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# The Stimson Doctrine: F.D.R. *versus* Moley and Tugwell

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IN JANUARY, 1933, Raymond Moley and Rexford G. Tugwell, professors at Columbia University and members of Roosevelt's original Brain Trust, concluded that the President-elect had accepted the Stimson Doctrine as a basis for formulating America's Far Eastern policy. They met Roosevelt in his New York City residence and voiced their objections. In his *After Seven Years* Moley gives an account of this meeting, describing in a general way the nationalist position which he and Tugwell advocated. This brief essay presents, in the context of other relevant statements by Tugwell, Moley's summary of what he said to Roosevelt on the day the die was cast in American policy towards Japan.

On January 17, 1933, Roosevelt made a statement to the press on foreign policy. Journalists, state department officials, and Roosevelt's advisers interpreted this statement as an endorsement of the Stimson Doctrine of nonrecognition of the Japanese penetration of China. The Brain Trusters and nearly all others outside of the Hoover administration assumed that there was only one doctrine of nonrecognition. Professor Richard N. Current, however, has held that during the course of a struggle between Hoover and Stimson to name and define the doctrine, "nonrecognition" came to mean different things to the President and the secretary of state. Hoover opposed recognition of treaties resulting from the use of force. Stimson "always wanted to go in for withdrawal of diplomats or an economic embargo, either or both of which measures would almost inevitably lead to war." Hoover favored disarmament rather than economic sanctions as a means of implementing a pact of peace. Stimson called disarmament "just a proposition from Alice in Wonderland."<sup>1</sup>

According to Current, Hoover first proposed the doctrine as an alternative to sanctions or other aggressive action. He requested written statements on this point from Secretary of War Hurley and Secretary of the Interior Wilbur for the historical record. Stimson then formu-

<sup>1</sup> Richard N. Current, *Secretary Stimson* (New Brunswick, 1954), 104-123, is the source of references to Current's findings; a more detailed study is his "The Hoover Doctrine and the Stimson Doctrine," *American Historical Review*, XLVIII (1954), 512-542.

lated the doctrine, modifying Hoover's pacifism. Hoover considered nonrecognition a "final and sufficient measure, a substitute for economic pressure or military force, a policy looking toward conciliation and peace and relying on the moral power of public opinion for its effect." Stimson viewed nonrecognition "not as an alternative but as a preliminary to economic and military sanctions, a way of drawing sharp the issue between the United States . . . and Japan, a means of laying down the ideological basis for eventual war."

Tugwell, as a typical outsider, did not, as he recalled, "separate Hoover and Stimson."<sup>2</sup> He made the very mistake which, according to Current, Hoover feared many people would make. In November, 1932, Current notes, Hoover suggested that Undersecretary of State William R. Castle write an account of the administration's foreign policy. He did not want Stimson to tell the story, placing himself at the center, because "he would have had us at war with Japan before this if he had had his way."

Other students of the Stimson Doctrine, including Stimson's biographer, disagree with Current's two-doctrines analysis.<sup>3</sup> In any event, what worried Moley and Tugwell was whether Roosevelt would support an aggressive version of nonrecognition. Stimson, too, wanted to find out where the President-elect would stand.

Stimson intended to persuade Roosevelt to adopt an aggressive version. He had to contend with Hoover, who was not enthusiastic about Stimson's meeting Roosevelt. Stimson got the permission he wanted on January 3, 1933, after telling Hoover that he was "sufficiently interested in his [Hoover's] policy to want to do anything I could to perpetuate it"—an equivocal statement if there were indeed two versions of nonrecognition. Hoover agreed to a meeting on the condition that Roosevelt put the request to him. Among the Democrats, Norman Davis urged a meeting, persuading Roosevelt to agree to see Stimson.<sup>4</sup> Felix Frankfurter, an old friend of Stimson's and a Roosevelt adviser, served as go-between. Shortly before Christmas Frankfurter told Stimson that Roosevelt would like to see him. The final invitation came on January 6.<sup>5</sup>

Stimson went from Coolidge's funeral at Northampton, Mass., to

<sup>2</sup> Letter to writer, April 3, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy in the Great Depression: Hoover-Stimson Foreign Policy, 1929-1933* (New Haven, 1957), 169 n.; Elting E. Morison, *Turmoil and Tradition: A Study of the Life and Times of Henry L. Stimson* (Boston, 1960), 401, refers to the "doctrine of non-recognition—whether his [Stimson's] or Rogers', or Hoover's or William Jennings Bryan's."

