to immediately aid Great Britain. He wanted to tackle the Nazi regime first, because he believed it posed the greatest threat to democracy in the world (116). He also expanded his interpretation of the scope of the Monroe Doctrine to include protecting the Atlantic Ocean (119). The Lend-Lease program helped Roosevelt realize those goals even before the U.S. officially entered the war.

In August 1941, the United States and UK agreed upon the Atlantic Charter. The charter was composed of the fundamental components of Roosevelt’s international worldview and the Grand Alliance (127), which remained the most important goal of Roosevelt’s Grand Strategy (123). Schmitz argues the agreement to build a “permanent peace built upon international cooperation” by establishing “a wider and permanent system of general security” was the most essential element of the charter to Roosevelt (127). In meant that by the time Pearl Harbor was attacked, the president had completely transformed American foreign policy. It was now an internationalist policy, rooted in protecting the concepts of the Four Freedoms, promoting collective security (as would be seen in the Grand Alliance),

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and establishing a new “multilateral, international organization” that encouraged American ideals abroad (138).

According to Schmitz, nothing symbolized Roosevelt’s vision for the postwar world more than the Grand Alliance, because out of it would come the foundations for the United Nations’ Security Council (141). Keeping the alliance together took all of Roosevelt’s skills as a leader and personal diplomat. The biggest obstacle Roosevelt faced was getting the British and the Soviets to work together and set aside national interests for the greater good. Tensions related to the Soviet Union’s role in the Grand Alliance continued until Roosevelt’s death in 1945. Although it was his presence and commitment to the alliance that held it together, it was, according to Schmitz, his “overreliance on personal diplomacy” in managing Churchill and Stalin that left the Alliance vulnerable to future problems (241).

The zenith of Roosevelt’s foreign policy aspirations lay in the creation of the various international institutions that came out of the war. The establishment of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank institutionalized and internationalized the ideas behind the Good Neighbor Policy (207). The Bretton Woods Conference created the framework for the United Nations and served as the shining achievement of Roosevelt’s foreign policy transformation (229). These institutions promoted peace, prosperity, and American values (208). They institutionalized and globalized the Four Freedoms and continued building upon the principles outlined in the Atlantic Charter (217).

Schmitz argues establishing the international system based on American values, collective security, and cooperation was Roosevelt’s greatest legacy (242). He maintains that FDR’s commitment to American exceptionalism and internationalism created the postwar world. Ultimately, he concludes these contributions make Franklin Roosevelt the “most important and most successful foreign policy maker in the nation’s history (242).”

*The Sailor* provides an extensive examination of Roosevelt’s foreign policy aspirations and shows how he made that worldview a reality. Schmitz hammers home throughout the book that the most important elements of FDR’s foreign policymaking were rooted in internationalism and American exceptionalism. He excels at illustrating that FDR’s foreign policy approach was consistent and rooted in the same ideals throughout his time as a public servant, and that consistency is made abundantly clear in his analysis and discussion of the influence of the Good Neighbor Policy on FDR’s entire foreign policy throughout the 1930s and 1940s. His analysis adds to the historiography of the Good Neighbor Policy’s importance when it comes to assessing and understanding Roosevelt’s larger foreign policy goals.

Since Schmitz’s analysis focuses solely on FDR’s foreign policymaking ideology, it does not thoroughly examine FDR’s failures, such as Japanese internment or provide a detailed discussion of what influence the Holocaust had on his foreign policy approach. While Schmitz acknowledges these issues, they are not at the forefront of his analysis. He does explore FDR’s struggles in managing the fate of Poland while maintaining the Grand Alliance. Poland was the fly in the ointment for the alliance, and the unresolved tensions over Poland almost immediately created problems for the Truman administration, which eventually morphed into larger tensions between the Soviet Union and the rest of the Grand Alliance. While Schmitz indicates that FDR laid out a roadmap for Harry Truman to follow to achieve postwar peace, he acknowledges Roosevelt’s emphasis on

personal relationships meant that after his death, problems would inevitably arise, particularly in the Grand Alliance (238 & 241).

Overall, however, *The Sailor* provides an excellent evaluation of the foreign policy ideas of FDR’s presidency. Schmitz clearly demonstrates that FDR’s vision of a world with peace, prosperity, and collective security were always at the forefront of his mind, whether in the Good Neighbor Policy, the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, Lend-Lease, or the management of the Grand Alliance. He achieves his goal of showing continuity in Roosevelt’s approach to foreign policymaking, and he shows that Roosevelt’s methods were always rooted in internationalism and American exceptionalism. His work enhances both the historiography of FDR’s foreign policy and U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century.

## Author’s Response

David F. Schmitz

I thank Andrew Johns for organizing this roundtable and Benjamin A. Coates, Andrew Johnstone, and Autumn Lass for their participation.

Autumn Lass has provided an excellent summary of my work and has engaged with the central arguments of *The Sailor*, with a particular focus on the ideas and concepts that formed the basis of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s foreign policy and how it marked a transformation of the U.S. approach to the world and its security. I am pleased that she highlighted the importance of FDR’s views on foreign policy prior to becoming president. Roosevelt’s experience as assistant secretary of the navy under President Woodrow Wilson and his numerous statements on international relations during the 1920s have not been widely examined even though they set out the key assumptions FDR held about the United States and its role in the world when he became president. As Lass correctly notes, Roosevelt entered the White House convinced that only an internationalist approach to foreign policy could ensure America security and prosperity. This understanding shaped the Good Neighbor Policy, which was the president’s first step to implementing his internationalist policy.

