

WHO ARE THE WAR AGITATORS?

THE FIGHT FOR AN INDEPENDENT DESTINY AND AMERICAN NEUTRALITY IN WORLD WAR II

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Col. Charles Lindbergh remains, for many Americans, one of the nation's greatest heroes and patriots. A staunch opponent of America's entry into World War II, he became one of the most popular speakers at America First Committee gatherings across the country, addressing crowds of his concerned countrymen numerous enough to fill Madison Square Garden in New York City and Soldier Field in Chicago.

*On September 11, 1941, Col. Lindbergh gave perhaps his most provocative speech to an America First Committee rally in Des Moines, Iowa. The central focus of this talk was a marked departure from his other addresses, for it identified three primary interest groups that were pressuring America into war: the British, Jewish organizations, and the Roosevelt administration. As official biographer A. Scott Berg points out in *Lindbergh*:*

Lindbergh had long told himself that the moment American entry into the war seemed inevitable, he would drop a bombshell. He would publicly name "the groups that were most powerful and effective in pushing the United States toward involvement in the war." Having agreed to speak at another America First meeting, in Des Moines, he realized his engagement there would provide that moment. He penciled draft after draft of his most provocative speech yet, one bluntly titled, "Who Are the War Agitators?"¹

*The reaction to Lindbergh's speech and the fallout that was to beset the America First Committee are well documented in Ruth Sarles's *A Story of America First* (edited by Bill Kaufman), reviewed elsewhere in this issue of TOQ. Berg rightly lends the speech some much-needed perspective:*

In the end, Lindbergh had reduced his comments about the Jews to three paragraphs. They were the only public comments he ever made during the Great Debate in which he mentioned them. Although he felt he was showing his sympathy for a long-persecuted tribe, each additional sentence would be used to burn the brand of anti-Semite deeper into his public persona....

Lindbergh had bent over backward to be kind about the Jews; but in suggesting the American Jews were "other" people and that their interests were "not American," he implied exclusion, thus undermining the very foundation of the United States.²

*The distorted image of Lindbergh that lingers is of a man who was rabidly anti-Semitic. Writers such as Gabriel Schoenfeld have fed this misperception over the years. In his recently published book, *Jude: The Return of Anti-Semitism*, Schoenfeld argues:*

This burgeoning movement received a powerful boost from the hero Charles Lindbergh, who, having become a prominent isolationist and a leading figure in the America First Committee, described the Jews as a sinister force pushing the U.S. into war...³

In the fourth of our "Classics Corner" series, we reprint Lindbergh's Des Moines, Iowa, speech so that the reader can decide whether or not Lindbergh's emphasis on Jewish involvement toward intervention can correctly be viewed as a "sinister force." Lindbergh's warning against U.S. military intervention, when the nation's best interests take a backseat to special interests, remains equally valid today given the well-documented, high-pressure leverage of neoconservative influence on the Bush administration's decision to preemptively invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power under the guise of protecting the U.S. against future acts of terrorism.

It is now two years since this latest European war began. From that day in September 1939, until the present moment, there has been an ever-increasing effort to force the United States into the conflict. That effort has been carried on by foreign interests and by a small minority of our own people, but it has been so successful that, today, our country stands on the verge of war.

At this time, as the war is about to enter its third winter, it seems appropriate to review the circumstances that have led us to our present position. Why are we on the verge of war? Was it necessary for us to become so deeply involved? Who is responsible for changing our national policy from one of neutrality and independence to one of entanglement in European affairs?

Personally, I believe there is no better argument against our intervention than a study of the causes and developments of the present war. I have often said that if the true facts and issues were placed before the American people, there would be no danger of our involvement.

Here I would like to point out to you a fundamental difference between the groups who advocate foreign war and those who believe in an independent destiny for America. If you will look back over the record you will find that those of us who oppose intervention have constantly tried to clarify facts and issues; while the interventionists have tried to hide facts and confuse issues.

We ask you to read what we said last month, last year, and even before the war began. Our record is open and clear, and we are proud of it. We have not led you on by subterfuge and propaganda. We have not resorted to "steps short of" anything in order to take the American people where they did not want to go. What we said before the elections we say "again, and again, and again" today. And we will not tell you tomorrow that it was "just campaign oratory."

Have you ever heard an interventionist, or a British agent, or a member of the administration in Washington, ask you to go back and study a record of what they have said since the war started? Are these self-styled defenders of

democracy willing to put the issue of war to a vote of our people? Do you find these crusaders for foreign freedoms advocating the freedom of speech, or the removal of censorship here in our own country?

