tacitly pro-Entente, British ambassador Sir Cecil Arthur Spring Rice counseled his government to avoid overt propagandizing.[34] Despite this warning, Sir Gilbert Parker, who directed Britain's American Ministry of Information, blanketed the nation with news releases, pamphlets, and speeches.

When, in early August 1914, war broke out in Europe, Wilson immediately realized that his decisions could vitally affect the international order. He discovered that his advisers served him poorly, either being inadequate to the task or offering counsel that was downright destructive. The Congress and the press presented a cacophony of voices, at times advancing positions that challenged the foundations of his policies. An examination of the president's leadership, how he interacted with all the players, and the judgment of historians is the subject of this book.

2

The Earliest Debates

August 1914–March 1915

ON THE AFTERNOON OF August 6, 1914, a dying woman whispered into the ear of her physician: "Promise me that you will take good care of my husband." As a downstairs clock chimed five times, her spouse asked the doctor, "Is it over?" Receiving a nod, he walked to a window and cried out: "Oh, my God, what am I to do?" Then, composing himself, he vowed: "I must not give way." Nonetheless, the man remained sitting in his chair, maintaining an isolated vigil. President Woodrow Wilson had just lost his wife Ellen to Bright's Disease, a fatal kidney ailment. He soon wrote an intimate friend: "Every night finds me exhausted,—dead in heart and body." He blamed his own ambition for her death. His brother-in-law called him "the loneliest man in the world."[1]

It took months for the excruciating grief to pass off. As late as November, the president told his most intimate friend, Colonel House, that he hoped someone would kill him. Wilson confessed that he "was not fit to be President because he did not think straight any longer, and had no heart in what he was doing."[2] The burden of work sustained him, for the chief executive found himself suddenly facing challenges that no world leader could envy.

At the very time that Wilson's inner world disintegrated, the outer one experienced calamity. Just five days before Ellen died, war in Europe erupted on an unprecedented scale. To most Americans, the outbreak of the conflict appeared as something far off, remote, even unreal. The flurry of diplomatic dispatches, the massing of huge armies, the orders of mobilization—all seemed a kind of gruesome illusion. After the assassination of the Hapsburg heir, the archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo, Austria-Hungary threatened Serbia, a nation having the protection of Russia.

Imperial Germany backed Imperial Austria, while republican France upheld the czar. After seeing Germany suddenly pounce upon Belgium, Britain came to France's aid and on August 4, 1914, declared war on the Reich. The Great War had begun, and it soon engulfed almost all of Europe.

When the Serbian crisis first broke out, most Americans saw it as another one of Europe's chronic ailments. On July 27, the day before Austria declared war on Serbia, Wilson told the press: "The United States has never attempted to intervene in European affairs."[3] Agriculture Secretary David F. Houston queried in a memo: "What? Another little war in the Balkans? Serbia is in the Balkans, isn't it? A lot of fuss over an archduke. Calls himself Francis Ferdinand. He probably didn't amount to much; he couldn't have with a name like that."[4]

Nevertheless, Americans took events most seriously. The same David Houston remarked: "I had the feeling the end of things had come." Franklin Delano Roosevelt, assistant secretary of the navy, foresaw "the greatest war in human history." To former president William Howard Taft, the event was "a cataclysm." Novelist Henry James feared that the world had plunged into "an abyss of blood and darkness."[5] More than one journal made reference to the biblical battle of Armageddon, the conflict marking the end of human history.

More than ever, citizens expressed gratitude for their isolation. "Again and ever I thank Heaven for the Atlantic Ocean," wrote Ambassador Walter Hines Page to the president, soon adding: "How wise our no-alliance policy is."[6] A Chicago journal blessed Columbus for having discovered America, while a Buffalo newspaper remarked: "This European war suggests that the white man's burden is the white man himself."[7]

Soon, however, the citizenry began to choose sides. Although scientific polling of the wider public did not take place for another two decades, the sentiments of opinion leaders became clear. In November the weekly *Literary Digest,* which frequently surveyed the nation's press, canvassed over 350 newspapers. It noted that 49 percent of the editors expressed no sympathies for either side, while 46 percent favored the Allies. A regional breakdown indicated pro-Allied leanings in New England, the South, the West, and the Pacific coast. In the Midwest, which contained a large German American population, feelings were either neutralist or occasionally pro-German; often such views predominated where the Populist movement had drawn its strongest support. Furthermore, small towns tended to be more neutralist than

urban areas. The *Digest* itself observed: "The sympathy on either side is that of the distant observer." Practically no one desired to enter the war.[8]

Historian Ernest R. May puts the issue well: "It was thought possible to be sympathetic yet completely neutral." At the same time, May notes that an American could shift easily between a desire to avoid war and the wish to defend the nation's rights by spirited diplomacy. Journalist Mark Sullivan compared the sentiment to the cheering of baseball fans sitting in the bleachers. In September a newsboy hawked a late edition, crying: "Extra! Giants and Germans lose! Extra!" Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, British ambassador to Washington, discerned that Americans regarded the conflict "as a bore, or as an immensely interesting spectacle provided for their entertainment." Either way, the diplomat deemed it "useless and misleading to depend on these people for help or for practical sympathy."[9] Certainly, the great majority assumed that no vital interests, economic or military, lay at stake. Planting crops, earning wages, selling goods, raising children—these remained the most important priorities. Moreover, the United States assumed that the Allies would win without its direct involvement.

By November 1914 a major portion of thoughtful Americans had decided upon the causes of the conflict; they did not really change their perspective during the war itself. The belligerents released various "white papers" or color books, selecting those diplomatic documents that best argued their case: white for Germany and Britain, yellow for France, red for Austria, green for Italy, orange for Russia, gray for Belgium. Though the contents of each volume were highly biased, taken together they revealed the complexity of the war's origins.

On August 4 Wilson issued a sweeping proclamation of strict neutrality, though he feared that an event might occur on the high seas to make this stance impossible. Within three weeks he released his "Appeal to the American People," calling upon his countrymen to "be neutral in fact as well as in name," "impartial in thought as well as in action." No sentiment, no transaction should indicate "a preference of one party to the struggle over another."[10]

The president was obviously aware that many fellow Americans harbored biases. Nevertheless, in their activities, he thought that they should put the interests of the United States ahead of any belligerent. In this plea he received strong support across the political spectrum, ranging from George Sylvester Viereck's militantly Teutonic *Fatherland* to the ardently pro-Allied

Outlook. The latter said: "This is not our war. Let us keep out of it." Senator Henry Cabot Lodge spoke of absolute impartiality.[11]

