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2015

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Shearer, Sam, "Truman Smith's Reports on Nazi Militarism: Domestic Political Priorities and U.S. Foreign Policy-Making in Franklin Roosevelt's First and Second Terms" (2015). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive*. 414.  
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# Journal

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OF THE National Collegiate Honors Council

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ESSAY, 2014**



# Truman Smith's Reports on Nazi Militarism: Domestic Political Priorities and U.S. Foreign Policy-Making in Franklin Roosevelt's First and Second Terms

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Appointed head military attaché in Hitler's Berlin in 1935, career U.S. Army officer Truman Smith harbored no illusions about the challenges he faced. As he recalled later in his memoirs: "I saw at firsthand how inadequately organized, staffed, and financed the Military Intelligence Division was. It became clear to me also that Military Intelligence was the orphan branch of the General Staff and the army as a whole and that military attachés lacked prestige and were little regarded or listened to" (26). Despite inadequate support and seemingly insurmountable obstacles to access, Smith produced over the next three years a series of startling yet remarkably accurate reports on the Nazi military buildup that held the potential to influence deeply the course of American military and diplomatic policy. Far from achieving their intended influence, however, Smith's reports drew the otherwise obscure

military attaché into a political maelstrom not of his own making—a tempest that owed much to Smith's association with famed but increasingly controversial American aviator Charles Lindbergh, whose celebrity Smith exploited to gain critical access to *Luftwaffe* airfields. Amid the heated polemic that swirled about him, the stunningly accurate intelligence information contained in Smith's reports languished in obscurity. On detailed examination, the case of Truman Smith demonstrates in a profound manner the ways that domestic political agendas and controversies clouded U.S. foreign policy-making in the years leading up to the Second World War. Although the international order today is fundamentally different from that of the 1930s, Smith's case may also hold important lessons for the early twenty-first-century United States concerning the unforeseen costs of polarization and a political culture in which opposing parties often dismiss even simple factual information put forward by their supposed political enemies.

After an accomplished military career leading up to and during World War II, Truman Smith (1893–1970) was seemingly forgotten. His name was seldom mentioned after the war until his memoirs were published posthumously in 1984. Since then, intrigued historians and journalists have sporadically examined his strange story. History shows Smith to be an astoundingly successful figure in military intelligence. Though hampered by his lack of rank, Smith first submitted intelligence reports from Germany on the nascent Nazi movement while he was assigned to Berlin as an assistant military attaché in 1920–24. From 1935 to 1938, Smith returned to Germany to serve as head military attaché. Part of the reason Smith's intelligence efforts were exceptionally insightful and accurate in this vital period was his summer 1936 decision to take advantage of Charles Lindbergh's fame to gain better access to German air facilities. Despite Smith's efforts and his warnings about the German military build-up, his reports were mostly dismissed by the Roosevelt administration. For his efforts, Smith was labeled first an alarmist and later a Nazi sympathizer.

After serving in combat during World War I, Smith served as a military observer and assistant attaché in Berlin from June 1920 to April 1924. In November of 1922, Smith became the first American official to interview Adolf Hitler and subsequently submitted reports on Nazi aims and ambitions that were nearly prophetic, even though he lacked rank and his reports were mostly ignored. He did, however, manage through his 1920–1924 stint in Berlin to forge relationships with German military figures that proved to be invaluable contacts when he returned as head military attaché later in his

career. His warnings in these early years came, moreover, nearly a decade before other more prominent voices began warning the rest of the world about Hitler's intentions.

In the years between 1924 and 1935, Smith held various posts. Most notably, from 1928 to 1932 he served as an instructor at the Fort Benning Infantry School, where General George Marshall was in command. During this time, Smith formed a close professional relationship with Marshall, and the general subsequently acted as Smith's patron for the remainder of his career.

Smith's second posting in Berlin from 1935 to 1938 as head military attaché, which was the most interesting and historically significant of his career, can be divided into two sections. From 1935 through the first half of 1936, he struggled as his reports were widely dismissed by both the military and the Roosevelt administration. In November of 1936, however, Smith took a trip to Washington at his own expense to impress upon his military superiors the seriousness of events in Berlin. This trip was quite successful, and Smith received considerable support from the military going forward. In addition, Smith began making use of Lindbergh in his air intelligence in the summer of 1936. In combination with his newly acquired military backing and the support of Lindbergh, Smith's reports received considerable circulation in the highest level of United States government in 1937–1938. These reports, most notably the General Air Estimate of 1937, contained powerful language that vividly described the rapid expansion of the German military.

After Smith was diagnosed with diabetes and subsequently exited his post in Berlin in December of 1938, he proceeded to work as a military adviser in Washington. During this time, 1939–1941, he came under fire from various figures in the Roosevelt administration. A diverse range of factors, most notably his history with Lindbergh, contributed to the attacks he received. Smith entered retirement in 1941, but returned to active duty after the attack on Pearl Harbor at the request of General Marshall. During the war, Smith served as a military advisor to General Marshall, and he retired with the rank of colonel in 1946.