The subterfuge and propaganda that exist in our country is obvious on every side. Tonight I shall try to pierce through a portion of it to the naked facts which lie beneath.

When this war started in Europe, it was clear that the American people were solidly opposed to entering it. Why shouldn't we be? We had the best defensive position in the world; we had a tradition of independence from Europe; and the one time we did take part in a European war left European problems unsolved, and debts to America unpaid.

National polls showed that when England and France declared war on Germany in 1939, less than 10 percent of our population favored a similar course for America.

But there were various groups of people here and abroad whose interests and beliefs necessitated the involvement of the United States in the war. I shall point out some of these groups tonight, and outline their methods of procedure. In doing this, I must speak with utmost frankness, for in order to counteract their efforts, we must know exactly who they are.

The three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish and the Roosevelt administration. Behind these groups, but of lesser importance, are a number of capitalists, Anglophiles, and intellectuals who believe that their future and the future of mankind, depends upon the domination of the British empire.

Add to these the communistic groups who were opposed to intervention until a few weeks ago, and I believe I have named the major war agitators, not those sincere but misguided men and women who, confused by misinformation and frightened by propaganda, follow the lead of the war agitators.

As I have said, these war agitators comprise only a small minority of our people; but they control a tremendous influence.

Against the determination of the American people to stay out of war, they have marshaled the power of their propaganda, their money, and their patronage.

Let us consider these groups one at a time. First, the British. It is obvious and perfectly understandable that Great Britain wants the United States in the war on her side. England is now in a desperate position. Her population is not large enough, and her armies are not strong enough to invade the continent of Europe and win the war she declared against Germany. Her geographical position is such that she cannot win the war by the use of aviation alone, regardless of how many planes we send her. Even if America entered the war it is improbable that the Allied armies could invade Europe and overcome the Axis powers.

But one thing is certain. If England can draw this country into the war she can shift to our shoulders a large portion of the responsibility for waging it, and for paying its cost. As you all know, we were left with the debts of the last European war and unless we are more cautious in the future than we have been in the past we will be left with the debts of the present one.

If it were not for her hope that she can make us responsible for the war financially, as well as militarily, I believe England would have negotiated a peace in Europe many months ago, and be better off for doing so.

England has devoted and will continue to devote every effort to get us into the war. We know that she spent huge sums of money in this country during the last war in order to involve us. Englishmen have written books about the cleverness of its use. We know that England is spending great sums of money for propaganda in America during the present war.

If we were Englishmen we would do the same. But our interest is first in America and, as Americans, it is essential for us to realize the effort that British interests are making to draw us into their war.

The second major group mentioned is the Jewish. It is not difficult to understand why Jewish people desire the overthrow of Nazi Germany. The persecution they suffered in Germany would be sufficient to make bitter enemies of any race. No person with a sense of the dignity of mankind can condone the persecution of the Jewish race in Germany. But no person of honesty and vision can look on their pro-war policy here today without seeing the dangers involved in such a policy both for us and them.

Instead of agitating for war, the Jewish groups in this country should be opposing it in every possible way, for they will be among the first to feel its consequences. Tolerance is a virtue that depends upon peace and strength. History shows that it cannot survive war and devastation. A few farsighted Jewish people realize this and stand opposed to intervention. But the majority still do not. Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, and our government.

I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races, I admire. But I am saying that the leaders of both the British and the Jewish races, for reasons which are as understandable from their viewpoint as they are inadvisable from ours, for reasons which are not American, wish to involve us in the war. We cannot blame them for looking out for what they believe to be their own interests, but we also must look out for ours. We cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction.

The Roosevelt administration is the third powerful group which has been carrying this country toward war. Its members have used the war emergency to obtain a third presidential term for the first time in American history. They have used the war to add unlimited billions to a debt which was already the

highest we had ever known. And they have used the war to justify the restrictions of congressional power, and the assumption of dictatorial procedures on the part of the president and his appointees.

The power of the Roosevelt administration depends upon the maintenance of a wartime emergency. The prestige of the Roosevelt administration depends upon the success of Great Britain to whom the President attached his political future at a time when most people thought that England and France would easily win the war. The danger of the Roosevelt administration lies in its subterfuge. While its members have promised us peace they have led us to war heedless of the platform upon which they were elected.