Almost immediately Wilson privately revealed his own proclivities. On August 19 he informed Sir Edward Grey, the British foreign secretary, that their two nations were "bound together by common principle and purpose." Conversely, the president told Ambassador Spring Rice that a German victory would force the United States to "take such measures of defence as would be fatal to our form of Government and American ideals." "Everything that I love most in the world is at stake," he asserted. He warned Colonel House on August 30 that a German victory "would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a military nation." The impact of Germany's destruction of Louvain, which had taken place late in August, wore heavily upon him, as did the German chancellor's crude justification of the attack on Belgium. That October Wilson reported to Ambassador James W. Gerard in Berlin that German bombing had created "terror and the destruction of innocent lives," making a "fatal" impression on the American public. Just before the November congressional elections, Wilson supposedly informed his aide, Joseph Tumulty, that "England is fighting our fight and you may well understand that I shall not, in the present state of world affairs, place obstacles in her way."[12]

Wilson usually expressed such sentiments at the start of the war, a time when the Allies seemed to face defeat. After September 9, when the Germans were repulsed at the Marne River, a long stalemate appeared in the offing, leading Wilson to think that the United States had avoided possible danger. By late autumn, he was becoming increasingly detached, moving toward a more impartial position. In mid-September he defined his own peace agenda, one that included restoration of Belgium, an independent Poland, the cession of Alsace (but not Lorraine) to France, the neutralization of the Dardanelles, and the formation of a Balkan federation at the expense of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[13]

Already on September 28, Wilson advised House to tell Foreign Secretary Grey, whom the colonel already knew personally, that Britain would be most unwise to destroy Germany and Austria completely; otherwise Russia's ambitions on the Continent would remain unchecked. Early in November, the president accused the British of seeking a "complete defeat of Germany" and "to a very considerable degree a dismemberment of the German empire." Even if Germany won the war, he told a skeptical House, it would be in no condition to menace America.[14]

Later that month House told Wilson that Germany disliked America's policy, would "hold us to account," and had designs on Brazil, to which the president countered that the European conflict might have been "a Godsend to us," for otherwise "we might have been embroiled in war ourselves." Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels later recalled Wilson's comment: "Every reform we have won will be lost if we go into this war."[15]

In an off-the-record interview that took place in mid-December, the president informed *New York Times* writer Herbert Bruce Brougham that Germany might not have been solely responsible for the conflict and that the best outlook lay in a deadlock followed by a peace of reconciliation. A victory of the Allies, however, would not significantly injure American interests. He added that the German government needed profound change and that Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had been unwise to annex Alsace-Lorraine in 1871. He called for dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and noted that land-bound Russia deserved "natural outlets for its trade with the world." Wilson told his brother-in-law Stockton Axson in February 1915 that he envisioned a peace involving legal equality of small and large nations, public ownership of munition firms, the repudiation of any conquest, and an association of nations bound together against aggression.[16]

During the last days of peace, the United States offered to intercede in the conflict. On July 28, Bryan offered America's good offices to the British. Three days later, Grey thanked the secretary but, acting with polite evasion, avoided further discussion of Wilson's gesture. In the first few months of the conflict, Wilson and Bryan hoped that they might lead the belligerents to the conference table. On August 4, just two days before Ellen Wilson died, the president wrote the great powers of Europe: "I should welcome an opportunity to act in the interest of European peace, either now or at any other time that might be thought more suitable." The respondents all made excuses. As part of his neutrality proclamation of August 18, he spoke of America's readiness "to play a part of impartial mediation." In mid-November Page reported from London that Britain envisioned a protracted war.[17]

The president's overtures never had a chance. Each side thought the other completely responsible for the conflict and therefore undeserving of parlay. Furthermore, all the warring states believed that a major victory would assure their security for many generations. Both combatants advanced war aims that became increasingly ambitious and therefore less acceptable to the other side. While Britain had not yet announced specific desires, it considered major transfers of territory and population: Alsace-Lorraine to France,

Schleswig-Holstein to Denmark, South Germany to Austria, and the Austrian Slavs to Russia. Belgium would receive an indemnity. The German colonies would serve as trading pawns.[18]

The September Program of Germany's chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, was equally comprehensive. It would have turned France into a second-class power, subject to German economic penetration and deprived of the Briey ore region. Belgium would lose territory and accept limits to its sovereignty, becoming essentially a German province. Luxembourg would be a federal state within the Reich.[19]

To compound the problem of negotiation, the Central Powers held the advantage on both fronts. By autumn 1914 they had conquered almost all of Belgium. Although Germany occupied only a tenth of France's territory, it was an area that contained much of its major industry, four-fifths of its coal, and nine-tenths of its iron. The British did gain a foothold in northern France. They also tenaciously hung on to an exposed salient around Ypres, Belgium, the defense of which cost them fifty thousand men, about half their regular army. Germany captured territory well inside Russian Poland and took over two hundred thousand Russian prisoners in East Prussia. These successes strengthened Allied opposition to any peace settlement that would shift Europe's balance of power in Germany's direction.

Not surprisingly, Americans debated the question of war guilt. And quite predictably, the Central Powers received the most condemnation. The pro-Allied *North American Review* indicted Austria for issuing an ultimatum that triggered Russian mobilization and consequently war itself. The Hapsburg Empire had insisted that Serbia permit Austria-Hungary to join its internal investigation into the archduke's assassination. Not only would Vienna place every Serbian officer "at the mercy of foreign malice," it practically demanded that Serbia renounce "her own essential sovereignty and independence." James Montgomery Beck, a former assistant attorney general, stressed that Serbia had attempted to submit the crisis to an international tribunal at The Hague, only to be met by a humiliating forty-eight-hour ultimatum from Austria that threatened invasion if Belgrade rejected its demands. The *Nation* magazine admitted that Austria held a just grievance against Serbia but insisted that Belgrade's general compliance should have resulted in a peaceful settlement.[20]

Though believing the Hapsburg Empire had triggered the conflict, Americans usually deemed its Hollenzollern counterpart the main culprit. They conceded that Germany possessed a rich cultural heritage, an advanced system of social insurance, and a superb public school system and had achieved major scientific breakthroughs. Nonetheless, many noted that it harbored strategic ambitions in the Caribbean and had confronted the United States in Manila Bay just as the Spanish-American War ended. It competed with the United States for markets in Latin America, had recognized the despotic regime of Victoriano Huerta in Mexico, and opposed Wilson's takeover of Haiti's customhouses. Emperor Wilhelm II often exhibited such bluster as to make him an embarrassment to himself. Because the Kaiser's "blank check" to Austria-Hungary, dated July 5, promised unequivocal support to the Hapsburg Empire for any stance it took, it aroused considerable American ire. Austria, said William Howard Taft, might have formally initiated the conflict, but "I think William was behind it all the time." Harvard's former president Charles W. Eliot declared that "In Germany, all the forces of education, finance, commercial development, a pagan philosophy, and Government have been preparing for this war since 1860."[21]