Though Smith's reports on Hitler from the early 1920s are certainly historically significant, his reports from the late 1930s are even more so. Not only is the content of the reports militarily important, but the reception of the reports holds complicated lessons concerning the nature of U.S. political culture in the years leading up to World War II. Ultimately, the question remains: Why were Smith's reports mostly ignored within U.S. policymaking circles? The answer to this question is complex, and contributing factors

varied according to changing viewpoints and priorities within the Roosevelt administration itself from 1935 to 1940.

## 1935–1936: OPPOSING VOICES

In 1935 and 1936, Smith faced several obstacles in impressing the developments of the German military on American leadership. One explanation for Smith's reports being undervalued involves his position. In the 1930s, the Military Intelligence Division of the Army (G-2) was little respected, and the position of military attaché was far from prestigious. These factors gain little mention in contemporary sources because allegations of Smith's Nazi sympathy generally take the spotlight, but the lack of respect held for the post of military attaché was a pressing issue for Smith in 1935 and 1936.

The lack of respect for military attachés is well-documented and was matched by the inadequacies of the Military Intelligence Division. Smith details his thoughts on G-2 and his initial training for his 1935 Berlin post in his memoir *Berlin Alert*. Of his instruction, Smith notes it to have been "cursory and quite inadequate," to the extent that Smith felt he had gained nearly nothing from his training (26). The struggles within G-2 were well known. Among military officers, the post of military attaché was considered a career dead end. The record of its predecessor agencies provided by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) states that, on the surface, Military Intelligence presented the post of attaché as highly respected, claiming that attachés received top-notch training before being sent to their assignments. This image, however, was far from the reality. The reputation of posts in Military Intelligence was so poor that the most qualified officers could seldom be recruited for them. In addition, the training in G-2 was so inadequate that attachés were often thrown into their posts so unprepared that they could not even develop sensible reports (CIA).

Military attachés were also severely underfunded. The job of attachés was far from easy: "Operating against odds, only too often in periods of tension, they must exercise discretion in all their procedures: they must refrain from spying or other conspiratorial activities, and contacts likely to disturb regular 'harmonious,' peace-conductive diplomatic relations between states" (Vagts ix). Within the tight pressures of not upsetting international politics, attachés often gained the bulk of their information from social events. Accordingly, the CIA website details the struggle the attaché corps faced in obtaining funding:

The United States was in a serious economic depression, and Congress was not about to increase MID's budget so that a few attachés could host cocktail parties in Paris, Berlin, Rome, London, Moscow, and Tokyo. Unfortunately, the annual appropriations battle reinforced the perception in the Army at large that the attaché corps was nothing more than a well-heeled country club.

As Smith proved however, much could be gained from "cocktail parties."

Smith recalled that his department's lack of funding limited his movements in Germany considerably, especially in terms of travel around the country (164). In addition, Smith felt that the U.S. needed an espionage presence in Berlin that was separate from the attaché corps, and, as Smith noted in his memoirs, "not a penny for espionage was available" (164). Overall, G-2 and the post of military attaché were neither respected nor funded sufficiently.

A problem Smith faced specifically concerning his post was his responsibility to report not only on the development of German ground forces but also on their rapidly expanding air force. Referring to himself in the third-person, Smith detailed the difficulty he faced in reporting on German air development: "The military attaché possessed as much, but no more, knowledge of air corps organization and tactics than did the average American infantry officer who had been trained in the army school system. This was small. His technical knowledge of air matters was negligible" (75-76). His wife, Katharine (Kay) Smith, wrote in her unpublished autobiography that her husband's lack of aeronautical expertise weighed on him heavily because, even with his limited knowledge of air science, he knew something huge was occurring in Germany (90).

Smith believed that the lack of respect for his knowledge and the bad reputation of his title were responsible for his reports not being taken seriously in the General Staff or the Army Air Corps (84). The growing strength of the German *Luftwaffe* impressed Smith to the extent that he returned to the States at his own expense in November 1936 in an attempt to convince his superiors of the seriousness of events in Germany. Smith's wife records that this trip was successful and that he did succeed in swaying much of the military leadership he encountered of the growing threat in Germany (Katharine Smith xviii).

By the end of 1936, Smith had gained considerable support in the military. This support would ultimately save his career when the political firestorm approached in 1940. Since the lack of respect for attachés and G-2 was substantial, the backing Smith received within the military provided much-

needed support. Smith's supporters at this time included not only his former boss, General George Marshall, but also a close advisor to Roosevelt, Bernard Baruch. These two men in particular were responsible for Smith's reports being not only circulated in "the highest military circles" in the late 1930s but becoming known to influential figures in the Roosevelt administration and even the president himself (Truman Smith xvii).

