

**Robert Lansing and the Formulation of American Neutrality Policies,
1914-1915**



Daniel M. Smith

The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jun., 1956), 59-81.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0161-391X%28195606%2943%3A1%3C59%3ARLATFO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The Mississippi Valley Historical Review is published by Organization of American Historians. Please contact the publisher for further permissions regarding the use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/oah.html>.

The Mississippi Valley Historical Review
©1956 Organization of American Historians

JSTOR and the JSTOR logo are trademarks of JSTOR, and are Registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. For more information on JSTOR contact jstor-info@umich.edu.

©2003 JSTOR

<http://www.jstor.org/>
Mon Sep 8 23:38:42 2003

Robert Lansing and the Formulation of American Neutrality Policies, 1914-1915

BY DANIEL M. SMITH

The role of Robert Lansing in the formulation of American foreign policy during the First World War has, with the increasing availability of public and private papers, come to seem more significant than had been previously suspected. Contrary to some earlier assumptions that he had been merely a "law clerk" to President Woodrow Wilson, Lansing, first as counselor to the Department of State and then as secretary of state after William Jennings Bryan's resignation in June, 1915, was a major figure in the diplomacy of the United States. His responsibility for the direction and course of American policy toward World War I belligerents was particularly great; in fact, he was one of the principal architects of the 1914-1917 neutrality structure. This conclusion is supported by an examination of his role during one phase of that period, the crucial year from August, 1914, to July, 1915, during which the basic pattern of American neutrality was established.

The neutrality structure which Lansing helped to establish clearly foreshadowed the nation's eventual participation as a belligerent in the European war. Lansing exerted his influence through his work on the series of neutrality problems which confronted the Wilson administration in the fall of 1914 and the early spring of 1915. These problems principally involved such matters as ratification by the belligerents of the Declaration of London; the status of armed belligerent merchantmen; the participation of Americans in contraband trade; the issuance of loans and credits to the belligerents; and, finally, the submarine crisis of 1915.

During the months in which these problems arose, Lansing was serving as counselor for the State Department, a position equivalent to the later office of under-secretary. In this office it was fre-

quently his function to give advice and to draft statements of policy in accord with the principles of international law — a body of law comprised in large part of conflicting precedents of the past — and in the process he usually expressed, also, his own concept of the significance of the European war to America's national interests. Since President Wilson and Secretary of State Bryan were relatively uninformed about international law and of foreign policy problems in general, they were dependent to a large degree upon the advice of the counselor. To Lansing thus fell the task of supplying much of the substance of Wilson's foreign policy, of imparting content to the President's thinking about "national honor" and "duty." He must be viewed, therefore, as having played an important part in the formulation of the administration's neutrality policies. These policies, largely completed by mid-1915, rendered American neutrality highly benevolent toward the Allied Powers and strictly, even grudgingly, technical toward the Central Powers. Economic, political, and emotional bonds connected America to the Allies, to the extent that American neutrality tended to lose its value in the view of German strategists. The absence of mutual interests between the United States and Germany meant that little cause existed either to restrain the administration's condemnation of German war policies or to moderate the German formulation of those policies.¹ The submarine thus became the precipitant, fusing into hostilities the more basic ingredients of sentiment and concepts of national political and economic interests.

Lansing's own concept of the national interest and his way of thinking about America's role in world affairs were of course bound to affect policy recommendations which he made for the administration. Along with other Americans he had witnessed a steady improvement in Anglo-American relations ever since the Venezuelan crisis of 1895, when Great Britain, aware of her diplomatic isolation in the face of a growing German "threat," began a policy of rapprochement with the United States. Paralleling this development was a deterioration in German-American relations, resulting from the increasing economic and colonial competition between the two expanding powers.² It was not surprising, therefore, that

¹ Alice M. Morrissey, *The American Defense of Neutral Rights, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1939), 49.

² Dexter Perkins, *America and Two Wars* (Boston, 1944), 20-30. For discussions of the influences affecting American opinion, see Horace C. Peterson, *Propaganda*

some Americans, thinking in terms of the European balance of power, were concluding that the peaceful growth of the nation in the past was largely the by-product of this power structure and of Great Britain's pivotal role therein. Writing in 1913, Lewis Einstein, an experienced American diplomat, suggested that America's stake in the world power system was such that to prevent an English defeat the United States might find it necessary to intervene in any future major European war.³ Lansing came to share this view, at least by 1915, when he recorded similar convictions in his private "diary."⁴ This conviction became current among other administration officials and prominent private citizens, and it did much to define the neutrality policies and to facilitate the country's ultimate entry into the war.⁵

When Lansing entered upon his duties as counselor in March, 1914, he was fifty years of age, a short and dignified man of handsome visage, greying hair, and impeccable manners—the very personification of the diplomat.⁶ Conservative in outlook, diffident in his personal relations, studious and well informed, Lansing appeared more the scholar than a public man of action. He could best be described as the conservative who had fused a realistic approach

for War: *The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Norman, 1939), 5-6; H. Schuyler Foster, Jr., "How America Became Belligerent: A Quantitative Study of War News, 1914-1917," *American Journal of Sociology* (Chicago), XL (January, 1935), 468; and James Duane Squires, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917* (Cambridge, 1935), 42-68.

³ Lewis Einstein, "The United States and Anglo-German Rivalry," *National Review* (London), LX (January, 1913), 736-50. Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Navy General Board shared the conviction that the position of Great Britain was vital to American security. See Mahan, *The Interest of America in International Conditions* (Boston, 1915), 75-76, and Forest Davis, *The Atlantic System: The Story of Anglo-American Control of the Seas* (London, 1943), 187, 205.

⁴ "Consideration and Outline of Policies," July 11, 1915, Confidential Memoranda, Papers of Robert Lansing (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress).

⁵ Prominent Americans who were influenced by or shared Einstein's views were the historians George Louis Beer, George Burton Adams, Albert Bushnell Hart, and Roland G. Usher; the journalist Walter Lippmann; and among administration officials, in addition to Lansing, Walter Hines Page, Colonel Edward M. House, and James W. Gerard. For a fuller discussion see Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Policy* (Chicago, 1953), 114-34, 154-70. Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York, 1954), 279-80, admits that Lansing and House shared views of the national interest and the war, but he asserts that their views had only an incidental influence on Wilson. Link underestimates the fact that while Lansing's concept of the national interest was not completely shared by Wilson, the latter adopted many of Lansing's policy recommendations which were based on such views.