The American media portrayed Berlin's war aims in sweeping terms. On August 5 the *New York World* announced, "Germany has run amuck," warning that "the map of European republicanism may well be rolled up," forcing Americans to make "a last great stand for democracy." In September Ambassador Page warned: "If German bureaucratic brute force could conquer Europe, presently it would try to conquer the United States; and we should all go back to the era of war as man's chief industry and back to the domination of kings by divine right."[22]

Germany's most severe critics pointed to an obscure work written by a sixty-five-year-old general who had previously been a cavalry corps commander. The very chapter titles of Friedrich von Bernhardi's *Germany and the Next War* (1911) conveyed a tone of immeasurable arrogance: "The Right to Make War," "The Duty to Make War," "World Power or Downfall." War, he declared, was "not merely a necessary element in the life of nations, but an indispensable factor of culture, in which a true civilized nation finds its highest expression of strength and vitality." France, he continued, must be so crushed as to nevermore threaten Germany.[23]

Just six thousand copies were printed; they made little impression on ordinary Germans. In 1912 the British translated the volume and, when war erupted, circulated it widely. Even William Randolph Hearst's *New York American* offered excerpts, calling it "The Book That Profoundly Stirred Germany's New War Spirit."[24]

Teutonic sympathizers challenged such claims. Herbert Sanborn, phi-

losophy professor at Vanderbilt University, justified Austria's "vigorously worded" ultimatum to Serbia on the grounds that it suited "the treacherous people to whom it was sent." Indeed Balkan peoples lived "on the plane of semi-savagery." German-educated John W. Burgess, a Columbia University professor and the founder of the *Political Science Quarterly,* asked how America would react if its vice president and his wife had been assassinated in Texas in a "plot hatched in Mexico City and implicating high officials of the Mexican government." The United States would have "slapped Mexico off the face of the earth."[25]

To some defenders the Kaiser was a paragon of statesmanship, a "knight without fault or blemish," as one German American newspaper described him. He had done "all in his power to mediate between Austria and Russia," remarked the *Fatherland,* doing so at the very time both nations were secretly arming for the conflict. As for Bernhardi, the journal stressed that he had been dismissed from command. Said editor Viereck in a debate with British publicist Cecil Chesterton: "You have annexed our Bernhardi and we have annexed your Shakespeare."[26]

While defending the Central Powers, pro-German spokesmen sought to blacken the reputation of the Allies. The initial issue of the *Fatherland* described Entente war aims in one sentence: "Russia wants Constantinople, France wants revenge, and England wants Germany's commerce." Kuno Francke, director of Harvard's Germanic Museum, expressed himself similarly. England sought to cripple German trade, France desired the lost provinces, and Russia hoped to undermine German commercial influence in the Near East and eliminate Austrian power in the Balkans. Furthermore, the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 and Japan's intervention in the war revealed that Britain had no qualms about betraying the Pacific interests of the United States. Conversely, Germany harbored just two goals: "the consolidation of German middle Africa from sea to sea, and a leading position in the commercial opening up of the near Orient."[27]

Such partisans emphasized Russia's prominence among the Allies. Harvard psychologist Hugo Münsterberg portrayed the issue as a struggle between two civilizations, that of German *Kultur* versus "the Cossacks with their pogroms." Simon N. Patten, an economist at the University of Pennsylvania, remarked that "assassination and bomb-throwing are zealously promoted by Servian hatred and Russian gold." Hence Austria was forced either to fight or to become "disrupted by racial discord." Similar sentiments were not limited to German sympathizers, as seen by the views of Wilson and

House. Reformist publisher Oswald Garrison Villard queried: "What shall it avail humanity if a hateful Prussian militarism be smashed only to leave in its place a more hateful and dangerous Russian militarism and an even more dominating British navalism?"[28]

The wide-sweeping debates became increasingly concentrated on one event—Germany's invasion of Belgium. In 1905 the chief of the German general staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, inadvertently produced what military historian John Keegan calls "the most important government document written in any country in the first decade of the twentieth century."[29] Realizing that Germany could never win a two-front war against both Russia and France, he devised an operational plan that went under his name. One must first defeat the French, doing so within six weeks; then one must tackle the Russians. However, as France's border was heavily fortified, one must strike through Belgium, whose neutrality the Great Powers, including both Britain and Prussia, had guaranteed in the Treaty of London signed in 1839.

On August 2, 1914, in the capital of Brussels, the German minister delivered a note to Belgium's foreign minister. "Reliable information," it stated, revealed that French forces intended to attack Germany through Belgium's Meuse Valley. Hence, out of self-defense, Germany felt itself forced to invade first. Berlin attempted to soften the news by promising to pay cash for necessities, offering an indemnity to cover damage, swearing to evacuate Belgium, and, when peace was concluded, guaranteeing its territory and independence. If Belgium resisted, Germany would be compelled to consider it an enemy. The Belgians were given twelve hours to respond. If Belgium had accepted the offer, writes historian Larry Zuckerman, it would have lain at Germany's mercy and Britain and France would have felt directly threatened. Even if the Allies won the overall conflict, Belgium could have faced Berlin's annexations as well as political and economic controls that would have compromised its independence.[30]

When Belgium rejected this ultimatum, German patrols started crossing the Belgian border, attacking at 8:00 A.M. on August 4. On that very day, Britain declared war on Germany, an act that might ultimately have determined Allied survival. In justifying the German action, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg told the Reichstag: "Necessity knows no law." He also indicated to the British ambassador to Berlin that the 1839 guarantee was simply "a scrap of paper."[31] Though Bethmann soon averred that he had been misunderstood, the phrase haunted him the rest of his life. The Germans captured Brussels on August 20 and Namur on August 25, the same

date that they began five days of brutal devastation in the university town of Louvain, known as "the Oxford of Belgium." Here the Germans destroyed over a thousand homes, a quarter of the city's building surface. That night a Zeppelin bombed Antwerp, which fell to German troops on October 9. The Germans claimed that snipers were firing on occupation troops, but they were never able to prove their allegation. After the Germans occupied Belgium, they looted it, a practice that continued throughout four years of occupation.