General Marshall, who became the Chief of Staff of the Army, operated as Smith's patron from when Smith first served under Marshall as an instructor at Fort Benning in 1928 to when Smith retired in 1946. Marshall sent Smith's General Air Estimate from November 1937 to the President as "an example of outstanding military intelligence" (Lindbergh 872). Marshall went on to battle the President over military appropriations, and in this combat he relied heavily on Smith's reports.

Bernard Baruch was a chief economic advisor to the President and was widely known for having Roosevelt's ear. One of the only real middlemen in the politics surrounding Smith's story, Baruch was well-liked by the Roosevelt administration as well as the administration's isolationist opponents (Baruch 307). Baruch described himself as somewhat "obsessed with the subject of preparedness" (276). The reports Smith was submitting were not only being circulated widely enough that they reached Baruch, an economic consultant to the President, but Baruch actively used Smith's reports in some of what he calls the "many occasions I was pressing him [FDR] to take more decisive preparedness measures" from 1936 through 1940 (276–79).

Despite the invaluable support from Marshall and Baruch, one of the chief criticisms of Smith prior to 1937 was that "some of his reports had exaggerated the strength of German forces, especially the air force, in comparison with the reports of the British and French" (Truman Smith x). The perceived reliability of foreign attachés was about as tenuous as that of American attachés. Vincent Orange writes in the *Journal of Military History* that "British intelligence departments in the 1930s were short of staff, funds, equipment, and prestige. There were far too many of them, they refused to cooperate with one another, and they had little influence on decision makers, civilian or military" (1015). This low status was similar to that of the American attaché corps although the British attachés in Berlin handled their lack of prestige differently than Smith did.

Colonel Andrew Thorne assumed his post as head British military attaché in Berlin in 1932. In 1934 and 1935, Thorne reached much different conclusions concerning the state of German affairs than Smith would

eventually report in 1935 and 1936. Thorne reported that he felt the German army operated separately from Hitler's rule. He went on to conclude that military leaders in Germany were not particularly loyal to Hitler and could put a stop to Hitler's regime at any moment (Wark 592). Smith could not have disagreed more. In his memoirs, Smith incredulously recalled a conversation he had with the Supreme Commander of the German *Luftwaffe*, Hermann Goering: "With moist eyes and a voice tinged with emotion, he turned to the attaché [Smith] and said, 'Smith, there are only three truly great characters in all history: Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Adolf Hitler'" (100). Smith was immediately struck by the fanatical devotion and support Hitler elicited. As early as 1922, Smith had noted about Hitler: "So intense and dramatic were the times, and so well did Hitler understand how to play on the emotions of his audiences, that the lack of logic in his message was often entirely overlooked" (70). Though they were proven false not long after they were submitted, Thorne's reports of divided German leadership did damage the influence of Smith's early reports from Berlin in 1935 and 1936.

In addition, when Colonel F. E. Hotblack took over Thorne's post in Berlin in 1935, he entered with the expectation that Thorne had left for him. From 1935 through early 1937, Hotblack's reports became less and less consistent with Thorne's. By late 1937, when Smith submitted his most meaningful report, "The General Air Estimate of November 1, 1937," Hotblack's intelligence was in complete support of Smith. At the time Smith submitted his General Air Estimate in 1937, Hotblack was submitting reports to British Intelligence claiming that Germany would be prepared for an all-out offensive against Europe within two years (Wark 599).

By 1937, contradictory foreign intelligence was no longer an obstacle for Smith to overcome. Prior to 1937, however, contradictory reports influenced the reception of Smith's reports in a major way. Thorne's reports fueled an already raging problem in the perception of Germany held by the United States as well as Great Britain from 1933 to 1937, thus greatly impeding the impact of Smith's reports. The idea that the Nazi state was deeply divided was one of the worst assumptions made prior to World War II. In seemingly wishful thinking, much of the world's leadership became convinced that "a policy of negotiated and limited readjustment to the international *status quo* would be welcomed within the Third Reich" (Wark 593). This act of self-deception proved to be extremely harmful.

Smith faced another problem in Berlin at the hands of the United States ambassador, Dr. William Dodd, who was well known to be a pacifist who had

a “marked distaste for military matters” (Smith 76). He did not like to associate himself with the military attaché office, but he did enjoy the company of professors in Germany. He had no confidence in Army and Navy attachés in Berlin, which he said “here, and I think all over Europe, are utterly unequal to their supposed functions” (Vagts 71). While Dodd was instrumental in making President Roosevelt aware of the offenses against Jews in pre-war Germany, he consistently battled the idea that Germany was militarizing in the early 1930s. Even when the military attaché preceding Smith, Colonel Jacob Wuest, raised the alarm and tried to alert the United States that Germany was mobilizing for war, Dodd insisted that Wuest was overly excited (Vagts 71). While Dodd asserted that both Wuest and Smith were alarmist, he was proven wrong when the Germans took over the Rhineland in 1936. This risky act from Hitler, which Smith reported would happen a few days beforehand, completely shocked Dodd (Katharine Smith 83–85). The well-educated ambassador had long been a critic of Hitler, but he completely underestimated the fiery dictator.

