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Walter Lippmann on U. S. Foreign Policy

Author(s): Samuel Flagg Bemis

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## REVIEW ARTICLES

### WALTER LIPPMANN ON U. S. FOREIGN POLICY\*

Walter Lippmann is the most distinguished American journalist of our generation. This book is said to have sold during the present year at least half a million copies. It has already had a great influence on American public opinion in favor of an Anglo-American-Soviet alliance to enforce a peace of righteousness and security after the present war. On October 24, 1943, Wendell L. Willkie, speaking at the Hotel Astor at the Second Anniversary of Freedom House—a war-time organization for the promotion of inter-allied solidarity—presented to Mr. Lippmann the first annual “Freedom Award” given by that organization to “an American who has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of freedom.” One may continue to be a great admirer, as this reviewer certainly is, of Lippmann as a journalist, and to sympathize with his desires and proposals, and at the same time regret that he has misconstrued history for current political purpose. The true scholar can never justify such historical means for achieving a political end, no matter how desirable the end.

This tract consists of two principal parts: (1) an argument for an Anglo-American-Soviet alliance to enforce a peace of victory by giving an overwhelming balance of power to these three “nuclear” powers following their victory over Germany and Japan; and (2) an historical exegesis of American diplomatic history to prove that such an alliance would be in conformance with the historical traditions of our foreign policy.

This review need concern itself only with the historical part of the book. Mr. Lippmann argues that an alliance with Great Britain now would be just what the Fathers advocated over one hundred years ago when the Monroe Doctrine was pronounced. His basic premise is that the Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed “only after Canning, the British Foreign Secretary, had assured the American Minister, Richard Rush, that Britain and the British Navy would support the United States” (p. 17). The assertion appears in a somewhat stronger form on page 59: “In the last great act in foreign relations which was determined by the Founding Fathers of the Republic in the prep-

\* *U. S. Foreign Policy. Shield of the Republic.* By WALTER LIPPMANN. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943. Pp. x, 177. \$1.50.)

aration of the Monroe Doctrine, they made their decision *after negotiations in London by which they were assured of the armed diplomatic support of Great Britain.*" Again, page 89, the author refers to "how much the Monroe Doctrine depended upon the 'concert' with Great Britain which Rush and Canning had *negotiated.*" Now this is pure fiction. The facts are well known to historical scholarship, both American and British. No agreement, no understanding, was ever negotiated between Rush and Canning by which Great Britain assured the United States that she would support what was later pronounced as the Monroe Doctrine. As President Roosevelt said in one of his speeches (I believe that it was the Arsenal of Democracy speech), there was no understanding between the two powers on this question.

This is what happened: In August, 1823, George Canning proposed to Richard Rush a five-point concert of policy, based on the following principles:

1. "England conceived the recovery of the Colonies by Spain to be hopeless,
2. "That the question of their recognition as independent states was one of time and circumstances,
3. "That England was disposed not to throw any impediment in the way of an arrangement between the Colonies and the Mother Country by amicable negotiation,
4. "That she aimed at the possession of no portion of the Colonies for herself,
5. "That she could not see the transfer of any portion of them to any other power with indifference."

Of these points, Point 2 was contrary to the basis of our Latin-American policy of that time. The United States had already recognized the independence of the Latin American states, most of which were republics. In vain we had urged Great Britain to join with us in doing so. She preferred to see monarchies set up there instead of republics, monarchies like the one which British diplomacy had created already in Brazil, monarchies that would be within a sphere of British tutelage and influence.

Rush told Canning he did not have powers which allowed him to take action on such a proposal, that he would send home for instructions. But Rush's dispatches and letters reveal that he was willing, on his own responsibility and at his own professional risk, without instructions, to make a joint pronouncement with Canning, *if Canning would pledge Great Britain to the immediate recognition of the independence of the Latin American states.* Canning would not do this.

Canning's real purpose, of course, was to fend off any possible intervention in Latin America by the powers of the Holy Alliance, or by any mandatory of them, like France. Professor Perkins has shown that there was really no danger of the powers combining together for joint intervention at that time, and any danger that there might have been of intervention by France was stopped by a British ultimatum to France, the well-known Polignac Memorandum of October 9, 1823. Canning had been unwilling to await the result of Rush's reference of the matter to his Government at home, and acted alone. (The Polignac Memorandum was not known in Washington when the Monroe Doctrine was formulated.)

When President Monroe received Rush's dispatches telling of the conversations with Canning, he referred the matter for advice to ex-President Jefferson and ex-President Madison as well as to his cabinet. Both Jefferson and Madison, as Mr. Lippmann correctly states, were in favor of the concert as proposed by Canning; but in the cabinet deliberations Secretary of State John Quincy Adams persuaded the President to decline the overture, and instead to issue independently a pronouncement of our own: The Monroe Doctrine. So, however interesting the view of Jefferson and Madison (of which Lippmann makes much) in favor of Canning's proposals, the fact remains that President Monroe laid them aside. There was no "agreement" with England, no "understanding," no "concert," no "assurance of diplomatic armed support" (whatever that is). Such assertions are figments of Mr. Lippmann's imagination, crystallizations of his desires, for which he cites not the slightest support, either in historical sources or secondary authorities.

If Mr. Lippmann were Ambassador of the United States today, say to Great Britain or Russia, would he construe such an expression as the Rush-Canning conversations as an "alliance," an "agreement," an "understanding," a "concert," or an "assurance," all of which words he has used at one time or another to describe them?

As a matter of historical fact, Great Britain was opposed to the Monroe Doctrine, not only in 1823, but all through the nineteenth century until 1896. She violated it or flouted it repeatedly, and these violations are lightly passed over by Mr. Lippmann, or not mentioned at all.

Despite the attitude of Great Britain toward the New World, toward the Monroe Doctrine, and toward the balance of power in the New World, I am nevertheless of the opinion that *mankind had its happiest century of civilized human existence in the period after 1815 when Great Britain held the balance of power in the Old World, and*

*was predominant on the high seas.* During that century human freedom became anchored in principles of the British and American constitutions, which spread their influence and that of developing democracy widely out over the civilized world.

It would have been much better for Mr. Lippmann candidly to recite the historical facts, and then to state how changed conditions in the twentieth century had brought about a compelling identity of interests between the United States and Great Britain in face of any threat to alter the balance of power overwhelmingly against them, in Europe or in Asia.

The very forces against which the United Nations are fighting this war are notorious for the perversion of science and history in order to achieve current political purposes. One must believe that Mr. Lippmann abhors, as this reviewer does, the Nazi use of the Aryan myth, and Nazi perversion of the German historical dialectic for their detestable purposes. No matter how desirable the ends which we Americans have in view for a peace of righteousness, let us, particularly historical scholars, guard ourselves against the misuse of history, no matter how good the ends we have in mind may be. Only a few scholars have spoken their minds in this particular instance. Professor Charles C. Tansill has done so in his article "Mr. Lippmann on American Foreign Policy," printed in *Thought* for September, 1943. This reviewer wishes to record his stand on the side of objective historical scholarship: he likes Mr. Lippmann's journalism, he sympathizes with Mr. Lippmann's end, but he rejects Mr. Lippmann's means.

SAMUEL FLAGG BEMIS.

Yale University.