The invasion of Belgium offered a view of the future that most Americans wanted to avoid. In describing the entry of the Kaiser's troops, Richard Harding Davis, an internationally known war correspondent, wrote of the "uncanny, unhuman" nature of their march. "You returned to watch it, fascinated," he said; "It held the mystery and menace of fog rolling toward you across the sea." Another journalist, Will Irwin, ably captured the impersonal nature of the conflict: "We had seen three days of the German army by now; and it seemed to me . . . that the whole world had turned into a gray machine of death—earth and air and sky."[32]

More important, the German actions left an indelible impact on many Americans, who perceived that the Germans had become barbarians. Although accounts of brutality were highly exaggerated, photographs of devastated buildings in Antwerp and Louvain, together with those of the severe damage done to Rheims cathedral in France, severely injured Berlin's reputation. Germany, it appeared, had deliberately trampled on the rules of civilized warfare. To many Americans, a powerful nation had decimated a small neighbor, a peaceful country had found its neutrality violated, and a lawless power had broken an international treaty and in the process dishonored itself. The Kaiser simply added to the impression of callousness when he wrote Wilson, claiming that he had to destroy Louvain in order to protect his troops.[33]

Outrage was instantaneous. Journalist Mark Sullivan ably caught his countrymen's sentiment: "America's attitude had been fixed the hour that Germany's army projected the first goose-step of its vanguard's toe across the boundary-line of Belgium." Average citizens saw the invasion "in the simplest possible terms, a big dog pouncing on a little one." "By this action," remarked the *Nation*, "Germany has shown herself ready to lift an outlaw hand against the whole of Western Europe." The assault on Antwerp, Lansing wrote Bryan, embodied "an outrage against humanity." Mary Bryan,

wife of the secretary of state, called the zeppelin bombing of the city "this cowardly way of sneaking up under cover of darkness and dropping death down upon sleeping people."[34]

Theodore Roosevelt appeared to be of two minds. Writing a British friend on August 22, he accused the Germans of having "trampled on their solemn obligations to Belgium and on Belgium's rights." Over the past forty-three years, Germany had "menaced every nation where she thought it was to her advantage to do so." TR opposed any Allied march to Berlin, however, for western Europe might need the Reich "as a bulwark against the Slav." In late September, while in the midst of a congressional campaign, he refused to pass judgment on the Germans. While conceding that Belgium was entirely innocent, he claimed that "almost all great nations" had ignored matters of "abstract right and wrong" when "matters of vital national moment" were at stake. Certainly the United States bore not "the smallest responsibility" in the matter; it should remain "entirely neutral." Probably no American action could have affected the situation.[35]

Within weeks, Roosevelt radically reversed himself. Meeting with an official Belgian delegation visiting the United States, he learned more of German atrocities than had first been conveyed through British accounts. Early in October he wrote psychologist Münsterberg, claiming that Belgium deserved reparations. In another letter, this one to the head of the German Information Service, Roosevelt accused Berlin of seeking to integrate Belgium into Imperial Germany and to retain Antwerp and other North Sea cities in the process. In December his own daughter Ethel reinforced such reports. The wife of a surgeon serving Allied soldiers in Paris, she had heard of scandalous behavior on the part of German troops.[36]

In 1914 the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), a neutral organization, was established. An American mining engineer, Herbert Hoover, headed the body. It created much sympathy for that invaded land and therefore indirectly for the entire Allied cause. The CRB centered attention on ordinary Belgians, using the techniques of advertising to induce American support. It publicized pleas from King Albert, the royal family, and the highly vocal Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier and circulated films portraying German behavior in most unflattering terms.

Some Americans took a more benign view, maintaining that Belgium lay naturally within the German sphere of influence. Wrote economist Simon Patten: "Everyone knows that the economic welfare of Germany and

Belgium are bound together. They form parts of one economic unit." Publisher S.S. McClure observed that the efficient occupiers had abolished contagious diseases there.[37]

Far from being a small, defenseless country, Belgium, according to John W. Burgess, possessed a population of nearly 9 million, a well-equipped army of over two hundred thousand men, and an empire of over a million square miles, not to mention benefiting from a vigorous commerce. The Columbia scholar argued that it was Prussia and the German Confederation that had signed the 1839 guarantee, not the German Empire, which was founded in 1871. Therefore, the treaty was invalid. Philosophy professor Herbert Sanborn accused France and England of violating Belgian neutrality before German troops had begun to mobilize.[38]

Some of Germany's defenders took on the matter of Louvain, maintaining that the real atrocities were those committed against the Germans. Even Belgian priests, they asserted, supplied snipers with ammunition. Viereck called the city's destruction "an act of humanity, for it will teach other noncombatants, wherever they may be, to keep their guns out of their hands." Once the Belgians acted responsibly, women, children, and art treasures would no longer be endangered. Herman Ridder of the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* denied reports that the Germans had destroyed the town hall and the cathedral. In justifying the bombardment of Rheims, he blamed the French for deliberately making the cathedral their military stronghold. Certain journalists in Belgium, among them the representatives from the *New York World* and the *Chicago Tribune,* challenged accounts of German atrocities. The *Fatherland* asked: "Should the Germans Drop Bon-Bons into Antwerp?" as it argued that women and children had no place in a fortified town. After all, even before France declared war, its aviators had bombed Cologne and the unfortified Nuremberg.[39]

On September 16, Wilson met with a delegation of Belgian officials, led by the Belgian minister, who presented material concerning atrocities. The president promised his "most attentive perusal" of the documents but added: "You will not expect me to say more." When the war ended, "the day of accounting will then come when I take it for granted the nations of Europe will assemble to determine a settlement." The commission distributed a well-publicized report, *The Case of Belgium in the Present War.* As the drafters had little time, they lacked hard evidence and accepted hearsay; therefore their credibility was weakened. Wilhelm protested to Wilson, alleging that the British and French used splintering dumdum bullets, supposedly discovered in large quantities at Longwy fortress, to which the chief executive responded in almost the same words as those he addressed to the Belgians.[40] The president denied a hearing to a German American delegation concerning Belgium, a move that convinced Berlin's sympathizers that Wilson was insincere and pro-British.

The Germans in turn released three recently captured documents that appeared to compromise Belgium's neutrality. In 1906 the chief of the Belgian general staff and the British military attaché in Brussels had supposedly made an agreement by which, in the event of war between France and Germany, Belgium would admit one hundred thousand British troops. A 1911 paper indicated that the British sought to attack the Lower Rhine and Westphalia through Belgium. In 1912 still another record revealed Britain's presumed intention to counter a German attack with a landing on Belgian territory, whether invited or not. Even if the documents were spurious, noted historian Roland Usher of Washington University, the fact remained that the Belgian army had disposed its forces and readied its forts on the advice of British and French generals.[41]

Supporters of Belgium replied quickly. Any such arrangements were designed solely to defend Belgium and embodied mere contingency plans relating to a possible attack. Historian Zuckerman notes that if Belgium and Britain had planned their joint operations effectively, as the operations appeared to suggest, they would have hampered the German advance.[42]

Wilson's critics attacked his failure to invoke various provisions of the Second Hague Conference, convened in 1907. According to its provisions, belligerents were forbidden to move troops or supplies across the territory of a neutral power, much less bombard undefended towns or levy tribute from conquered provinces. In November Theodore Roosevelt accused the Wilson administration of shirking its duty, claiming, "We are bound in good faith to fulfill our treaty obligations." At the very least, the United States should have investigated and put itself on record. Writing Lodge, he labeled Wilson and Bryan "the very worst of men we have ever had in their positions."[43]