Dodd’s underestimation of Hitler represents a much wider feeling within the United States government in the 1930s. The impact of Smith’s reports was compromised not only by Dodd but also by the general lack of concern in the United States about German military build-up. When Smith began his post in 1935 in Berlin, global politics were in a complicated stage during which all military intelligence needed to be carefully weighed and considered. Instead, as Smith recalls, at no point during his time in Berlin did Dodd ever ask any information from Smith on German developments (Truman Smith 77). Dodd’s attitude explains much of why Smith’s reports from 1935 and 1936 were ignored.

Although Smith consistently reported on German mobilization during his entire service in Berlin, his reports in 1937 and 1938 offer the most insight into the vicissitudes of United States policymaking at the time. Several barriers stood in the way of Smith’s reports in 1935 and 1936, but by 1937 these obstacles had been conquered. In 1937, Dodd had lost credibility, Smith had gained immense support from his military superiors, foreign intelligence was lining up with his own reports, and Smith gained a new assistant air attaché, Major Albert Vanaman, who possessed top-of-the-line aeronautical expertise (Smith 106). Because of these factors, along with the support he received from Baruch and Marshall, Smith’s most important report of his service in Berlin—his “General Air Estimate of November 1, 1937”—effectively had a direct path to the highest levels of the Roosevelt administration. Yet at the

same time, other factors remained in play to continue to prevent Smith's reports from exerting much influence on U.S. policy—specifically a wide array of domestic political priorities in the 1930s.

## 1937–1938: DOMESTIC PRIORITIES

Hitler's rise to power in Germany stands as one of the most gravely underestimated events in history. Across the globe, Hitler was regarded by many world leaders as little more than a dupe. Even in Germany, Franz Von Papen, who convinced President Paul von Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor, was so confident that Hitler was weak and could easily be controlled that he boldly claimed, "Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far into the corner that he'll squeak!" (Craig 570). While Hitler was being underestimated in Germany, a comical image was simultaneously being created of him in the United States.

One of the sources of Hitler's image in the U.S. as "outrageous" was Dorothy Thompson's book *I Saw Hitler*, which stemmed from her 1931 interview with the soon-to-be leader of Germany and in which she clearly and colorfully described Hitler as feminine, socially backward, and mentally fragile (14, 16). Thompson also openly questioned Hitler's ability to lead; she states in her writing that, entering her interview, "I was convinced that I was meeting the future dictator of Germany. In something less than fifty seconds I was quite sure that I was not" (13). *Time* magazine also reported on Hitler as a silly figure, making light of his appearance as a "pudgy, stoop-shouldered man" and highlighting anything strange about him ("Hitler into Chancellor" 22). *Time* also went on to fuel an unfortunate and common misconception that the Nazi party was "pledged to so many things that it is pledged to nothing" (22). This perception of Hitler was common in the United States in the mid-1930s, ultimately reducing the impact of Smith's reports and detracting from the plight of Jews in America and in Germany.

This common doubt about the seriousness of Hitler's regime was a major detriment to Smith and his reports. With the exception of Jews, the majority of Americans were unconcerned with Hitler. In addition, the concerns and protests voiced by Jews in America ultimately did as much harm to their own cause as it helped. Rabbis openly criticized Hitler and predicted that he would lead the world to another world war ("Rabbis" 28). On May 11, 1933, fifty thousand Jews gathered in Chicago to protest the oppression against Jews in Germany ("50,000" 10). Though this protest did not have a huge effect on the public, it did touch Edith Rodgers, a Massachusetts Republican in the U.S.

House of Representatives. On May 13, two days after the protest, Rodgers voiced in the House her feeling that the United States should intervene in Germany to aid the suffering Jews there (“Scores” 7). Directly after Rodgers addressed the House, however, the President released a statement emphasizing that any actions by the Nazis were strictly European affairs (“U.S.” 4).

The public was generally in favor of this isolationist policy. Anti-Jewish sentiments were extremely common in the United States in the pre-World War II era, combining with a Nazi propaganda barrage to eliminate much of the sympathy Americans had for German Jews (Elson and Levy 83). Truman Smith recalls in his memoirs that Hitler was outspoken in his speeches against the Jews, but the common belief was that his violent rhetoric was exclusively for propaganda purposes and that he would never become too abusive to Jews (55).

Jewish businessmen also had their own scheme turned against them by the Nazis when they attempted to boycott German goods on a global scale (“Boycott”). Before Jews began implementing this boycott, the Nazis had already begun issuing “warnings” to Jews in general, stating that if they kept up their “treachery,” there would be major ramifications (“Hitler Warns Jews”). After the boycott was implemented, the Nazis launched their counter-attack, claiming that, by boycotting German goods, the Jews were extending their treachery. The Nazis reciprocated by boycotting Jewish goods and services and began removing more Jews from positions of importance (“More” 4).