⁶ For an intimate portrayal, see David F. Lane, "Robert Lansing as His Friends Know Him," *Colliers* (New York), November 13, 1915, pp. 22-24.

to human problems with a compensating measure of political idealism.

The Lansing approach to foreign policy combined the realism taught by experience with a generous measure of the democratic ideals then current. He believed with great sincerity that democratic systems were more peaceful than non-democratic governments. Along with his democratic faith, however, he was also a tough-minded realist whom the Italian statesman, Vittorio Orlando, once described as supremely analytical and practical.⁷ On the international plane Lansing saw force as the "great underlying actuality in all history, which, regardless of the highest intellectual and spiritual impulses affecting human conduct, must be recognized and reckoned with."⁸ It followed, therefore, that while on the domestic level there might be an increase in the higher moral impulses, on the international scene brute power governed and each state of necessity followed policies based on self-defense and aggrandizement. Consequently, in Lansing's opinion, it was folly to try to found a foreign policy on any premise other than national interest — "Idealism which cannot be harmonized with sound common sense is worse than useless."⁹

It was within such a practical framework that Lansing contemplated the outbreak of the European war in the summer of 1914. His initial reaction was that the United States was fortunate to be so far removed from the "slaughter fields of poor little Belgium."¹⁰ Pro-Ally from the beginning of the conflict, Lansing agreed with John W. Foster, his father-in-law, that any American attempts to mediate would fail, as the Allied Powers were strong and would not halt short of the destruction of the German power to menace world peace.¹¹ However, the war had just begun, the Allies appeared capable of securing their own destinies, and Lansing's duties as counselor required concentrated attention upon the problems attendant upon the war dislocations.

⁷ Vittorio E. Orlando, "Wilson and Lansing," *Saturday Evening Post* (Philadelphia), March 23, 1929, pp. 6-7.

⁸ "Force and Material and Moral Impulses," May 23, 1922, Confidential Memoranda, Lansing Papers. These Memoranda have been erroneously called "Diaries."

⁹ Robert Lansing, *War Memoirs of Robert Lansing, Secretary of State* (New York, 1935), 7-9.

¹⁰ Lansing to M. H. Gates, October 10, 1914, Lansing Papers.

¹¹ This conclusion is based upon a letter from John W. Foster to Lansing, dated September 16, 1914, and summarizing recent conversations between the two. Lansing Papers.

The status of neutral commercial rights was the first important problem to be faced, and its "solution" set the tone for subsequent relations with the belligerents. Unfortunately, international law, so much a collection of precedents and actions derived from the positions asserted by traditional neutrals and belligerents, was contradictory and inexact. In 1909 a series of moves to define and codify maritime law had found fruition in the Declaration of London.¹² Presented as a mere summary of existing rules, this codification actually contained several new features—in regard to a free list of goods, limited contraband, and blockade procedures—which favored the traditionally neutral powers. Understandably, the British House of Lords rejected the code as unfavorable to a major sea power. Failure to ratify left this part of international law substantially in its previous chaotic state.

With the beginning of hostilities, Lansing sought a means of protecting legitimate American commercial interests while at the same time preserving friendly relations with the dominant sea power, Great Britain. Both Lansing and Wilson were cognizant of the likelihood of serious controversies with Great Britain, whose navy rapidly began to control all commerce to Europe. The experience of 1812 seemed to offer most unpalatable analogies,¹³ and expediency dictated the prevention of controversies through adoption of the Declaration of London. As Lansing was soon to note, Great Britain could adopt the Declaration and yet control German imports, thereby avoiding serious conflict with the United States government.

British resistance, however, prevented the hopes of the State Department from being realized. Secretary Bryan had urged the belligerents, on August 6, to accept immediately the unmodified Declaration of London. The Central Powers promptly complied, subject to reciprocity, while the French and Russian governments deferred to Great Britain for decision. When the British reply did arrive, it was found to be an evasive acceptance with substantial modifications and with no reference to the greatly desired "free list," specifying articles which could not be declared contraband.¹⁴ Sub-

¹² For the text, see Carlton Savage (ed.), *Policy of the United States toward Maritime Commerce in War* (2 vols., Washington, 1936), II, 163-79.

¹³ Harley Notter, *The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson* (Baltimore, 1937), 347-49; Charles Seymour, *American Diplomacy during the World War* (Baltimore, 1934), 55.

¹⁴ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of*

sequent British naval actions indicated clearly that the entire Declaration would not be honored and consequently that it had lost its value as a definitive set of rules. Nevertheless, the State Department continued for a period to seek full acquiescence by the belligerents to the code.

The remainder of the Department's futile negotiations over the Declaration of London, which need be sketched only lightly, are chiefly significant as a demonstration of Lansing's realistic diplomacy.¹⁵ In the realization that amicable relations could be preserved only by securing workable commercial arrangements which would protect American interests without seriously restricting the Allied war effort, Lansing drafted a sharp note condemning British subterfuges and requesting an unmodified acceptance of the Declaration of London.¹⁶ He forwarded the draft note to Wilson on September 27, commenting on the parallel between current British practices and those which preceded the War of 1812.¹⁷ Because of the opposition of Colonel Edward M. House and others, however, the draft note was never presented.

In response to the President's directions, Lansing then abandoned the legal approach and began a series of private sessions with the British ambassador, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. Since the British government was determined to cut off German military imports of foodstuffs through neutral Dutch harbors, Lansing suggested to Spring-Rice that the imports could be stopped more effectively within the scope of the Declaration by the negotiation of a nonexportation agreement with the Netherlands government.¹⁸ Meeting with no favorable response, he next suggested that a common-sense interpretation of the Declaration would allow the Allies in any

the United States: 1914 Supplement (Washington, 1928), 216, 218-20. The "free list" was contained in Article 28 of the Declaration of London.