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Moley, *After Seven Years* (New York, 1939), 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Hyde Park. On January 9, 1933, the two men talked all afternoon with no one else present. Stimson, *Current* writes, found his ideas closer to Roosevelt's than to Hoover's except on disarmament. He cautioned Roosevelt "not to be too hasty" on disarmament, predicting that Japan would object to the naval portions of Hoover's plan. Stimson took up the matter of Philippine independence, the possible imminence of war, and naval strategy in the event of war. He found it easier to discuss these subjects with Roosevelt than with Hoover. But the heart of the conversation was the Stimson Doctrine.

On January 10, according to *Current*, Stimson told Castle that he had "a good talk with Roosevelt, that if you could take at 100% all that he said, the future looked very hopeful as to foreign relations." On January 11 Hoover sent a memorandum, written by Stimson, to Congress on the revision of arms-embargo legislation in order to extend its application beyond the western hemisphere. Roosevelt endorsed Stimson's recommendation enthusiastically. On January 16 Stimson informed the European foreign offices and the League of Nations of his position on Manchurian recognition. He "indicated broadly," Moley comments, "that there would be no disposition on the part of the new administration to change it."<sup>6</sup> On January 17 Roosevelt issued a public statement: "American foreign policy must uphold the sanctity of treaties." This was a meaningless platitude to the man in the street, but not to the state department or to Moley and Tugwell.

Moley and Tugwell felt certain before Roosevelt's statement of January 17 that Stimson had won the President-elect's support. Conferring with the governor after the Stimson-Roosevelt meeting of January 9, they were convinced that Roosevelt had committed himself to Stimson's version of nonrecognition.<sup>7</sup> Roosevelt's endorsement on January 11 of Hoover's memorandum to Congress on arms-embargo legislation confirmed their misgivings about the meeting of January 9. Stimson's statement of January 16 to European foreign offices and the League provided additional grounds for their conclusion.

To Moley and Tugwell, Roosevelt's announcement of January 17 was a climactic warning—the moreso because Roosevelt was to discuss intergovernmental debts with Hoover on January 20, in a meeting which the Brain Trusters considered part of an attempt to win Roosevelt's commitment to Hoover's internationalist foreign policy. Moley called Roosevelt's position of January 17 "wholehearted acquiescence

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Charles A. Beard, *American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932-1940* (New Haven, 1946), 138.

in the Hoover-Stimson rejection of the traditional American concept of neutrality,” and insisted that “it endorsed a policy which invited a major war in the Far East.” He and Tugwell feared that Roosevelt was running the risk of making contradictory commitments, that he was being pushed into an impossible position.<sup>8</sup>

The two men were dismayed and puzzled. “To say that I was sick at heart . . .,” Moley recalled, “would be the epitome of understatement. I was also completely baffled.” He and Tugwell speculated on the possible reasons for Roosevelt’s attitude—ignorance of the implications of his conduct, an attempt to strike a “compromise” between the nationalists and the “Hulls and Davises of the party,” or a desire to demonstrate to Moley, “who, God knew, required no such proof,” that he depended on no one kind of advice and no single adviser may have accounted for Roosevelt’s behavior. “Or was it something of all three? Rex and I tried to find the answer.”<sup>9</sup>

On January 18 Moley and Tugwell spent several hours with Roosevelt at his 65th Street house in New York City. They began with an attempt to show that the underwriting of the Hoover-Stimson policy in the Far East was a tragic mistake. Tugwell, Moley recalls, carried the ball: “Rex, always more fluent and excitable than I, elaborated the argument with all the clarity and passion of which he was capable.” Moley listened, trying to determine from Roosevelt’s reaction what had motivated him.<sup>10</sup>

Tugwell did not pretend to be an expert on the Far East. He had requested the views of Nathaniel Peffer, his colleague at Columbia.<sup>11</sup> He based his own ideas primarily on his training as an economist. The gist of what he said to Roosevelt emphasized Japan’s position as the only industrial nation in the Far East. Her natural market and source of raw materials was the Asiatic mainland. Some old-fashioned economic imperialism was preferable to military imperialism. It would create conditions favorable to Japanese liberals, enabling eventual regularizing and toning down of Chino-Japanese relations through negotiation. If Japan’s natural economic outlets were closed, the militarists would gain control, making war inevitable. Moreover, Japanese economic interests would be the only effective check to Russian imperialism in the Far East.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Moley, *After Seven Years*, 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Letter, Peffer to Tugwell, Jan. 7, 1933, Tugwell papers, in the personal possession of Mr. Tugwell, Greenbelt, Md.