While the nation was being influenced by German propaganda, President Roosevelt was aware of the true story in Germany. Dodd reported to the President on the abuses that German Jews were experiencing, but Roosevelt’s lack of concerted response further solidified the impression that, as far as the United States government was concerned, Germany’s Jews were essentially on their own (Duffy 68–69). While much of the public simply was not sure what to think about Nazi Germany, the President was aware of the situation but placed his New Deal programs far above international matters as the main priority of the U.S. government at least through late 1937.

To those whom history remembers as the “New Dealers,” the New Deal represented much more than the social reform it literally entailed; it represented hope that democracy was still a viable system of government. In the midst of dictatorships and communism on the rise, Roosevelt wanted to turn his New Deal into a “shining light” for democracy (Schwarz xvi–xvii). Roosevelt wanted his program to rise above the attacks from his opponents, who called the New Deal the “Jew Deal” and questioned Roosevelt’s motives

(Schwarz 129). In hopes of preventing his New Deal's funding from being spent elsewhere in response to escalated arms concerns, the President put much of his faith in global disarmament as a foreign policy strategy.

Those who advocated for military preparedness, many of whom were isolationists, did not agree with Roosevelt on global disarmament (Doenecke). Bernard Baruch is recorded as saying: "Peace does not follow disarmament; disarmament follows peace" (266). Roosevelt's plan did what he wanted it to do, however, because it allowed him to justify postponing military funding and slashing military appropriations to create funds for the New Deal.

The President's handling of Smith's reports evoked some criticism in the late 1930s. Smith described the press coverage of his activities with Lindbergh in Berlin as highly inaccurate. He believed that the press simplified German affairs and contributed to the misconception that Germany was weak and divided. Despite what Smith saw as faulty reporting, the fact remains that he and Lindbergh did receive substantial exposure in the press because of Lindbergh's presence in Berlin, but this media coverage did not keep the Roosevelt administration from consistently downplaying Smith's reports. The Roosevelt administration's dismissal of Smith's intelligence did not sit well with General Marshall, however, who went so far as to submit Smith's reports to the President's political opponents to keep them from being buried (Truman Smith, 117-18).

Almost entirely because of Marshall's activities, accusations developed that the President had purposefully withheld Smith's reports from Congress in order to remove them as a barrier to slashing the military appropriations (Vagts 71). These accusations climaxed when Representative Albert Engel, a Michigan Republican, provided well-documented evidence that showed how the President cut the annual military appropriations by forty million dollars, despite having been aware of Smith's reports ("Charges"). Though Smith recalls Engel's attack on the President as being of a completely partisan nature, the fact remains that Roosevelt was adamant that the New Deal needed to take priority, even when it meant setting aside Smith's unprecedented but unpalatable reports (Truman Smith 117).

Events surrounding Smith's reports offer insight into the Roosevelt administration and the battle for military appropriations that raged through the mid-1930s. The President opposed heavy military spending up until 1938 when the Sudeten crisis and Kristallnacht began to impact the views of American citizens as well as the administration itself. As Nazi aggression became to be more apparent, and as Nazis attacked Jewish businesses and abused

their owners, American public opinion began to see beyond the propaganda war Germany had launched against the Jews. Public opinion obviously then shifted even further against the Nazis when in 1939 the Germans overran Poland, Denmark, and Norway (Leuchtenburg 299). Only in the summer of 1940, though—when Germany invaded France—did General Marshall successfully acquire sufficient funding for the military to begin preparing for the clear probability of impending conflict (Cray 152–53).

Indeed, the military suffered mightily at the hands of domestic politics. General Marshall thought the narrow-mindedness of politicians was handicapping the military and felt it was important for the United States to be ready for war (Cray 126–27, 151). Similarly to Marshall's feelings concerning the military, Bernard Baruch wrote that he was quite concerned with the inadequacy of the American military (177–79). Baruch also mentioned, however, that the President was also quite aware and concerned about how unprepared the United States would be if attacked (177–79). This presents an interesting quandary: The President slashed military budgets to create more funds for his New Deal, but he also harbored concerns of preparedness, and wanted to “shake Americans from their isolationist delusions before it was too late” (179). If Roosevelt was concerned with military preparedness, and wanted to act against isolationism, why would he and his administration have covered up Truman Smith's reports? If anything, one would think Roosevelt could have used Smith's reports as evidence to support military buildup.

The largest reason for Roosevelt's action concerning Smith's reports came down to the same factor that many of the President's decisions hinged on: timing. Exactly at what point the Roosevelt administration's agenda changed from an isolationist one to an interventionist one is a topic for additional research, but one point is clear, and that is the President was extremely mindful of timing in relation to where public opinion rested at a particular moment. In the mid-1930s, regardless of how concerned Roosevelt was with the military, the New Deal received “top legislative priority” over foreign policy decisions and “the outside world would have to fend for itself” (McJimsey 191–92). This attitude is consistent with how the President responded to the fifty-thousand Jews that protested against the Nazis in Chicago in 1933. The President had certainly shifted gears, however, by the late 1930s, when he began his attempt to sway public opinion in favor of war (McJimsey 194).