The administration responded quickly. Robert Lansing, counselor to the State Department and therefore its second-ranking officer, argued that Belgium's evidence was one-sided and that no one possessed the resources to conduct an impartial investigation. The Hague stipulations were unenforceable, and neutral governments were not obligated to interfere in the action of belligerents. To President Wilson, Lansing's observations were "sound and wise."[44]

By the winter of 1914–15, western Europe was experiencing stalemate. Both sides erected trenches that stretched from the English Channel to the mountains of Switzerland. For several years countless numbers of men were lost in frontal attacks that might at best gain a few yards. In January 1915, Ambassador Page wrote Wilson:

> The horror of the thing outruns all imagination. Yet somehow nobody seems to realize it—men marched into the trenches to as certain slaughter as cattle when they are driven into the killing house in a stockyard. . . . There's nothing of the old "glory" of war—the charge, the yell, the music, the clash, and the giving way of one side or of the other. That's all gone. . . . Just plain, beastly butchery of men in such numbers as were never before killed in battle in so short a time, every mollifying thing gone—use any weapon, lie in the mud wounded for twelve hours, lie dead unburied for days! And when bombs strike a farmhouse and kill a family, that's not a subject even of passing remark.[45]

Although the Central Powers made inroads on their western front, they experienced frustration on their eastern one. Germany initially pulverized the Russian invader, but the entire Austrian army experienced setbacks in Poland and Serbia. In short, as in the west, neither side could expect a rapid victory.

News of deadlock overseas conveyed little reassurance to Americans. Instead of realizing that Europe was engaged in suicidal conflict, many feared that such massive mobilization portended ill for the United States. George Harvey, editor and publisher of the *North American Review,* issued a warning:

> Suppose a German Empire, rising triumphant over a ruined England, lord of the sea, hungry for markets and colonies to recoup its losses. Suppose an aroused and aggressive Asia, with the United States the sole unscathed member of the white world. Suppose, even, a firmly welded British Empire, united by successful war, militarized by the intoxication of victory, and allied to a hungry and bellicose Japan. . . . At any rate, one lesson seems to lie fair for our reading: on this day of Armageddon America should neglect nothing for the sure maintenance of her position in a quaking world.[46]

Some military figures were obsessed with fears of a German threat. At the turn of the century, American naval leaders, including the famous strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, believed that Berlin sought to occupy territory in the Western Hemisphere and challenge the United States for the control of world markets. In 1910 Captain Bradley Fiske, who directed war planning during Taft's administration, foresaw a commercial rivalry that would eventually lead to war. In August 1914 the Navy General Board warned that a victorious Germany would covet territory "on this side of the ocean." George H. Dewey, admiral of the navy and hero of Manila Bay, chaired the Board, thereby lending his personal prestige to this finding. Taft's secretary of war, Henry L. Stimson, observed that the American coastline harbored thousands of places where an invading army could land.[47]

The German conquest of Belgium, Theodore Roosevelt argued, proved conclusively that a German victory over England would inevitably cause the Reich to invade the United States, probably in alliance with Japan. Germany would commence hostilities, first challenging American interests in the Caribbean. Unfortunately, he warned *Chicago Tribune* publisher Joseph Medill Patterson, America would have "far less chance of success *than if we joined with the powers which are now fighting her.*" In fact, he told Princeton students that he had personally seen the plans of two great warring empires to seize America's great coastal cities. In an article appearing in the *New York Times,* he warned that Germany would hold these cities for an enormous ransom. Again, though, he argued that the total defeat of Germany would be "a great calamity," leading to war between the entire world and the newly victorious Russia.[48]

Hearst's *New York American* echoed somewhat similar sentiments: "Many shrewd observers of international affairs apprehend that whatever the outcome of the European war we shall have to fight the victor." The *New York Times* noted the German book *Operations upon the Sea* (1901), in which Captain Franz von Edelsheim of the general staff proposed a German strike on America's Atlantic Coast, landing at an unexpected point and aiming guns at several of the wealthiest coastal cities. The complete conquest of the United States was unnecessary; Berlin's control of major commercial arteries would create such an unbearable state of affairs that the United States would readily sue for peace. Early in November, according to Colonel House's diary, Wilson instructed intelligence services to investigate whether German agents, preparing for invasion, were building gun foundations disguised as tennis courts.[49]

Americans genuinely feared threats to coastal defense and to the "hands off" provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, but their preoccupation with conti-

nental threats, rather than overseas involvement, reflected domestic politics as well. By ignoring any possibility of sending an expeditionary force to Europe, the Wilson administration could assuage the anxiety of a neutralist people, who opposed massive rearmament. It might also rally support from German Americans, a group far from anxious to see the United States fighting against their former homeland.

German naval leaders had long believed that Britain and the United States were tacit allies, sharing the desire to freeze Berlin out of world markets. Assuming the weakness of the American navy, they made no serious studies of American strength. In 1903 Berlin developed a contingency scheme to land forces in Canada and conduct attacks against its southern neighbor. However, Operations Plan III, as it was called, was soon deemed quixotic and was dropped three years later.[50]

Admittedly, America's armed forces were unprepared for major conflict, their numbers being only slightly larger than those of Mexico or Belgium. The regular army totaled well under one hundred thousand men, divided into thirty regiments of infantry, fifteen of cavalry, and six of field artillery. It also possessed 170 companies of coast artillery. Some units were nowhere near wartime strength. Furthermore, half of these troops were stationed overseas, spread from Tientsin (now Tianjin) to the Canal Zone. According to War Secretary Garrison, those remaining in the United States hardly doubled the police force of New York City. The army possessed only 11 airplanes and even in emergency could produce just 100 more within a year. In comparison, France possessed 1,400 planes; Germany, 1,400; Russia, 1,000; Britain, 900; Austria-Hungary, 600; Belgium, 60; Italy, 300; and Japan, 20. Certainly no major power feared one of the world's smallest land forces.

In addition, a National Guard of 120,000 existed, but this body was poorly trained and badly led. State governors controlled these troops, possessing the sole power to muster out forces. Of this militia just 67,000 had fired a gun during range practice; 38,000 never drilled as much as twenty-four hours in a given year. Summer camps, even if conscientiously administered, offered little real instruction. In 1912 the attorney general ruled that the militia could not be required to serve outside the United States. During the Spanish-American War, some state units refused to obey presidential directives.

There were some pluses in the overall picture. Almost half the officer corps of 3,450 men were West Point graduates. Many had seen field service in the Philippines and on the Mexican border. The 77,300 well-trained en-

listed men possessed such superior weapons as the Springfield rifle and the three-inch gun. The army's twelve-inch guns and huge mortars protected the nation's principal seaports. The chief of army ordnance judged American field guns as good as those of any nation.

