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## Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II

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with this evenhanded approach, especially in China during the age of extra-territoriality.

A good reference book has three audiences: the scholar who requires accurate and authoritative information, the general reader who needs clarification and the random reader who is curious. All three groups are well-served by this book. The third group can have real fun, for instance, reading of "Mad Jack" Percival, commanding Old Ironsides, who took hostages in Annam in 1845 to force the Annamese court to release a French bishop who seems to have made a career of being arrested. Percival tried to take on the whole kingdom with only one 18th century frigate, only to find that the bishop had been released to a French man-of-war. Some of the 19th century contretemps of naval officers in Nicaragua also make lively, if cautionary reading.

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Heinrichs, Waldo. *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 279pp. \$19.95

Although Professor Heinrichs cannot fully describe Roosevelt's intentions in the crisis year of 1941—Roosevelt's love of dissembling made it impossible to know then, or now, whether he had some hidden plan to take the country to war—Heinrichs does the next best thing. He cites the

president's decisions in their context using what anthropologists call "thick description," in this case a month-by-month analysis of what information the administration had, how they considered it, and what they decided between the passage of Lend Lease in March to Pearl Harbor in December. This is a comprehensive history that sheds new light on American foreign policy.

Heinrichs concludes that Roosevelt was determined to protect the country's interests on their own terms, that he supported but did not defer to an allied cause, and that he understood that the primary threat came from across the Atlantic. Heinrichs' main point is that the president and the administration made foreign policy according to a systematic evaluation of the global implications of events and to the country's military capability. Roosevelt, like Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, knew the value and the limits of force.

Heinrichs' vertical chronology makes it easy to follow the complex of influences behind every major decision. He shows that policy was based increasingly on what armed force was available and anticipated, and that technology and operational doctrine played a large part. In fact, the focus of the book turns out to be not Roosevelt after all. Rather it is the mass of considerations interconnected by the process of American policy evaluation, the threads of which, admittedly, only Roosevelt held in their entirety.

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As an example of Heinrichs' analytic method, refer to the month of July 1941. The government related the German invasion of Russia directly to the future of the Atlantic and a new deterrence policy towards Japan. American security depended on control of the Atlantic. For this the defeat of Germany was essential, for which in turn the survival and continued resistance of the Soviet Union was necessary. To help, the United States could supply the Russians and prevent the Japanese from opening a second front against them in Siberia. Events on the Russian western front were thus behind sending marines to Iceland (army troops being unready for so sudden a move) and the decision to escort the convoys. At the same time, and by the same token, the government sought to contain Japan's careening expansion in the Far East.

The Japanese had the choice of moving north to take advantage of the wounded Russians, or, with fewer worries now on the Manchurian border, to turn south toward a maritime empire. Deterrence was meant to prevent action in either direction. The elements of diplomatic and economic pressure are well known. Less so are its military dimensions. Roosevelt's quid pro quo for help to the British in the Atlantic was their dispatch of the *Prince of Wales* to join the *Repulse* in the Indian Ocean. The Philippines became part of an offensive strategy, based in part on a buildup of submarines but mainly on long-range B-17s, whose deterrent value the

army air force touted (as it turned out, entirely unrealistically). This Asian strategy, a Far Eastern second front from Manila, was meant to enhance security in the Atlantic. This is truly global thinking. However wrongheaded were some of the assumptions about strategic bombing and containing Japan, Heinrichs' point is that the administration was consciously thinking in terms of a worldwide balance of power, and action in the Pacific was meant to add to the security of the Atlantic.

For an understanding of U.S. foreign policy in 1941, for clues to appraise the elusive Roosevelt, this is now the book with which to begin.

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van der Vat, Dan. *The Atlantic Campaign: World War II's Great Struggle*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988. 424 pp. \$25

World War II's Battle of the Atlantic, the Allies' triumphant effort to use the Atlantic sea lines and Germany's nearly successful attempt to deny, was the longest and bloodiest campaign in naval history. Dan van der Vat's *The Atlantic Campaign* is a one volume history of this epic struggle, intended for the general reader. Surprisingly, there have been few English language attempts prior to this. Most related works tend to concentrate upon one specific aspect, such as the crucial convoy battles of early 1943, the sinking of the *Bismark*, or intelligence. Author of previous