If Smith's timing in Berlin had been slightly different, his story would be remembered in a much different way and may have changed the course of world history in a different way. Instead, Smith's reports were consistently at

odds with the President's agenda. In 1935 and 1936, Smith's reports contradicted the cuts Roosevelt wanted to implement to military funding, and in 1937 through 1938, Smith's reports did not line up with the complex plan Roosevelt put in place to systematically shift public opinion in a gradual rather than sudden manner. Smith's reports came across as abrupt and startling, and the President was against shocking the public.

A major problem Smith saw in military intelligence was the robotic nature of aeronautical reports. In his memoirs Smith described air reports as "so bulky, statistical, and technical that anyone who read them needed both leisure and training in all branches of aeronautical knowledge to absorb their information" (111). In his "General Air Estimate of November 1, 1937," Smith aimed to create a "brief, all inclusive, and couched in dramatic rather than technical terms" summary of Germany air progress (111). Smith certainly succeeded in this effort, providing the War Department with a relatively brief but detailed overview of the German *Luftwaffe* and its immense development. Lindbergh was a vital part in the preparation of this report, and his influence is clear when reading it. The language is dramatic, to the point and would be understandable to nearly any reader. Dramatic reports on German might, however, were the last things Roosevelt wanted to reach the public.

Indeed, alarming reports of the huge air power in Germany could incite panic in the United States. The political weight of air superiority at the time cannot be underestimated as well. Just before World War II, the world was transitioning into a time when, as Lindbergh stated: "We can no longer protect our families with an army. Our libraries, our museums, every institution we value most, are laid bare to bombardment" (92–94). Considering the vast concern and fear surrounding air power, the President did not want any shocking news to develop and panic the public.

A prime goal of the President was to keep the public calm. He "deliberately sought, with the collaboration of the mass media, to avoid controversy and to stifle national debate" (Steele 69). Roosevelt ultimately wanted to stifle any shocking news, and he pushed propaganda that tried to illustrate that the government leaders in America were more than capable of handling any complex foreign policy decisions that came their way. Rather than pushing the public into anxiety over the unsettling events of the world, Roosevelt succeeded in producing a "dull, steady, pervasive drum of preparedness information emanating from every popular source of public education" (Steele 71). Roosevelt manipulated the press in order to essentially "sell" his administration.

Roosevelt's interference in the media went as far as to force the removal of press figures that were critical of his administration's foreign policy stances. One of the most notable instances of the President's influence on the media was when the White House caused the removal of one of CBS's most popular news commentators, Boake Carter, for being critical of the Roosevelt administration. In contrast, figures that were far more derogatory towards the President's rivals than Carter was against the administration, like the extremely popular radio commentator Walter Winchell, were praised (Steele 83). Ultimately, the President saw foreign policy issues leading up to World War II to be too serious to be up for debate. Roosevelt thought he knew what was best for the United States and aimed to influence the public into offering the least amount of resistance to his agenda as possible (Steele 92). Considering the President's attitude, the motive for obscuring Smith's reports is clear. In his effort to impress German buildup on American leadership, Smith actually doomed his own reports, because they were too alarming and unpalatable to be utilized in the Roosevelt administration's agenda, even as the administration gradually turned the ship of state towards a war that it increasingly saw as inevitable.

Smith ultimately found himself at constant odds with the Roosevelt administration. As if his reports being contrary to the agenda of the administration were not enough, Smith's association with Lindbergh ultimately caused him to be dragged into a fierce political battle. The rivalry between Lindbergh and Roosevelt had a deeply polarizing impact across the country. The rhetoric on both sides was often radically misrepresentative of the other side, and Smith was regularly targeted because of his relationship with Lindbergh.

## **1939–1940: POLITICAL STRIFE**

Starting heavily in the summer of 1940, Smith received repeated attacks from several members of the Roosevelt administration as a Nazi sympathizer. The attacks were fueled less by suspicions of Nazi sympathy than by a political grudge resulting from Smith's relationship with Lindbergh. Smith was dragged into a confrontation that had started as early as 1934 when, after an investigation into corruption in commercial air lines, Roosevelt ordered an immediate halt to all commercial airmail. He handed the task of transporting airmail entirely to the Army. This order turned out to be a tremendous mistake, and Lindbergh quickly became a vocal opponent. Lindbergh, who at the time possessed fame and influence not matched by even the most famous

celebrities today, immediately spoke out against the President's painting of all commercial airlines with the same brush. He warned against the policy and predicted that Roosevelt's hasty action would compromise the safety of untrained Army airmen who were being volunteered for the airmail service (Davis 357-60).

Between February 1934, when Roosevelt instituted his ban on commercial airmail, and April 1934, twelve airmen were killed due to their lack of training. By the summer, Roosevelt's ban on commercial airmail was effectively lifted, and the entire situation "constituted a personal defeat for Roosevelt in the court of public opinion" (Davis 361). This interaction between Lindbergh and Roosevelt proved to be the beginning of a conflict that soon tore much of the country apart.