Turning to the navy, one finds it barely adequate for a world power facing two major oceans. Assistant Secretary Franklin Roosevelt claimed that target practice was infrequent, long tours in the tropics undermined morale, and the sea arm lacked a proper staff. Since 1906, most of America's thirty-one battleships had become obsolete, with few being replaced. The Atlantic fleet, stationed off the Mexican coast, had become an increasingly inferior force.[51]

Hearings of the House Committee on Naval Affairs, held in late fall 1914, created genuine debate. Rear Admiral Victor Blue, chief of the Bureau of Navigation and a hero of the Spanish-American War, pictured the navy as undermanned, short of experienced officers, and riddled with timeservers, a sentiment echoed by the *Army and Navy Journal*. Assistant Secretary Roosevelt placed his nation's force third among the great powers; over eighteen thousand additional sailors were needed to man the fleet on a wartime basis. Commander Yates Sterling, in charge of the Atlantic flotilla of submarines, claimed that only one such craft could remain underwater for more than fifteen minutes. Retired rear admiral French E. Chadwick warned that a victorious British Empire would turn upon the United States as easily as it had confronted Germany.[52]

Particularly vocal was Rear Admiral Bradley Fiske, the navy's chief planner and aide for operations to Secretary Daniels. Fiske had seen combat in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine insurrection and was a well-known inventor of electric devices. As early as 1910 he had sought a navy outmatched by none. At the end of October 1914, Fiske privately noted that he could not "get any one to bet 2 to 1 that we will not be in war in two years." Needed were war plans for "Black and Orange—Germany and Japan." In his testimony of December 17, he stressed that the navy lacked a general plan of development. Enemy aircraft launched from ships might possibly be able to bomb the United States from a distance of five hundred miles. Both the Panama Canal and New York City in particular remained exposed to such strikes.[53]

Other admirals countered such claims, thereby supporting the Wilson administration. Rear Admiral Charles J. Badger of the navy's general staff responded that ship for ship, American forces equaled any in the world,

though he pleaded for a naval reserve, eight more battleships, and one hundred submarines. Admiral Dewey concurred with Badger's assessment. Frank F. Fletcher, commander in chief of the Atlantic Fleet, boasted that the United States could control the seas against any foe but Britain. He considered existing fortifications and mines sufficient to protect New York City. In addition, he maintained, American ships remained in a high state of efficiency. Although the fleet could not defend the Philippines unaided, it could wrest the seas from Japan.[54]

Josephus Daniels discerned no need to increase the number of naval personnel, much less engage in any crash program. "We should just go on as if there were no war," he said on December 10. Although the Navy General Board sought four dreadnoughts, Daniels's first annual report only recommended two. He conceded that the United States lacked any battleship capable of resisting torpedo attack, though he noted that five battleships under construction would enjoy such protection. Conversely, Germany possessed twenty fortified dreadnoughts.[55]

Augustus P. Gardner served as the preparedness movement's chief advocate in Congress. No ordinary legislator, Gardner was one of the most visible, vocal, and powerful members of the House. On October 15, having just returned from Europe, he presented a resolution advocating creation of a national security commission. Assistant Secretary Franklin Roosevelt claimed to have initiated the idea, even suggesting Gardner's wording. This body would be composed of three senators, three representatives, and three presidential appointees. Its task: to scrutinize America's military weakness. Strongly favoring the Allies, the Massachusetts congressman deemed Berlin's cause "unholy," "a menace to the principles of democracy." Although he predicted that "the God of battles will visit defeat upon the Germans," he asked his countrymen to remember that "victorious nations have proved headstrong and high-handed."[56]

Almost immediately, Gardner sought a radical increase in dreadnoughts, torpedoes, and artillery. The navy, he charged, was shrinking to fourth or fifth place. He judged the militia woefully ill trained, even being inept in riflery. Placing some of the blame upon himself, he noted: "For a dozen years I have sat here like a coward, and I have listened to men say that in time of war we could depend for our defense upon our National Guard and our Naval Militia, and I have known all the time that it is not so." Unless the United States was fully armed, Germany and Japan would threaten the Monroe Doctrine.[57]

Gardner took full advantage of the controversy over naval strength. In testifying before the House naval affairs committee, he warned that eighty vessels, including nine battleships, were not battle-ready. Furthermore, the navy possessed a mere dozen "aeroplanes." He told a New York audience: "The guns in your defense have one and a half miles less range than the dreadnoughts laid down by Great Britain." Assistant Secretary Roosevelt surreptitiously supplied Gardner data with which to attack Daniels.[58]

The American press split over Gardner's accusations. To the pacifist-leaning Oswald Garrison Villard, the legislator had ignored reports of the army and navy secretaries to rely upon congressional testimony from top brass. The *New Republic,* more Realpolitik in its perspective, supported the congressman's plea for an independent investigation, charging that the United States was unable to protect its own coasts from invasion, much less defend the Philippines, Panama, and Hawaii.[59]

Wilson patronizingly called the controversy "good mental exercise," noting that he had heard such talk since he was ten years old. After meeting with Gardner, he told the press that the representative's proposal "might create very unfavorable international impressions." Gardner responded by finding that "the scholarly surroundings which environed the President" led him to "take too kindly a view of the good intentions of foreign nations."[60] In reality the president possessed the southern progressive's usual suspicion of rearmament, discerning jingoes, high finance, and heavy industry behind any such crusade. To Wilson America's mission centered on neutrality and mediation, not preparation for war.

On December 8, the House Rules committee refused to report out Gardner's bill. Southern Democrats, who controlled the Congress, stressed frugality and entertained antimilitary sentiments. During subsequent debates over Gardner's resolution, Congressman Martin Dies Sr. (D-Tex.) asked his Bay State colleague: "Can you point to a nation of militarism that maintained the liberty of the people?" Senator Lodge, who introduced a similar resolution in the Senate, countered that "the ocean barrier which defended us in 1776 and 1812 no longer exists. Steam and electricity have destroyed it." Less than three months earlier, the Massachusetts senator had endorsed an Allied victory, warning that if Germany conquered Europe, it would seek to dominate the world.[61]

Gardner was certainly not the sole preparedness advocate. Major General Leonard Wood, physician and Rough Rider, was even more prominent. Wood had served as military governor of Cuba and of the rebellious Moro

province of the Philippines. In 1914, when his term as chief of staff expired, he was appointed commander of the Department of the East, the nation's most important military post. Its headquarters, located at Governors Island in New York harbor, was an ideal spot from which to launch his crusade. In particular he stressed the need for camps to provide military training, first for college students, then for young professionals and businessmen. He conceded that he did not expect to accomplish much in the way of instruction but sought to inculcate "a sound military policy," that is, a belief that any vigorous foreign policy needed force behind it.