Lass is also correct to note that the implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy was linked to Franklin Roosevelt’s efforts to challenge the existing view of American security as being best maintained through a policy of hemispheric defense that relied on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans for protection, neutrality, and territorial integrity. The thirty-second president saw these views as outdated, ineffective, and dangerous and set out to change the American public’s understanding of their nation’s place in the world. To Roosevelt, the only means to protect American security and interests was through an internationalist approach based on the United States taking up its role as a world leader, collective security, preparedness, and working with other nations through multilateral institutions to create a world order conducive to American values and interests. His long-term effort to change the basis of American foreign policy culminated in the shift in public opinion in 1940 in support of his position.

As Lass points out, I see these views coming together in what I termed the “fulcrum” of Roosevelt’s foreign policy in December 1940 and January 1941 with the announcement of Lend-Lease and the Four Freedoms, along with the president’s declaration that the United States would be the

arsenal of democracy. The four freedoms represented the values Roosevelt believed the United States stood for and needed to defend, and these policies became the basis for the Grand Alliance and the justification for war. Furthermore, these ideas shaped the various multilateral institutions the Roosevelt administration established at the end of the war to promote peace, democracy, and prosperity and extend the Grand Alliance into the postwar period.

Yet, as Lass observed, I also note that the greatest weakness of FDR's foreign policy was his "overreliance on personal diplomacy." Roosevelt saw the use of personal diplomacy as especially necessary regarding relations with the Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union. The highly personal nature of Franklin Roosevelt's diplomacy is at the center of Coates's criticism of my analysis of Roosevelt's internationalism. Before turning to these concerns, there are two other points that Coates raises that I want to address.

Coates does not see much controversy in my claiming that Roosevelt had a consistent foreign policy and challenging the view that the president mostly reacted to events. In a footnote, he cites Warren Kimball's statement from 1991 that it was an "old canard" that FDR lacked consistency in his policy. Thirty years ago, Kimball saw it as a mistaken view, but that does not mean it was not still widely held. As Kimball states in his blurb for the book, a central strength of my work is that I "challenge the long-standing argument that Franklin Roosevelt was a realist opportunist who simply reacted to world events and successfully demonstrates that FDR developed a consistent foreign policy."

In another footnote, Coates takes me to task for saying "little about Roosevelt's religious background" and the basis it provided for the president's confidence. I agree that religion did play a crucial role in Roosevelt's confidence, and I set out in the introduction that when FDR was asked what his political philosophy was, he stated "I am a Christian and a Democrat—that's all," and note that "these were the two central points of his worldview" (2). I point out the influence of his time at Groton and the impact that its director, the Episcopalian minister Endicott Peabody, and the school's emphasis on Christian character had on Roosevelt and his view of American exceptionalism. As Roosevelt stated in 1926: "I well remember my old school master, Mr. Peabody, teaching us that material and spiritual progress has had its periodic ups and downs but that the up-curves are always the longer, and the net advance is certain in the end" (5-6). Furthermore, there are examples throughout the book of Roosevelt in his speeches and fireside chats invoking God's blessings and guidance, and I quote from his D-Day message to the nation that was in the form of a prayer (203). To me, this all demonstrated the importance of his faith to both Roosevelt's confidence and policymaking.

Coates's primary concern with *The Sailor* is in regards to definitions. Neither reviewer commented on my analysis of how Franklin Roosevelt developed the concept of national security as part of his internationalist policy, and how it shaped the president's "grand design" for the postwar world (200). Yet, this is what Coates found "most frustrating" about my work: "a tendency to uncritically adopt the categories of historical actors and to use vague terms in obfuscating ways." Coates is correct that terms can have different definitions, and employed in different ways by different people. The meaning of key terms and concepts is certainly a worthy issue for discussion and an area where there can be disagreement. I believe that my use of terms is clear and reflects how President Roosevelt intended them, and, therefore, disagree that Roosevelt used internationalism to mean "the willingness to use armed forces unilaterally."

Coates notes that I do address the times when Roosevelt was inconsistent in his policies. Often, as Coates points out, I see these inconsistencies as tacking by Roosevelt, necessary maneuvering and compromises to reach his ultimate goal. This gets back to the greatest weakness of FDR's policymaking, his reliance on personal diplomacy. It left room for other people to interpret his views and follow policies that I do not believe Roosevelt intended or would have done had he not died in April 1945. The "fortified harbor" that Coates notes was not Roosevelt's creation. Although I agree that Roosevelt's policies, as I note, "shaped the thinking of the next generation of American leaders and Cold War policy," (10) I do not believe post-World War II American foreign policy can be reduced to just a quest for "military dominance worldwide." As I state in the book's conclusion, "the postwar period, of course, did not turn out entirely as President Roosevelt desired," (241) with the breakdown of the Grand Alliance and the emergence of the Cold War. Nonetheless, I did find that Roosevelt's "grand strategy was sound; the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the Nuremberg trials, and the concept of universal human rights, all became cornerstones of the Western alliance system." Along with the victory over fascism in World War II, these are significant achievements and explain how Roosevelt transformed American foreign policy from hemispheric defense to internationalism and why I hold to my conclusion that "Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the most important and most successful foreign policymaker in the nation's history" (242).