Roosevelt generally discredited any of his opposition as either ignorant or unpatriotic. Lindbergh certainly received this treatment. The President's priority through it all was to eliminate forces that would undermine his sway on public opinion, and he was concerned about "not getting ahead" of public thought. In general, the President's agendas were fairly open-ended (McJimsey 191); rather than push detailed plans, Roosevelt tried to steer public opinion to where he thought it should be. This typical political strategy was not compatible with conflicting viewpoints. Alarming forces that could disrupt his efforts were either covered up, like Smith's reports, or combatted, like Lindbergh's rhetoric. When Lindbergh began giving his isolationist speeches, he was approached with a bribe from the President: if Lindbergh halted his speeches, the President would create a new Cabinet position for him (Lindberg 257). Whether through bribery or smear campaigns, Roosevelt's administration did everything it could to silence or discredit opposition, and the methods aimed at Lindbergh ultimately spilled over onto Smith.

In his memoirs, Smith lists influential gossip columnist and radio broadcaster Walter Winchell among his principal antagonists (30). Winchell was opposed to everything isolationist. He accused Lindbergh, whom he nicknamed the "Lone Ostrich" (playing on Lindbergh's traditional "Lone Eagle" moniker), of being a Nazi and also sent messages to Roosevelt claiming that Smith was an "advisor on the Lindbergh speeches," calling Smith a "terrific Pro-Nazi" ("Rose Bigman"). Famous broadcaster and journalist Dorothy Thompson, who like Smith was one of the earliest voices to speak out against Hitler, was openly skeptical of Smith as well (Duffy 190). The popular columnist and critic of public figures Drew Pearson was also outspoken about the questions surrounding Smith's allegiances (Truman Smith 30).

Smith was effectively lumped into the isolationist group which was being blasted in the media. Though some columnists directly attacked Smith, he also felt the pressure of the polarized media war occurring across the United States. From gossip columnists to news broadcasters to cartoonists, the toxic climate was compromising objectivity in many media outlets. Even Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) took merciless shots at Lindbergh, repeatedly portraying isolationists and in particular Lindbergh as ostriches with their heads in the sand. Further, Seuss published multiple images portraying Lindbergh in league with Nazi Germany (Minear 28–34).

These influential members of the press also openly doubted Smith's patriotism, and many more columnists simply lumped Smith in with their criticisms of Lindbergh. Shortly after Smith returned to the United States, Lindbergh began a long pro-isolationist campaign in which he delivered speeches that were broadcast across the nation and internationally in many instances. These opinionated broadcasts quickly became controversial as the nation split down the middle between isolationism and interventionism. Many columnists, particularly ones who had more liberal stances, were quick to point out how fond the Germans were of Lindbergh and how all of his speeches were broadcast and cheered by Nazis ("Within" 193–94). The extensive smearing of Lindbergh eventually created a perception of Smith that essentially made him "guilty by association" and made him receive most of the "echoed accusations that were hurled at Lindbergh" (Duffy 190).

Smith was similarly associated with Lindbergh by prominent members of the Roosevelt administration. Among those whom Smith called the "New Dealers who wanted his scalp" were figures like Supreme Court Justice and personal friend of Roosevelt, Felix Frankfurter, who Smith claimed was fueling some of the press attacks (31, 34). White House Press Secretary under Roosevelt, Stephen Early, also spoke out against Smith (Duffy 190). Secretary of the Treasury and another critic, Henry Morgenthau, approached General George Marshall to request that Smith be discharged from the Army (Lindbergh 352).

Likely the most vocal opponent of Smith from the Roosevelt administration, however, was Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. Smith recalls an instance in 1940 when Ickes, along with Justice Frankfurter, suggested to the President that Smith should be court-martialed (31). Ickes helped to lead a unit in the Roosevelt administration that tracked the President's rivals (Duffy 182). Lindbergh described Ickes as "spreading misinformation" in the "cheapest and most inexcusable sort of way" (518). The pressure put on Smith was

intense enough that he and his wife, Kay, became convinced they were being spied on and having their phones tapped (Lindbergh 405–06).

The 1940 press attacks on Smith did not end until Bernard Baruch, in league with General Marshall, convinced the President to order a halt on the smear campaign (Truman Smith 32). Ickes did not give up, though; shortly after the President ordered members of the administration to halt fueling press attacks on Smith, Ickes orchestrated a new attack. Smith soon found himself the subject of an investigation after it was reported that Smith insulted and questioned the intelligence of the President at a cocktail party. This fabrication was later discovered to have been devised by Ickes and was utterly disproven (Truman Smith 33).