¹⁵ Secretary Bryan was frequently absent from the State Department, leaving Lansing as the acting secretary.

¹⁶ This disputed note was based by Lansing on a memorandum by James Brown Scott of the Joint State-Navy Neutrality Board. State Department Records, File No. 763.72112/135½ (National Archives). For the text, see Lansing to Walter Hines Page, September 26, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 225-32. Also see Charles Seymour (ed.), *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (4 vols., Boston, 1926-1928), I, 306-308.

¹⁷ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920* (2 vols., Washington, 1940), I, 247-48.

¹⁸ Memorandum by Lansing, September 29, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 233-35.

event to add to the contraband list goods used "exclusively for war."¹⁹ Finally, in one last effort, he proposed that the Declaration of London be accepted without modification and then followed by a separate proclamation adding articles to the contraband lists and reserving the right to blockade European neutral ports if non-exportation agreements were not promptly negotiated.²⁰ All these efforts failed, as Britain refused to restrict her future actions, and the State Department had no recourse but to withdraw the proposed Declaration of London. While Lansing has been sharply criticized for his apparently unneutral conduct in these negotiations,²¹ it should be noted that he was merely recognizing that the necessities of warfare would force many concessions eventually; therefore, the securing of the free list would have more than counterbalanced such compromises.

Failure to secure adoption of the unmodified Declaration of London boded ill for American neutrality. Perhaps only the threat of an arms embargo or other coercive measures by the United States could have brought success.²² As it was, the protracted negotiations had demonstrated to the British government that there was little to fear from the Wilson administration. The way was left open for the Allies to develop a system of extra-legal blockades, and for the inevitable German retaliation. In the United States, the administration soon followed its failure to secure a definite legal code with a series of specific policy decisions which seriously compromised American neutrality.

One such policy decision concerned the status of armed belligerent merchantmen, a question which appeared initially as merely routine to the officials at the State Department. According to the generally received interpretation of international law, a belligerent merchantman possessed the right to arm defensively without acquiring the status of a warship.²³ But since the practice had large-

¹⁹ Sir Cecil Spring-Rice to Lansing, October 1, and Lansing to Spring-Rice, October 2, 1914, Papers of Woodrow Wilson (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress).

²⁰ Lansing to Page, October 16, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 249-50.

²¹ Charles C. Tansill, *America Goes to War* (Boston, 1938), 157-59; Edwin M. Borchard and William P. Lage, *Neutrality for the United States* (2nd ed., New Haven, 1940), 60-61. For an analysis of the negotiations, see Richard W. Van Alstyne, "The Policy of the United States Regarding the Declaration of London at the Outbreak of the Great War," *Journal of Modern History* (Chicago), VII (December, 1935), 434-47.

²² Morrissey, *American Defense of Neutral Rights*, 33-34.

²³ Charles C. Hyde, *International Law Chiefly as Interpreted and Applied by the*

ly gone out of use, Lansing attached little importance to the question when it was first presented. When an armed British merchantman, the *Francisco*, arrived in New York harbor on August 13, the British embassy promptly offered assurances that the armament was wholly defensive in character.²⁴ The entry of additional vessels, however, compelled him to think more seriously about the question and to issue a formal statement of policy.

On September 13 Lansing submitted to Secretary Bryan a memorandum in which he recognized the right of defensive armament and proposed criteria designed to differentiate between defensive and offensive purposes.²⁵ Upon receiving the approval of President Wilson, this memorandum was issued on September 19 as an official circular on armed ships;²⁶ but the policy which it launched proved to be unfortunate in its eventual results. Despite the German government's protest in October, 1914, that British merchantmen were being armed illegally for offensive purposes, Lansing did not re-examine the validity of the distinctions made between defensive and offensive armaments. Instead, the issue was circumvented through the securing of an "informal understanding" with the British whereby guns were kept off British merchant vessels entering American ports.²⁷ In view of the subsequent outbreak of submarine warfare in 1915 and the consequent retraction of the British promise on armed ships, the absence of a real solution in the fall of 1914 was serious. The German government was later to assert that the arming of merchant vessels made it impossible for the less defensible submarine to use the rules of warfare applicable to surface ships, and that as a result ruthless measures were justified. If the State Department had closed American ports to all types of armed vessels, as the Netherlands government had done, it might have clarified the issue and thus have helped to remove any excuse for such tactics.

United States (2 vols., Boston, 1922), II, 402-405; James W. Garner, *International Law and the World War* (2 vols., New York, 1920), I, 399-401.

²⁴ Tansill, *America Goes to War*, 246-47.

²⁵ Lansing to Bryan, September 13, 1914, State Department Records, File No. 763.72111/158. This memorandum was based partly on the findings of the Joint State-Navy Neutrality Board.

²⁶ Wilson to Lansing, September 17, 1914, *ibid.*, File No. 763.72111/174½. For the text of the circular see *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 611-12, 618-20.

²⁷ Lansing to Wilson, September 12, 1915, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 330-31; James W. Gerard to Bryan, October 15, 1914, and Lansing to Gerard, November 7, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 613-14.

Far more significant than the armed ship question in determining the nature of American neutrality was the matter of trade in contraband of war, with special reference to munitions. The historic American position had been an insistence on the right of its citizens to manufacture and export munitions of war. International law and practice likewise permitted neutral trade in such contraband. With the outbreak of hostilities, therefore, interested American firms began to engage in the manufacture and exportation of arms and munitions which, because of the peculiar military situation, meant a unilateral trade with the Allied Powers.²⁸

Lansing was convinced that the munitions trade not only was consonant with the best practices of neutrality, but that it was even desirable for a peace-loving state to permit the exportation of munitions and arms. It seemed to him that an aggressive state, accumulating war materials during an era of peace, would benefit from neutral embargoes in wartime, while the normally unprepared defendant state would be deprived of all outside sources of supply. Thus, in his opinion, an arms embargo merely put a premium upon aggression.²⁹ Although such views obviously did not point directly toward the paramount question of preserving American neutrality, their sincerity had been demonstrated by Lansing more than two months earlier in a public statement designed to explain to American merchants and to domestic critics what were the obligations of a neutral nation in relation to trade in contraband.³⁰

The factors which had brought about the formulation of such an explanation represented a combination of economic and political considerations within the United States itself. By the early part of October, as the European war moved into the third month of conflict and diplomatic maneuvering, it was clear that the boon of war purchases, mostly by the Allies, would overcome the effects of a business recession which had caused Wilson and his advisers serious concern earlier in 1914.³¹ But in the absence of official sanction, American merchants were doubtful about their status

²⁸ Elton Atwater, *American Regulations of Arms Exports* (Washington, 1941), 2-8; Hyde, *International Law*, II, 572-79. For a discussion of the volume of the munitions trade, see Joseph V. Fuller, "The Genesis of the Munitions Traffic," *Journal of Modern History*, VI (September, 1934), 280-93.