<sup>12</sup> “Notes from a New Deal Diary,” introduction, Tugwell papers; interview with writer,

The discussion ended suddenly. "We might as well have saved our breath," Moley observed. Roosevelt looked up. He remembered that his ancestors once traded with China. "I have always had the deepest sympathy for the Chinese," he said. "How could you expect me not to go along with Stimson on Japan?" Moley and Tugwell were stunned. Moley recalls, "That was all. It was so simple, so incredible, there could be no answer."<sup>18</sup>

In 1947 Tugwell reviewed his thoughts on American-Japanese relations, throwing some light on what Roosevelt had in mind in 1933.<sup>14</sup> Tugwell had been opposed to the Stimson policy as early as 1930. He thought the British, whose policy had "an outward look of cowardice," were right. We were wrong because our policy led to war. He thought it "quite possible" that China could take care of her interests, "as she had always taken care of ambitious conquerors." He felt that the Japanese Pacific ended thousands of miles west of Pearl Harbor. Seeing no necessary conflict, he disapproved of defense installations at Guam and favored immediate military withdrawal from the Philippines. Even devotion to medievalism, rising militarism, and declining civil control in Japan "seemed to be the result of Western provocation. We refused them face. Toward them our liberalism was not even pretense: we gave them implacable hostility, supercilious superiority; and no encouragement for those among them who might have been our friends."

Tugwell writes that "there will always be unsatisfactory speculation" about what might have happened if we had taken a different attitude when Japan began her Manchurian adventure. "It may be that by then it was already too late." Perhaps our policy of "insult and exclusion" made subsequent events "unavoidable." Perhaps the Japanese liberals had already lost their influence. Perhaps the totalitarians already had the "strategic hold in school, in home, in government which they

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University of Chicago, April, 1954; M. Bronfenbrenner, "Some Lessons of Japan's Economic Development, 1853-1938," *Pacific Affairs*, XXXIV (1961), 22-23, points out that analyses of Japan's trade situation in the 1930's often overlook the steady growth of the Japanese domestic market and the "more pressing reason why Japan must 'export or die.' This is Japan's need to import." Bronfenbrenner also notes, *ibid.*, 24, that the *zaibatsu*, great importers and exporters, preferred "an essentially pacific type of economic penetration" to the militaristic form which Japanese imperialism finally took.

<sup>18</sup> Moley, *After Seven Years*, 95; Herbert Agar, *The Price of Power: America since 1945* (Chicago, 1957), 98-104, maintains that the American people were bewildered when China fell under communist control in 1949 because they had sentimentally believed that the Chinese were our friends and thus had imagined that Chiang's China was also a great power. Roosevelt, Agar concludes, contributed to the "China-myth."

<sup>14</sup> Tugwell, *The Stricken Land: The Story of Puerto Rico* (Garden City, 1947), 177-181, is the source of references in the remainder of this essay to Tugwell's comments on American-Japanese relations not attributed to other sources.

needed for their purpose.” In any event, Tugwell did not think it was “too late” down to the middle thirties.

Tugwell was not sure exactly when he began to change his views. He thought “it was somewhere about the time I left the government in 1936.” Some remarks he made in an article show that he concluded by the spring of 1935 that it was “too late.”<sup>15</sup> He “ceased to look backward at what might have been.” He felt that no trade arrangement which would prevent Japanese low standards from furnishing our workers and manufacturers “a competition which would result in wide fear and hatred” seemed possible. Meanwhile, “inconsistently but actually, our attitude of superiority grew stronger.” There was widespread talk about “cleaning out the monkeys.” Tugwell and his close friend William Herridge, Canadian minister in Washington, did not share in this attitude. They agreed that conflict was inevitable—Herridge “may have . . . helped to persuade me that things had gone too far for reversal”—but they thought that “our side . . . was in great danger from overconfidence and underpreparation.”