In selecting these three groups as the major agitators for war, I have included only those whose support is essential to the war party. If any one of these groups—the British, the Jewish, or the administration—stops agitating for war, I believe there will be little danger of our involvement. I do not believe that any two of them are powerful enough to carry this country to war without the support of the third. And to these three, as I have said, all other war groups are of secondary importance.

When hostilities commenced in Europe, in 1939, it was realized by these groups that the American people had no intention of entering the war. They knew it would be worse than useless to ask us for a declaration of war at that time. But they believed that this country could be enticed into the war in very much that same way we were enticed into the last one. They planned, first, to prepare the United States for foreign war under the guise of American defense; second, to involve us in the war, step by step, without our realization; third, to create a series of incidents which would force us into the actual conflict. These plans were, of course, to be covered and assisted by the full power of their propaganda.

Out theaters soon became filled with plays portraying the glory of war. Newsreels lost all semblance of objectivity. Newspapers and magazines began to lose advertising if they carried antiwar articles. A smear campaign was instituted against individuals who opposed intervention. The terms fifth columnist, traitor, Nazi, anti-Semitic, were thrown ceaselessly at any one who dared to suggest that it was not to the best interests of the United States to enter the war.

Men lost their jobs if they were frankly antiwar. Many others dared no longer to speak. Before long, lecture halls that were open to advocates of war were closed to speakers who opposed it. A fear campaign was inaugurated. We were told that aviation, which has held the British fleet off the continent of Europe, made America more vulnerable than ever before to invasion. Propaganda was in full swing.

There was no difficulty in obtaining billions of dollars for arms under the guise of defending America. Our people stood united on a program of defense. Congress passed appropriation after appropriation for guns and planes and

battleships, with the approval of the overwhelming majority of our citizens. That a large portion of these appropriations was to be used to build up arms for Europe, we did not learn until later. (That was another step.)

To use a specific example; in 1939 we were told that we should increase our air corps to a total of 5,000 planes. Congress passed the necessary legislation. A few months later, the administration told us that the United States should have at least 50,000 planes for our national safety. But almost as fast as fighting planes were turned out from our factories, they were sent abroad, although our own air corps was in the utmost need of new equipment.

Today, two years after the start of war, the American army has only a few hundred thoroughly modern bombers and fighters, less, in fact, than Germany is able to produce in a single month. Ever since its inception, our arms program has been laid out for the purpose of carrying on the war in Europe far more than for the purpose of building an adequate defense for America.

Now at the same time we were being prepared for a foreign war it was necessary, as I have said, to involve us in the war. This was accomplished under that now famous phrase, "steps short of war." England and France would win if the United States would only repeal its arms embargo and sell munitions for cash, we were told. And then a familiar refrain began, a refrain that marked every step we took toward war for many months... "[T]he best way to defend America and keep out of war," we were told, was "by aiding the Allies."

First, we agreed to sell arms to Europe; next, we agreed to loan arms to Europe; then, we agreed to patrol the ocean for Europe; then, we occupied a European island in the war zone. Now we have reached the verge of war.

The war groups have succeeded in the first of their three major steps into war. The greatest armament program in our history is under way. We have become involved in the war from practically every standpoint except actual shooting. Only the creation of sufficient "incidents" yet remains and you see the first of these already taking place, according to plan—a plan that was never laid before the American people for their approval.

Men and women of Iowa: Only one thing holds this country from war today. That is the rising opposition of the American people. Our system of democracy and representative government is on test today as it has never been before. We are on the verge of a war in which the only victor would be chaos and prostration. We are on the verge of a war for which we are still unprepared, and for which no one has offered a feasible plan for victory—a war which cannot be won without sending our soldiers across the ocean to force a landing on a hostile coast against armies stronger than our own.

We are on the verge of war, but it is not yet too late to stay out. It is not yet too late to show that no amount of money, or propagandage, or patronage, can force a free and independent people into war against its will. It is not yet too late to retrieve and to maintain the independent American destiny that our forefathers established in this new world.

The entire future of America rests upon our shoulders. It depends upon our action, our courage, and our intelligence. If you oppose our intervention in this war, now is the time to make your voice heard. Help us to organize these meetings, and write to your representatives in Washington.

I tell you that the last stronghold of democracy and representative government in this country is in our House of Representatives and our Senate. There we can still make our will known. And if we, the American people, do that, independence and freedom will continue to live among us, and there will be no foreign war.

ENDNOTES

1. A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 425.
2. *Ibid.*, 426.
3. Gabriel Schoenfeld, *Jude: The Return of Anti-Semitism* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2004), 102.