²⁹ Lansing Memorandum on Revision of the Neutrality Laws, December 22, 1914, State Department Records, File No. 763.72111/1430.

³⁰ See State Department Public Circular of October 15, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 573-74.

³¹ Link, *Wilson and the Progressive Era*, 75.

with regard to trade with the belligerents, and their requests for clarification had become too numerous to be answered on an individual basis. A statement of principles and policy by the government was needed, and it was apparent that neither the administration nor a majority of the people wanted the embargo which would be required to maintain a completely impartial neutrality.³² A threat of political complications arose, however, when Senator William J. Stone, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, reported to Lansing that criticism against the arms trade was being expressed by his St. Louis constituency, which contained a large number of German-American citizens. In view of the approaching congressional elections, it seemed politically necessary to refute the charges that the administration had failed to enforce strict neutrality.

To remove this political danger without destroying the economic advantage of continued trade, Lansing submitted to President Wilson a memorandum on the obligations of neutral nations and their citizens under international law and recommended that it be issued as an official statement. With Wilson's approval this statement became the "Contraband Circular" of October 15, 1914,³³ in which a clear distinction was drawn between the rights and duties of the individual citizens of a neutral nation and the responsibilities of the government in connection with contraband trade. "For the Government of the United States itself to sell to a belligerent nation would be an unneutral act," it explained in summary, "but for a private individual to sell to a belligerent any product of the United States is neither unlawful nor unneutral, nor within the power of the Executive to prevent or control."

While it did not specifically endorse the existing trade in munitions of war, the circular left the way open for it to be continued, and thus made possible the development of a growing economic entanglement with the Allied Powers. The State Department, led by Lansing, answered proposals for an arms embargo by contending that such an embargo would involve a change in the rules covering wartime trade, and that to do this during the course of a war would

³² A poll in early 1915 indicated that a majority of those sampled opposed an arms embargo. *Literary Digest* (New York), June 26, 1915, pp. 225-26.

³³ Lansing to Wilson, October 10, 1914, and Wilson to Bryan, October 13, 1914, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 113. For the circular itself, see *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 573-74.

be an unneutral act depriving one of the belligerents of military advantages to the benefit of the opposite side. Despite such claims, it was nevertheless true that a neutral had an unquestioned right to make changes if these were for the purposes of a more perfect neutrality and applied equally to all belligerents.³⁴ Considerations of "natural" belligerent advantages and disadvantages were thus irrelevant, and in the end the administration seems to have lost, because of the circular, a possible diplomatic bargaining power.³⁵ The arms trade was just getting under way in 1914; a year later its proportions were such as to preclude an embargo. The end result, in consequence, was to allow the United States to become an Entente supply base, and so to render American neutrality highly suspect in German eyes.

Closely associated with the controversy over the sale of munitions was the issue of loans and credits to the belligerents. An incongruous course was followed at first. The munitions trade logically required the concomitant of loans and financial credits as means to preserve and expand the operations. When the discussion of the matter came up in August, 1914, Lansing, in reply to an inquiry from Bryan, advised the Secretary that the floating of belligerent loans within the United States was compatible with the customary practice of neutrality. Bryan, however, took the position that money was the worst of all contraband and was capable of perverting neutrality. According to Bryan, Lansing "at once endorsed the position as sound in principle, even though not supported by precedent,"³⁶ and he seems to have given his support to the recommended loan ban. Wilson also accepted Bryan's recommendation and agreed to discourage such projected loans as one to France, then under consideration by J. P. Morgan and Company.³⁷ Consequently Bryan informed the Morgan firm, and other interested parties, that the government regarded loans to belligerents as "inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality."³⁸

³⁴ See Morrissey, *American Defense of Neutral Rights*, 17-19; Atwater, *American Regulation of Arms Exports*, 24-25, 30-31.

³⁵ The British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, was acutely conscious of such possibilities. George M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1937), 306-309.

³⁶ William J. and Mary B. Bryan, *Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), 375-76; Bryan to Wilson, August 10, 1914, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 131-32.

³⁷ Ray S. Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters* (5 vols., New York, 1927-1935), V, 175-76.

³⁸ Bryan to J. P. Morgan and Company, August 15, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 580.

The Bryan loan-ban policy began to disintegrate shortly after its formulation. Under the impact of heavy war purchases the financial resources of the Allies were so rapidly depleted that it became a question of either relaxing the policy or experiencing a sharp reduction in the flow of war orders. Pressure began to mount in October, when representatives of the Allies and agents of the larger New York financial houses approached Lansing, Bryan, and other administration officials.³⁹ As the question became more acute, the administration was forced to reconsider its position.

By late October, Lansing appears to have given his support to the views advocated by a number of bankers that they should be permitted to furnish credit to belligerents through the acceptance, for example, of treasury notes or treasury warrants of a belligerent government in payment for goods. He realized that such treasury warrants were practically "promissory notes," and in commenting on a Russian proposition for such an arrangement he said that it seemed "different to me from a war loan, so far as its form is concerned, but there is no doubt it is a loan or a series of loans to the Russian Government."⁴⁰ The vice-president of the National City Bank pointed out to Lansing on October 23 that unless some such plan for granting "short time" banking credits was adopted foreign buying power would be diverted to other countries and the foreign trade of the United States would suffer.⁴¹

Impressed by the banker's analysis, Lansing summarized these opinions in a memorandum to President Wilson. The memorandum included the comment, apparently intended by the banking representatives as a reassurance, that "as these warrants are bearer warrants without interest, they could not and would not be made the subject of a public issue."⁴² That same night he met with the President to discuss the proposals contained in the memorandum. As Lansing reported the substance of the conversation, it was Wilson's view — perhaps with Lansing's advocacy — that a distinction properly could be made between the issuance of bank credits

³⁹ See, for example, Lansing to Charles S. Wilson (chargé d'affaires to Russia), October 20, 1914, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 134; and Tansill, *America Goes to War*, 74-78. For a discussion of war purchasing, see Richard W. Van Alstyne, "Private American Loans to the Allies, 1914-1916," *Pacific Historical Review* (Glendale), II (May, 1933), 180-93.