Once Tugwell had decided that “Japanese trade aggression and her growing imperialism had by now gone too far to be checked in any way except by force,” he was in agreement with Roosevelt, who believed in 1933 that it was already “too late.” In view of this matter of timing—of estimating when it was “too late”—it is not surprising that Roosevelt’s reaction to their arguments on January 18 baffled Moley and Tugwell. He had decided it was “too late,” and they had not. He could not give them a systematic, detailed explanation of the reasons why he differed with them because he had not thought through the implications of his decision. In 1957 Tugwell, referring to the lame-duck period, noted that Roosevelt

was having some long thoughts, shared with no one, which only long afterward would issue in policy. Rising in Europe and the Far East was a sinister public philosophy, anti-democratic and devoted to violence. . . . How soon, exactly, the President-elect formulated his position vis-a-vis the dictators is not known. Before inauguration one part of it would become plain when he joined . . . Stimson . . . in active opposition to Japanese expansionism in Manchuria. . . . The same doctrine would in time appear as that which was also to be applied to European aggressors. At the moment it was not explicit. . . .<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Tugwell, “The Progressive Tradition,” *Atlantic Monthly*, CLV (1935), 438.

<sup>16</sup> Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt: A Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Garden City, 1957), 257; Robert A. Divine, “Franklin D. Roosevelt and Collective Security, 1933,”



Tugwell's writings show that from 1935 on he was concerned about another problem of timing. He hoped the administration could provide for entrance into the inevitable conflict at a time as favorable as possible to the United States. In late November, 1941, he thought that "in a technical sense, we were two years too early for war," that we must "postpone actual hostilities just as long as possible." On December 1 he remarked in his diary, "We seem terribly divided now; but perhaps we shall find a purpose and be welded to it soon."

Tugwell judged that the Japanese misunderstood us badly. They backed up Kurusu's ultimatum with bluster and vast troop movements, but the President, Tugwell thought, would not allow them to cut the Burma Road, ending China's resistance and opening Russia's flank. He felt that events "may draw Americans together as the anti-democrats [Russians] have been but by a strong nationalism rather than totalitarianism." But he had misgivings about timing—"We are putting on pressure while we are unready and leaving the Japanese nothing for face-saving." On December 7 Tugwell recorded in his diary events which made discussion of American-Japanese diplomatic relations academic.

In 1959 David Lawrence, in his syndicated column, quoted Admiral Kishisaburo Nomura, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States in 1941, as having recently said that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a "great blunder" for Japan, "forced on our responsible people by young, audacious elements." (Nomura had taken this position in 1941, which was one of the reasons why he was never apprised in advance of the plan to attack Pearl Harbor.) Commenting on Nomura's remark, Lawrence asserted that "there were blunders in American policy too." Lawrence's review of American-Japanese relations during the Roosevelt administrations comprises an analysis similar to that which Tugwell presented to the President-elect in January, 1933:

A large share of the blame for the war must be taken by those in Washington who did not fully grasp the fundamental reasons that led to the rise in power of the militaristic bloc in Japan.

Cabinet crisis after cabinet crisis should have been a warning that the truly liberal groups in Japan were losing out because the passions of nationalism were being inflamed by attacks on American policy towards China—a policy which was regarded then as hostile to Japan's commercial expansion on the Asian mainland.

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*Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVIII (1961), 42-59, makes a convincing case that Roosevelt (as Charles A. Beard contended, *op. cit.*, 64-156), was an isolationist who gradually turned internationalist rather than (as Basil Rauch held in *Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor: A Study in the Operation of Foreign Policy* [New York, 1950], 13-23) an internationalist who made concessions to the isolationists for strategic purposes.



Unfortunately, the minds of the American people, and particularly the officials of the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, were occupied primarily with domestic affairs in those years. Instead of pointing out [at an Anglo-American-Japanese conference in London in 1934] that the United States would have to build up its naval strength, too, if the existing treaty were ended [in accordance with an announcement by Japan], and that this would precipitate a period of tension, nothing was done to promote a different solution. Also, America failed to keep up its naval armament.

Certainly there were enough peaceful elements in Japan at that time which could have rallied to the idea of a new treaty of friendship with the United States and the creation of new commercial projects in the Far East. The United States and Japan could have shared in these ventures and thus have overcome the arguments of the militarists who insisted that, in view of Japan's growing population, something drastic had to be done—even if it involved military aggression—to provide outlets for Japanese industry and trade.<sup>17</sup>

The similarity of the statements by Tugwell in 1933 and Lawrence in 1959 does not, of course, indicate agreement between Roosevelt's servant whose loyalty to his chief never flagged and the anti-New Deal, anti-Roosevelt journalist. Tugwell, as we have seen, finally decided by 1935 that it was "too late." Nor was he ever willing to deny that Roosevelt may well have been right in 1933. Lawrence, on the other hand, considered the Japanese liberals' strength a certainty. He took a stand which fitted into the argument of the revisionists,<sup>18</sup> with reference to whom Tugwell wrote in 1957:

<sup>17</sup> David Lawrence, "Nomura's View of Pacific War," New York *Herald Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1959; Lawrence, in assuming that "Business and militarism were close allies in those days inside Japan," differs with Bronfenbrenner, *loc. cit.*, 24, 24 n., who stresses the "antagonism between the military *gumbatsu* and the economic *zaibatsu*."