Wood wrote Gardner, saying: "Our people do not appreciate the suddenness with which modern war develops. . . . Our condition is one which invites attack." During the first year of the European war, the fiery general gave sixty speeches, always in uniform and always offering tacit criticism of Wilson. In mid-December he publicly attacked unnamed figures who, as he pointed out, would recommend that American troops enter the battlefield unprepared; they were "fake humanitarians . . . slayers of their people." Wilson wanted War Secretary Garrison to order a reprimand but had to be satisfied with a mild rebuke.[62]

If anything, Theodore Roosevelt was even more adamant. In a series of articles for the *New York Times,* Roosevelt attacked those pacifists who had "made and applauded our recent all-inclusive arbitration treaties, who advocate the abandonment of our policy of building battleships and the refusal to fortify the Panama Canal." Justice could only be attained, the former president insisted, by the exercise of power. Therefore, the United States must be prepared for any eventuality, including participating in an international police system.[63]

Similarly, Roosevelt warned against ratifying the so-called Bryan treaties, which provided for permanent investigating commissions and a year's "cooling-off." Such procedures, warned TR, would cause the United States to wait in idle helplessness while a potential enemy "could make a Gibraltar" of one of the West Indian islands or of Magdalena Bay off the coast of Mexico. Better, he continued, to rely on the time-tested Monroe Doctrine, which was keeping America out of the current conflict, than choose the chimera of arbitration. The former president had his followers. In case of war, asserted the military inventor Henry Wise Wood, Roosevelt alone could "remasculinize what had become an almost demasculinized America."[64]

The preparedness issue united many Old Guard Republicans with the more belligerent elements of Roosevelt's foundering Progressive Party. After

all, most preparedness leaders came from Republican and Progressive ranks. Wilson suspected that the defense movement was rooted in partisanship, particularly because its adherents feared that the Republican domestic policy was too reactionary to draw popular support. At the same time, the crusade created new fissures among Bull Moose reformers, as it soon would among Wilsonian Democrats. To be sure, far more than political expediency motivated Roosevelt, for he had exhibited such militancy since the 1890s.

Even before the European war started, certain organizations had pushed the preparedness cause. Foremost was the Navy League, organized in 1902 and located in Washington, D.C. Steel and banking companies were heavily represented among its directors; the son-in-law of J.P. Morgan served as general counsel. Big business and high finance, though, played little role in determining policy. Civil War general Horace Porter was president, but Colonel Robert M. Thompson, financier and chairman of the executive committee, ran the organization. A son of Josephus Daniels wrote of Thompson: "The Navy League seemed almost as much his private property as his houseboats, his big houses, his securities or his stables." Despite attacks made by contemporary critics, League historian Armin Rappaport argues that it was motivated solely by patriotism and did not seek war.[65]

Only when the European conflict began did the League gain members and influence, boasting over fifty thousand members late in 1915. Endorsing Gardner's proposals, the League stressed the threat to "race purity" that stemmed from Oriental immigration to the Western Hemisphere. Its journal, *Seven Seas,* advocated wars of conquest, but in May 1916 an embarrassed leadership terminated publication. Its successor, *Sea Power,* was far less strident. At first advocating strict neutrality, the organization had long discerned in Germany a menace to American security and blamed the Central Powers alone for triggering the European conflict. Leonard Wood founded a similar Army League in 1913, but it exercised limited influence. As the army was far more labor-intensive than the navy, its league lacked the backing of steel companies and shipyards that the Navy League received.

A new organization soon overshadowed both groups. On December 1, 1914, the National Security League (NSL) was formed when Solomon Stanwood Menken, a prominent Manhattan lawyer, called fifty public leaders to meet at New York's Hotel Belmont. Their purpose: to make American armed forces combat-ready. Menken had personally observed the House of Commons on the day Britain entered the war; he feared that the United States would be similarly unprepared in an hour of peril. The NSL chose

Menken president but in mid-1916 gave the position to Robert Bacon, former ambassador to France and briefly secretary of state.

The base of the association lay among New York's business and social elite. Joseph H. Choate, former ambassador to Britain, was made honorary president, and former judge Alton B. Parker, Democratic presidential candidate in 1904, honorary vice-president. Other prominent leaders included Elihu Root, Henry L. Stimson, and Herbert Barry, a New York corporation lawyer. Among the various backers were corporation lawyer James M. Beck; Charles E. Lydecker, New York attorney and NSL president in 1918; and George Haven Putnam, who had enlisted in the Union army at age eighteen. At its initial meeting, Putnam warned of a German invasion through the Hudson Valley while foreign ships fired at New York City with impunity.[66] Although primarily composed of Republicans, the League was ostensibly nonpartisan and Menken was a Democrat. It never took an open stand on the war's outcome, even if such individual leaders as Bacon and Root made no secret of their desire for an Allied victory. By October 1915, it boasted fifty thousand members and seventy chapters in forty-two states. Within a year it had distributed a million pieces of literature and conducted over one hundred meetings.

In 1914 some sixty-three peace organizations existed, none matching the influence of the National Security League. The League's formation led to the creation of a counterassociation, the American League to Limit Armaments. Spearheaded by New York City's Episcopal bishop David H. Greer, it chose Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, as permanent chairman. In the call for organization, dated December 10, it accused preparedness advocates of playing into the hands of the "Armour Plate Trust." At the very first meeting, members endorsed "strict neutrality." A host of progressive reformers backed the League, including publisher Oswald Garrison Villard, philanthropist George Foster Peabody, Socialist legislator Morris Hillquit, Congregationalist minister Charles E. Jefferson of New York City, and two leaders whose names were synonymous with urban settlement work, Jane Addams and Lillian D. Wald.[67]

Preparedness proponents drew little support from Wilson's annual message, delivered on December 8. The president devoted a third of his speech to the defense issue. In every time of national peril, he admonished, the United States must depend "not upon a standing army, nor yet upon a reserve army, but upon a citizenry trained and accustomed to arms." More than this, he added, would mean "that we had been thrown off our balance

by a war with which we have nothing to do, whose causes can not touch us, whose existence affords us opportunities of friendship and disinterested service which should make us ashamed of any thought of hostility or fearful preparation for trouble." Wilson endorsed a voluntary reserve system and recommended strengthening of the National Guard. With an obvious reference to Congressman Gardner, he pledged: "We shall not alter our attitude . . . because some amongst us are nervous and excited." Speaking of the navy, he found long-term projections difficult to make, adding: "The question has not changed its aspect because the times are not normal."[68]

Though Republicans responded with tepid applause, the Democratic majority was enthusiastic. In his rejection of a strong military presence on the world scene, the president had skillfully captured the popular mood as well. Without referring directly to Wilson's address, Taft deplored the current "hysteria" over preparedness, finding that any victor would be far too exhausted to fight the United States.[69]

Secretary of War Lindley Garrison was less convinced. In his annual report he requested more troops for coastal defense along with additional artillery and ammunition and an adequate flying corps. He also sought one thousand more officers and twenty-five thousand additional enlisted men, the entire force to constitute the base of an army reserve.[70] He submitted his proposals in a series of seven bills, but the retrenchment-minded Congress ignored his agenda.