⁴⁰ Lansing to President Wilson, October 20, 1914, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 135.

⁴¹ Samuel McRoberts to Lansing, October 23, 1914, *ibid.*, 136-37.

⁴² Lansing to Wilson, October 23, 1914, *ibid.*, 137-40.

to a belligerent and the floating of a public loan. It seems to have been agreed that the administration would give tacit, but not official, approval to such "commercial" credit arrangements, and Lansing conveyed the substance of this unofficial expression of government policy to banking representatives in the course of the next few days.⁴³

In this "relaxation" of the Bryan loan-ban, Wilson and Lansing were motivated largely by their concern for the American economy. With conditions just beginning to improve, it behooved the nation to exploit fully the opportunities offered by wartime trade. Even Bryan appears to have been persuaded of the need to depart from the policy which he had advocated in August.⁴⁴ The approval of credits signaled the approaching end of a policy of prohibiting loans to belligerents, for any distinction between revolving treasury credits and long-term loans was illusory at best. In the fall of 1915, an arrangement for direct loans to France and England was finally worked out and the last bar to an ever-growing economic connection with the Allies had been removed.⁴⁵

The administration's policies toward the belligerents did not develop without resistance. Opposition to the approval of the contraband circular of October, 1914, along with the apparent acquiescence of the State Department in British maritime measures, culminated in charges of unneutral behavior favoring the Allied Powers.⁴⁶ Professor Hugo Münsterberg, then at Harvard University, summed up the charges in a long letter of protest to President Wilson, and the President was sufficiently disturbed by the criticisms to send the letter to Lansing for careful analysis.⁴⁷ Apparently disturbed that this prominent German should attempt to defend the cause of the Central Powers, Lansing regarded Münsterberg's efforts, and those of other German aliens, as an improper attempt

⁴³ Lansing Memorandum, October 23, 1914, *ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁴ See Charles A. Beard, "New Light on Bryan and the Wilson War Policies," *New Republic* (New York), June 17, 1936, pp. 177-78.

⁴⁵ See Van Alstyne, "Private American Loans to the Allies," *Pacific Historical Review*, II (May, 1933), 180-93. Again, the government's approval was tacit. According to the *New York Times*, September 14, 1915, "assurances had been received that if it were arranged as a straight credit negotiation, no objection would be offered by the State Department on the score of a possible violation of neutrality."

⁴⁶ Dissatisfaction was particularly acute among German-Americans. Clifton J. Child, *The German-Americans in Politics, 1914-1917* (Madison, 1939), 42-63; and Carl Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War* (Columbus, 1936), 55-66.

⁴⁷ Hugo Münsterberg to Wilson, November 19, 1914, and Wilson to Lansing, December 1, 1914, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 161-65.

to weld German-Americans into a bloc capable of coercing the administration into "showing special favors to Germany and Austria in the performance of the neutral duties of this Government." Consequently, he examined the Münsterberg letter most carefully and attempted to refute it in an exhaustive memorandum, which was to serve as the definitive rationalization of the administration's neutrality policies.⁴⁸ In general the memorandum concealed pro-Ally sentiments and economic interests behind a legalistic façade.⁴⁹

The sequel to the Münsterberg charges was Secretary Bryan's famous letter of January 20, 1915, to Senator Stone. During December Lansing had recommended that a public answer be made to confound all critics of the neutrality policies.⁵⁰ With the mounting criticism from certain elements in Congress, he renewed his previous suggestions and on January 1 advised that the most efficacious means would be a statement by the President or the Secretary of State, perhaps in the form of a letter responding to a projected inquiry from the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁵¹ He also prepared a list of twenty categories of questions to be answered by the Department, covering the entire field of neutrality problems and policies. After the President's approval had been secured, Senator Stone was persuaded to write the desired inquiry on January 8. Bryan's reply to Stone, based on Lansing's earlier analysis of the Münsterberg letter and following closely the suggested outline of January 1, was thus substantially Lansing's work.⁵² Although the Bryan-Stone letter publicly answered the critics and helped to educate the American public in regard to their neutral rights and privileges, it did not alter the essential unbalance of American neutrality. By the end of 1914 the United States was

⁴⁸ Lansing to Wilson, December 9, 1914, with his memorandum on the Münsterberg letter, *ibid.*, 166-79. In preparing the memorandum Lansing depended in part upon an analysis furnished by the Joint State-Navy Neutrality Board. State Department Records, File No. 763.72111/1074½.

⁴⁹ Wilson apparently still had doubts as to the correctness of the American position in general, and in answer to an inquiry on the question of an embargo Lansing hastened to give him additional assurances, including the opinions of neutral diplomats, that a change in rules during wartime, such as the adoption of an embargo, would be an unneutral act. Wilson then expressed himself as "fully fortified in the matter." Lansing to Wilson, December 10, 1914, and Wilson to Lansing, December 14, 1914, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 180-82.

⁵⁰ Lansing to Wilson, December 9, 1914, and Lansing to Bryan, December 26, 1914, *ibid.*, 166, 184.

⁵¹ Lansing to Bryan, January 1, 1915, *ibid.*, 185-88.

⁵² For Stone's inquiry and Bryan's answer, see *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, vi-xiv.

clearly oriented toward the Allied cause. American neutrality was increasingly one of form only, as two developments early in 1915 clearly demonstrated: the policy of acquiescence in the British blockade, and the "strict accountability" position taken in regard to submarine warfare.