<sup>18</sup> Wayne S. Cole, "American Entry into World War II: A Historiographical Appraisal," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIII (1957), 595-617, is a valuable study of the debate between the revisionists and Roosevelt's defenders; leading revisionist works are: H. E. Barnes, ed., *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1953); Charles A. Beard, *op. cit.* and *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941* (New Haven, 1948); H. E. Kimmel, *Admiral Kimmel's Story* (Chicago, 1955); George Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor* (New York, 1947); F. R. Sanborn, *Design for War* (New York, 1951); C. C. Tansill, *Back Door to War* (Chicago, 1951); R. A. Theobald, *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor* (New York, 1954); Shigenro Togo, *The Cause of Japan* (New York, 1956).

Sanborn's thesis is that Roosevelt moved toward war primarily to retain tenure of office. John T. Flynn implies that Roosevelt took us to war to divert the country's attention from unsolved domestic problems. In *The Roosevelt Myth* (New York, 1948), 182, he writes: "Saved now by the war from the disaster [recession] . . . in 1938, . . . he could now rise out of the ashes of a mere New Dealer to become a modern St. Michael brandishing his sword against Hitler and all the forces of evil throughout the world." Moley flatly rejected this implication. Those who made it, he stated in *After Seven Years*, 376, "do not know their man. Roosevelt was no cold-blooded opportunist. In fact, he felt so intensely the need to do right that he had to believe that he did right. He was incapable of sustaining a planned duplicity." He could shift to foreign affairs more easily, Moley notes,

It is conceivable that, as far back as his first days in office, Franklin might have begun to cultivate the liberal elements in Japan. . . . But just to state these possibilities is to reveal their inherent difficulties. The Japanese militarists were mystic obscurantists. How an American leader could have kept them from conspiring for power, the revisionists do not say. The alternative to opposing, finally, Japanese designs in Asia was to allow the complete subjection of China and other nations, perhaps including India. The revisionists must contend that a Japan based on such a source of power and subject to oligarchical rule would not have been an intolerable menace to the West.<sup>19</sup>

Tugwell ended his summary of the revisionists' reasoning with this observation: "It can now be seen that no conclusion can ever be reached in such a discussion."<sup>20</sup>

We shall never know whether Roosevelt could have brought about the dominance of the Japanese liberals if he had pursued a different policy. He decided, and it was his decision to make, that the militaristic group in Japan would be able to stay in power despite anything he could do to strengthen the liberals' position.<sup>21</sup> Can we be certain in the 1960's that the group in power in Iran, for example, will be able, with our assistance, to remain in power despite the forces which threaten its position? To raise such a question is to draw the obvious conclusion, with which the Kennedy administration will agree after its Cuban experience of early 1961: estimating the relative strength of the various groups in a foreign nation is always an extremely difficult yet vitally necessary task.

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because internationalists had for so long been describing them in moral terms. In *The Art of Politics* (Garden City, 1958), 86, 197, Tugwell rejects the charge that Roosevelt deliberately brought on World War II and called the claim that Roosevelt conspired to precipitate Pearl Harbor "nonsense," giving his reasons for this conclusion.

<sup>19</sup> Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt*, 484. It should be noted in connection with this statement that Lawrence's proposal of joint commercial projects was calculated to prevent the militarists from gaining power, not from conspiring for power. "Mystic obscurantists" would have conspired in any event—as in Algeria in 1961—and, again, their defeat in Japan assumes the certainty of sufficient strength on the part of the liberals.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> The writings of two Japanese liberals on the conflicting forces in their country between the two world wars do not provide a basis for disputing Roosevelt's decision: Mamoru Shigemitsu, *Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace* (New York, 1958); Shigeru Yoshida, *The Yoshida Memoirs: The Story of Japan in Crisis* (Boston, 1962).