The heightened aggressiveness of Ickes was largely a result of his staunch opposition to racism. Ickes was a vocal opponent of racial discrimination of all kinds, and as history has documented well, much of Lindbergh's rhetoric was racially charged (Ickes III 641). Lindbergh was quite vocal in blaming Jews for trying to agitate the American public into moving toward war (Lindbergh 538). Ickes made it a priority to try to disrupt and nullify anything that had to do with Lindbergh. In his diary, Ickes expressed jubilation when his smear campaign began to crawl under Lindbergh's skin (581). In correspondence between Ickes and Roosevelt, Ickes described Lindbergh as a "ruthless and conscious fascist, motivated by a hatred for you personally and a contempt for democracy in general," to which the President responded: "What you say about Lindbergh and the potential danger of the man, I agree with wholeheartedly" (Duffy 211). The seriousness of these feelings toward Lindbergh deeply influenced the perception of Smith in the Roosevelt administration. The FBI even kept a record of Smith in their file on Charles Lindbergh, in which they listed Smith among potential threats as allegedly being "strangely pro-Nazi" (FBI). Ickes and his fellow critics felt they were doing their country a service by exposing those who, in their minds, were Nazi sympathizers (Ickes 581).

The overall theme of Smith's career tends to be that an outstanding military man was dragged into politics against his will. Much like his patron General Marshall, who tried diligently to remain apart from partisan politics, Smith maintained a marked aloofness to politics (Cray 9–10). Even when he found himself being ridiculed and smeared, Smith generally kept his cool. During the attacks on him, Smith never once responded. Throughout the attacks, Smith kept his head down and did his duty, trusting General Marshall to take care of the attacks (Truman Smith 33–35). Though much of the

small amount of history that includes Smith will present him as “that guy” who brought Lindbergh to Germany, Smith’s career offers a variety of learning opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

While contemporary sources try to isolate reasons that Smith’s reports were covered up, the reality remains that the poor reception of his reports resulted from a diverse collection of domestic political factors. Smith was swept into political rivalries that diminished the value of his intelligence efforts. Smith’s case and the fate of his reports remind us that the polarized nature of politics in the early twenty-first century is hardly unique in the annals of U.S. history.

Even today, opinions vary concerning the events surrounding Smith’s career. Many of these differences relate directly to the diversity in views on the rivalry between Roosevelt and Lindbergh. The majority of research conducted specifically on Smith’s career tells a story of a dutiful officer who was treated unfairly by the Roosevelt administration; however, not all contemporary sources agree. Though the research focused on Smith is limited, examinations of the rivalry between Lindbergh and Roosevelt are not. In these works, Smith is often mentioned in passing, but these brief glimpses of his career are skewed according to the biases of the author. In the majority of contemporary work, Smith is paired with Lindbergh; thus, the perception of Lindbergh is key in the portrayal of Smith. Some authors praise Lindbergh’s contributions to Smith’s intelligence effort and subsequently admire Smith’s performance. Others label Lindbergh a Nazi sympathizer, as the Roosevelt administration did, and include Smith in their accusations.

Charles Lindbergh stands as one of the most polarizing public figures in American history. Historians still bicker about whether he contributed to the United States or was little more than a traitor. These issues were magnified in the years leading up to World War II and ultimately caused Smith’s intelligence work to be pushed aside in the midst of debates about matters other than the substance of his reports.

Looking back, Smith was not shy about admitting his shortcomings. In his memoirs, Smith described how his intelligence office completely overlooked the development of German missile technology. In addition, Smith recalled that, through much of the early stages of German military buildup, the nature of German air tactics escaped him. Air forces had never before been employed to support ground forces, and Smith did not realize that the

Nazi regime planned to use their mighty *Luftwaffe* in this way until late 1937. Smith's memoirs clearly indicate that he considered these oversights to be massive blunders on his part (164–65).

Despite these failures, the successes of Smith's intelligence efforts should not be underestimated. Though his work on the German *Luftwaffe* is generally the primary focus of research because of Lindbergh's involvement, Smith also reported with startling accuracy on German ground forces. In addition, the work Smith accomplished on German air developments, with the help of Lindbergh, remained unprecedented. Smith was not faultless during his service, but his relationship with Lindbergh led him to produce more meaningful intelligence than his foreign counterparts in Berlin. Despite the stellar content of Smith's reports, the United States government remained aloof to the gravity of Germany's military expansion.

Scholars in the early twenty-first century are likely to prove more interested than their early post-war predecessors in the winds of controversy that swirled about the formerly obscure military attaché Truman Smith, especially through 1939 and 1940. Clearly the world order of 2015 is vastly different than the one that made possible Hitler's rapid rise in the 1930s, but the sort of political polarization and demonization of ideological opponents examined in this study have an oddly familiar ring to those of us accustomed to the American news media markets of our own times. For us, perhaps the most pressing lesson of Truman Smith's case lies in its function as a cautionary tale about the importance of listening to opposing viewpoints. What, ultimately, might we be missing when we dismiss out-of-hand the arguments of those whom we believe to be political opponents?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Dr. David Coleman, my mentor for this project. His guidance and direction have been pivotal in the completion of this research. Dr. Coleman has been a true pleasure to work with, and I could never have asked for a better mentor.

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