The failure of the United States to secure adoption of the Declaration of London had left Great Britain free to develop the blockade of the Central Powers. Exploiting fully its command of the seas, the British government largely ignored the rules and practices of international law. As an effective territorial blockade of Germany was geographically impossible, the Allied Powers resorted to blockade procedures on the high seas and to the use of embargoes and nonexportation agreements to prevent the flow of neutral goods to the Central Powers.⁵³ The net effect was to enable Great Britain to mold the neutral exporters to her will. The United States government in 1915 took no countermeasures but contented itself with formal protests and tacit acquiescence.

It was not difficult for Lansing to rationalize satisfactorily the British departures from the established rules. He believed that war in any case was little more than a reversion to barbarism, and that since force was the basic factor in international relations, with each state responsible for its own safety and survival, extraordinary measures in wartime could be justified on the basis of belligerent necessity.⁵⁴ However, while belligerent needs justified violations of the normal codes of morality and law, the violation should not be a wanton act without military significance. Furthermore, on the grounds of self-preservation, an invaded country had more excuse for violating regular codes of warfare than had an invading power. Apparently, this point of view enabled Lansing to criticize the German conduct and to accept more calmly the British "defensive" acts.⁵⁵

Lansing's policy toward the Allied blockade and Allied maritime measures was essentially one of acquiescence. In his private records he had noted generally regarding countries at war that the

⁵³ Philip C. Jessup *et al.* (eds.), *Neutrality: Its History, Economics, and Law* (4 vols., New York, 1936), III (*The World War Period*, by Edgar Turlington), 4-5, 67.

⁵⁴ Entry of April 15, 1915, and Memorandum, "Cruel and Inhuman Acts of War," May 25, 1915, Confidential Memoranda, Lansing Papers.

⁵⁵ Lansing was under no illusions as to why Great Britain went to war; he viewed her actions as motivated primarily by national interests. See Lansing to Bryan, January 23, 1915, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 192-94.

"most sensible course" was to be patient and to "treat the warring nations as if irresponsible for their acts."⁵⁶ The correct procedure, he continued, would be the reservation of rights and the withholding of demands pending a future or postwar settlement. In practice, however, Lansing applied such a detached view only to the Allied violations, and not to those of Germany. In his policy recommendations and in his draft notes, he sought to avoid serious controversy with the British government. This he accomplished by designing the diplomatic notes to protect American commercial rights, in so far as possible, without seriously hampering the British war effort or threatening the existing good relations between the two countries.⁵⁷ The American notes were intended by Lansing to prolong indefinitely the discussion of neutral rights and yet, by apparent sharpness and by some actual concessions, to satisfy popular discontent with the Allied maritime actions.⁵⁸ As the war continued and active participation seemed more imminent, Lansing felt that it was even more necessary to avoid diplomatic conflicts with Great Britain in order to leave the way open for a possible future use of Allied methods by the United States. Consequently, "Everything was submerged in verbosity."⁵⁹

While the diplomatic exchanges were under way, a practical solution of commercial difficulties was reached which further compromised American neutrality. The solution, apparently with State Department sanction, was based on the formation of working agreements between private American firms and agents of the British government. The origins of the system are obscure, but Lansing has been credited with the original idea.⁶⁰ Earlier, during the negotiations concerning the Declaration of London, Lansing had suggested to the British embassy a comparable solution of the contraband problem by way of Allied agreements with the neutral coun-

⁵⁶ Entry of May 3, 1915, Confidential Memoranda, Lansing Papers.

⁵⁷ Lansing to Sir Charles Fitzpatrick (Canadian Chief Justice), January 9, 1915, Lansing Papers. Lansing here explained a recent note as intended to allay American industrial unrest.

⁵⁸ See Lansing's statement to Julius W. Pratt, June 24, 1928, Lansing Papers; also, Lansing to House, July 30, 1915, Papers of Colonel Edward M. House (Yale University Library). Lansing wrote House that public opinion had to be satisfied and some concession to American claims gained, but that in no case should issues be pressed so far as to threaten friendly relations with the Allies. Lansing's Confidential Memoranda, particularly the entry of September, 1916, stated the policy of endless exchanges more explicitly.

⁵⁹ Lansing, *War Memoirs*, 128-29.

⁶⁰ C. Hartley Grattan, *Why We Fought* (New York, 1929), 166-67.

tries to bar goods from Germany. The later scheme had its origin in Ambassador Walter Hines Page's proposal of December, 1914, to allow American firms to import certain commodities produced within the Empire in exchange for a promise by the State Department not to give its approval to copper exports consigned "to order" and presumably intended for Germany.⁶¹ The way was thus prepared for less formal arrangements. Several private American combinations were established, which co-operated with the British government in preventing German importation of goods through nearby neutral ports, receiving in return varied advantages, including safe transit assurances.⁶² Although the State Department maintained the fiction of disassociation with such working arrangement, it tacitly acquiesced in and encouraged the system. Much of American commerce thereby came effectively under Allied control, another major instrument in the war against Germany.

The North Atlantic stage was now set for the great drama of retaliation and counter-retaliation. The German government, unable to accept passively the Allied economic blockade, having little hope of alleviation of the situation through American action, and confronted with an unsatisfying stalemate in the land war, turned to the use of the submarine as a means of crushing British resistance. The British government on November 3, 1914, had proclaimed the North Sea a military area within which alleged indiscriminate enemy mining necessitated extensive countermining.⁶³ The German government responded on February 4, 1915, with a war zone of its own embracing the waters surrounding the British Isles, a zone in which belligerent vessels would be subject to attack without warning and neutral vessels would be exposed to accidental assault.⁶⁴ It was now necessary for the State Department to define its position.

The influence of Lansing on the formulation of policy reached its apex during the submarine crisis. As Bryan was absent from the State Department when the report of the German proclamation

⁶¹ See Page to Bryan, December 6, 1914, and Bryan to Page, December 9, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement*, 356-58, 361.

⁶² For a detailed discussion see Ethel C. Phillips, "American Participation in Belligerent Controls, 1914-1917," *American Journal of International Law* (New York), XXVII (October, 1933), 675-93.

⁶³ Spring-Rice to Bryan, November 3, 1914, Savage (ed.), *Maritime Commerce*, II, 226-27.

⁶⁴ Gerard to Bryan, February 4, 1915, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1915 Supplement* (Washington, 1928), 94.

was received, Lansing forwarded it to Wilson on February 5, commenting that it created a "delicate situation" which demanded careful scrutiny.⁶⁵ On the following day, the Counselor drafted a sharp note which expressed grave concern at the proclamation and which stated clearly that the German government would be held to a "strict accountability" for the loss of any American vessels or citizens.⁶⁶ Germany was to be reminded that belligerents should conform closely to the established practices of visit and search. President Wilson approved the note, after making the usual phraseology change designed to impart a "Wilsonian flavor," but he retained the "strict accountability" clause in its original form. The note was then ready for dispatch, but at the last moment Lansing was seized with misgivings. The German explanatory memorandum had finally arrived, and Lansing wrote Wilson that it made such a good defense that he wondered if any protest should be sent.⁶⁷ He apparently feared that the German explanation was so plausible that when published it would convince many American citizens of the correctness of the German action. He soon found a solution, however, which he believed would satisfy public opinion as to the impartiality of the United States government and yet permit use of the note.⁶⁸ The result was the dispatch of the note to Germany on February 10, accompanied by an innocuous protest to Great Britain against the alleged misuse of neutral flags.⁶⁹

At the time the note was sent, the submarine question was still largely academic. Lansing's appraisal at that time of the possibilities of war with Germany is of special interest, therefore, in showing his line of thought in the days before the submarine "outrages." In a memorandum prepared on February 15, he expressed a belief that the German government had much to gain and little to lose by hostilities with the United States.⁷⁰ He viewed the situation as one where the United States, while trading freely with the Allied Powers in war materials, was exporting very little to Germany;

⁶⁵ Lansing to Wilson, February 5, 1915, Wilson Papers. See also Baker, *Wilson, Life and Letters*, V, 247.

⁶⁶ Lansing's draft note, sent to Wilson on February 6, 1915, Wilson Papers.

⁶⁷ Lansing to Wilson, February 7, 1915, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ See Baker, *Wilson, Life and Letters*, V, 247-52.

⁶⁹ Bryan to Gerard, February 10, 1915; and Bryan to Page, February 10, 1915, *Foreign Relations, 1915 Supplement*, 98-101.

⁷⁰ Lansing Memorandum on Relations with Germany, February 15, 1915, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 367-68. Later he was to conclude that America could aid the Entente militarily as a co-belligerent.

therefore war would not harm Germany's commercial fortunes while it would make possible the disruption of the American-Allied trade. In addition, Lansing noted that the American navy would add little to Entente potential, and at the same time he thought that it would never be possible to send large armies from America to Europe. Consequently, Germany probably would gain by war far more than she could lose, especially in terms of a greater freedom of action in breaking up trade with the Allies.

This acute analysis seems to fit the known course of events which led to the ultimate participation of the United States in the war. As Lansing knew, American neutrality was heavily oriented toward the Allied Powers, a condition for which he had much responsibility. He knew, too, that it tended in a positive fashion to interfere with the German prosecution of the war. Thus the recent exchange over the submarine had seen the American government demand of Germany alone the fullest compliance with international maritime practices. Ultimately, led by a realistic appraisal of the situation, the German government was to conclude that America was already in fact a belligerent and therefore that a reckless submarine policy was justified.

The first major crisis with Germany followed the torpedoing of the British vessel *Falaba* on March 28, 1915, in which one American citizen lost his life. In the resulting policy discussions within the State Department, Lansing advocated the implementation of the "strict accountability" clause of the February note, in the face of Bryan's opposition and Wilson's indecision. On April 2, Lansing sent Bryan a memorandum which requested an immediate policy decision, terming the *Falaba* sinking a clear violation of the right of an American citizen to travel the high seas safely on any vessel.⁷¹ Thus the Counselor extended the "strict accountability" clause to cover not only American lives on American vessels but also American citizens traveling on belligerent ships — a type of immunization of Allied vessels. Lansing admitted, however, that such a position in effect amounted to a denunciation of the German war zone. Secretary Bryan, fearing imminent hostilities, energetically opposed Lansing's proposal to interpret "strict accountability" to mean German responsibility for loss of American life under the circumstances of the *Falaba* case.⁷² Bryan contended that an

⁷¹ Lansing to Bryan, April 2, 1915, *ibid.* 365-66.

⁷² Bryan to Wilson, April 2, 1915, Bryan Letter Books (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress).

American citizen traveling on a British vessel, knowing in advance of the submarine threat, might well be guilty of contributory negligence to his own destruction. Nevertheless, Bryan forwarded Lansing's February 15 memorandum on the probabilities of war to Wilson for his perusal. The President was impressed with Lansing's analysis, but he refused to allow it to influence him toward a milder policy. The *Falaba* case, however, was causing him great concern and he expressed an eager desire for Lansing's views on the best course to be followed.⁷² Clearly Wilson depended heavily upon Lansing for advice; had Lansing supported Bryan's views, American policy toward the submarine would perhaps have been radically different.

Convinced that the German use of the submarine should be flatly challenged, Lansing drafted a harsh note on the *Falaba* which termed the sinking contrary to the rules of "civilized warfare."⁷⁴ The draft note asserted that the German government had violated the rules of visit and search; and it denounced the war zone and demanded a disavowal of the sinking, reparations for the loss of life, and punishment of the guilty officials. In a letter to Bryan, accompanying the draft note, the Counselor admitted the severity of the note but asserted that any weaker protest would be worse than none.⁷⁵ As Lansing phrased it, only a sharp demand would modify German actions in the future and also satisfy the demands of American public opinion.

A final decision on the *Falaba* case was delayed while other aspects of the issue were more fully examined. Increasingly dismayed by the crisis, Bryan wrote Wilson on April 6 that he questioned the right of any private citizen to place his own personal interest above that of the nation and by traveling on belligerent vessels to involve his government in international disputes.⁷⁶ Even Wilson began to vacillate, inquiring if the arming of merchantmen in any way justified the attack on the *Falaba*.⁷⁷ Bryan seized upon Wilson's doubts to renew objections to the sending of a harsh note.⁷⁸ Lansing sought to counter these waverings, and he sent to the White House a memorandum from the Joint State-Navy Neutrality

⁷² Wilson to Bryan, April 5, 1915, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 369.

⁷⁴ Draft Instructions to Gerard, *ibid.*, 370-71.

⁷⁵ Lansing to Bryan, April 5, 1915, *ibid.*, 369-70.

⁷⁶ Bryan to Wilson, April 6, 1915, *ibid.*, 372.

⁷⁷ Wilson to Bryan, April 6, 1915, *ibid.*, 372-73.

⁷⁸ Bryan to Wilson, April 7, 1915, *ibid.*, 374-76.

Board which supported his views that the sinking was completely unjustifiable.⁷⁹ Shortly thereafter a report came from Consul General Robert P. Skinner in England which revealed that the crew and passengers of the *Falaba* had been allowed only ten minutes in which to abandon ship. This information demonstrated to Lansing that the question of armament was immaterial.⁸⁰ Whatever it was that moved Wilson, he finally, on April 22, outlined to Secretary Bryan the substance of a note to the German government. It was his suggestion that the Secretary "enter a very moderately worded but none the less solemn and emphatic protest against the whole thing" — an adoption, in substance, of the viewpoint of Lansing. A few days later the President rejected as inopportune Bryan's alternative suggestion for a peace appeal to the belligerents.⁸¹

While the *Falaba* note was in the process of completion, further complications arose. On April 29, the American vessel *Cushing* was attacked by a German airplane, and on May 1 the American steamer *Gulfight* was torpedoed by a submarine. Consequently dispatch of the *Falaba* note was delayed while these new developments were considered. At this juncture, an even greater crisis occurred: the sinking of the Cunard liner *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915. The *Falaba* case had already determined American policy toward the submarine, and it was now only necessary to apply that policy to the *Lusitania*.

The *Falaba* case thus completed the last major step in the delineation of America's neutrality policies. Beginning with the neutrality proclamation in August, 1914, the United States government had adopted a series of attitudes and positions, based on its own interests, which served to orient the country toward the Entente Powers and which thereby rendered its neutrality status a matter of mere technicality and form. In addition to its tacit approval of the extensive trade with the Allies, the American government submitted to the British blockade and failed to take effective measures to preserve neutral commerce with Europe and the Central Powers; instead, there had been unofficial co-operation with the maritime measures of Great Britain. The American government thus did nothing to prevent the German resort to submarine warfare but rather aided the measures precipitating that warfare, and then

⁷⁹ See Baker, *Wilson, Life and Letters*, V, 266-67.

⁸⁰ Lansing to Wilson, April 10, 1915, *Foreign Relations, Lansing Papers*, I, 377.

⁸¹ Wilson to Bryan, April 22 and 28, 1915, *ibid.*, 377-78, 380.

when submarines were used, insisted on the full observance of the rules of warfare by the German government alone. Thus the submarine was only the immediate cause of America's entry into war, a necessary factor but incomprehensible without reference to the neutrality structure developed by the spring of 1915.

For Lansing, the *Falaba* and *Lusitania* sinkings removed all doubts as to the best course for the United States. His policy recommendations were henceforth to reflect his conviction that the United States should actively enter the war. In a private memorandum dated July 11, 1915, Lansing recorded his views:

I have come to the conclusion that the German Government is utterly hostile to all nations with democratic institutions because those who compose it see in democracy a menace to absolutism and the defeat of the German ambition for world domination. . . .

The remedy seems to me to be plain. It is that Germany must not be permitted to win this war and to break even, though to prevent it this country is forced to take an active part. This ultimate necessity must be constantly in our minds in all our controversies with the belligerents. American public opinion must be prepared for the time, which may come, when we will have to cast aside our neutrality and become one of the champions of democracy.

We must in fact risk everything rather than leave the way open for a new combination of powers, stronger and more dangerous to liberty than the Central allies are today.⁸²

The primary concern of Lansing was with the national interest as it related to the balance of power. In this July memorandum he stated the fear that if Germany won the war, a future alliance of Germany, Japan, and Russia would probably be formed, which would threaten America from all sides, constituting an "almost irresistible coalition." More immediately, a British defeat would leave the United States alone to face an expansionist Japan in the Far East, while confronting a powerful and vengeful Germany in the Atlantic. The possible success of an absolutist concert would mean "the overthrow of democracy in the world, the suppression of individual liberty . . . and the turning back of the hands of human progress two centuries." Truly, he reasoned, the war in Europe could be regarded as a war for democracy, and American public opinion should be prepared for a possible military participation. The submarine issue and the horror aroused by the loss of noncom-

⁸² "Consideration and Outline of Policies," July 11, 1915, Confidential Memoranda, Lansing Papers.

batant lives offered a means for an effective appeal to the average man. As he later wrote, it was a "slow and irritating period of education and enlightenment as to German aims and the meaning of the great European conflict."⁸⁸ To this purpose he dedicated his efforts from 1915 until the declaration of war in 1917.

By mid-1915, the essentials of America's neutrality policies had been clearly formulated in a direction foreshadowing the eventual involvement in the war. In this process Lansing had performed a major role. Beginning with a realistic approach to foreign affairs and with definite pro-Entente sentiments, Lansing gradually came to view the war as vitally significant to American democratic, political, and economic interests. On these convictions he had based his policy recommendations, policies which when adopted oriented the country toward the Allied Powers and against Germany — contraband trade, credits and loans to the belligerents, tacit acquiescence in the Allied blockade, the armed ship policy, and the policy of "strict accountability" toward submarine warfare. Wilson, of course, made the final decisions on policies, but it was Lansing who first clearly understood the significance of the war, who supplied the President with much of the substance of his policies, who interpreted international law, and who successfully presented to the idealistic Wilson courses of action already clothed in moralistic and ideological terms. Lansing emerges as a most powerful figure in the first critical year of American neutrality in World War I.

⁸⁸ Lansing, *War Memoirs*, 28. See also his entries of August 25, 1915, September, 1916, and January 9, 1916, Confidential Memoranda, Lansing Papers.