Obviously America's strength lay far more in its productive capacity than in its armed forces. By 1913 its economy had become the world's largest, producing one-third of the global industrial output. Nevertheless, the first few weeks of war created great uncertainty. Stock markets closed in every great city in Europe and the Americas. Wall Street experienced hysteria, anticipating the collapse of transatlantic trade. On July 31, as Austria, France, and Germany mobilized, the New York Stock Exchange endured its biggest losses since the Panic of 1907. Experiencing a heavy sale of English securities, a fall in the dollar's exchange value, and a run on gold, it shut its doors for over four months. Treasury Secretary William Gibbs McAdoo worked with private bankers to stave off financial panic. He permitted the use of $370 million worth of "emergency currency" to tide over matters until the newly created Federal Reserve System could react positively. Nonetheless, the Stock Exchange did not resume normal interchange until the following spring. The war, commented the *Banker's Magazine,* had fostered "a total financial disaster."[71]

Business in general was in no better shape. At the end of 1913 a severe recession had developed, causing particularly harsh unemployment in the industrial areas of the Northeast and the Midwest. If conditions were slack in July 1914, before the war began, they were prostrate in October. Over 16 percent of the labor force in New York City lacked jobs. During that winter, joblessness remained high throughout the nation, abetting Democratic losses in the midterm elections. By January 1915 mills of the massive United States Steel Corporation operated at half capacity. Concurrently railroad construction reached its lowest point in fifty years. Prices suffered their greatest decline since the Panic of 1907. The cost of wheat, essential in baking bread, reached record levels.

The disappearance of America's maritime trade compounded the downslide. During the first half of every year, the United States faced an unfavorable commercial balance, but massive exports of such crops as wheat, corn, and tobacco usually corrected this slide. With the advent of war, Germany and neighboring neutral countries were suddenly severed from American trade. Materials bound for Europe—grains, copper, meat, oil, steel manufactures—all lay idle in warehouses and freight cars. The dry goods trade suffered because it was suddenly shut off from German dyes. The copper industry was damaged, for the German Reich had formerly received 88 percent of this resource from the United States. The president of the New York Chamber of Commerce remarked: "Europe has placed an embargo on the commerce of the world."[72]

Cotton growers experienced the worst of the downturn. The base of southern prosperity, cotton production involved about 4 million people. Now some $500 million was at risk. Seventy-seven percent of Germany's cotton had come from the United States. The disruption of European markets lowered the price of cotton considerably, so much that the price of 12.5 cents a pound in July plummeted to less than 7.0 cents by mid-October. Because cotton farmers always borrowed heavily on their future earnings, in November they fell into heavy debt. Writes historian Ray Stannard Baker: "Ruin threatened the farmer, the railroads that transported his crops, the merchants that supplied him, and the banks that loaned him money."[73]

Wilson defeated any effort that would have involved price supports. He instituted "cotton loan funds," involving private banks and the Federal Reserve Board, but they failed to raise prices and therefore did not restore the desired prosperity. The fact that the South provided the political base of the president's political support made his stance even more embarrassing.

In January 1915, Governor Oscar B. Colquitt of Texas called the Wilson administration "the greatest failure in the history of the Presidency." Because, he contended, Britain's spinners robbed the American cotton farmers of half their crop's value, southern business was prostrated, credit impaired, and "thousands of its people are starving." Were he president he would send "ironclads" to protect American shipping against any blockade. Similarly, by June 1915, Senator John Sharp Williams (D-Miss.), a strong Wilson man, warned the president of a southern backlash if he did not condemn Britain.[74]

Amid such anxieties, the administration debated the extension of loans to belligerent governments. Early in August 1914, France sought a $100 million loan from J.P. Morgan & Company, the world's largest banking firm. The company stressed that the loan would benefit the American economy as a whole because the money could be used to purchase American goods.

On August 15, Bryan forbade the transaction, publicly declaring that any such deal betrayed "the true spirit of neutrality." "Money," he wrote Wilson five days earlier, "is the worst of contrabands—it commands everything else." Besides, lenders would have "pecuniary interests" in the victory of a warring party, while the more powerful investors would use their influence in the press to support one side of the conflict. In addition, foreigners might absorb so much American money that the drain could affect the nation's ability to borrow. Conversely, the American example of restraint might hasten an end to the conflict. In his personal magazine, the *Commoner,* the secretary of state asked: "The government withdraws the protection of citizenship from those who do enlist under other flags—why should it give protection to money when it enters into foreign military service?" The *Nation* concurred. Though pro-Entente, the weekly found this the "time for the United States to sit tight," not "weakening our home resources and becoming financially bound up with the fate of the warring nations."[75] At first the business press supported Bryan, warning that belligerents were poor risks.

Wilson's support for Bryan was somewhat out of character, because of the sweeping nature of Bryan's measure and the secretary's belief that in the power of example alone lay effective policy. Historian John Milton Cooper Jr. offers several reasons why Wilson might have supported the move: distractions of grief, his usual deference toward a cabinet member's prerogative, a shared fear of Wall Street power, and the hope that the ban might help create peace.[76]

Wilson's biographer Arthur S. Link finds good reasons for a *temporary* ban. The sudden advent of war put international markets in chaos. Europe's

demand for gold and dollars had already demoralized the American money market. Further lending might well have drained financial resources, intensifying the domestic recession. The nation had to stop the flow of gold. Just as important, Bryan's initial move symbolized the administration's quest for genuine impartiality.[77] A *long-term* ban, however, Link judges economically unfeasible. It would have ruined the nation's foreign trade, in the process creating economic catastrophe. Only overseas sales could pull American farmers and manufacturers out of the recession. Perpetuating Bryan's proscription would have damaged the American economy, created political unrest, and aided a Germany that the public certainly distrusted.

Moreover, Link, along with fellow historians Daniel M. Smith and Kendrick A. Clements, sees a permanent ban as essentially unneutral. Highly prejudicial to the Allies, it worked against Britain, a sea power, to the advantage of Germany, a land one. Indeed, it might have caused the Entente to lose the war. As Britain and France were far more America's natural customers than was Germany, the trade-off would not have been a good one. In fairness to Bryan, this fact was as yet unclear, because none of the Allies yet needed American credits. No Allied government protested Bryan's pronouncement. Germany, the Wilson administration thought, would still maintain a lively trade in noncontraband goods. Bryan's prohibition also revealed muddled thinking. His arguments against loans, which he considered a form of contraband, could be used against exporting any kind of war material, contradicting another one of his tenets: America's right to export.[78]

By mid-October 1914, the other leading State Department officials favored loans to the warring powers. Either lift the ban, Lansing admonished Wilson, or Canada, Australia, Mexico, and Argentina would steal war orders from the United States. On October 23, in the wake of a French request for a $10 million loan, Wilson told him that he would not oppose an extension of commercial "credits," news at once relayed to the powerful National City Bank and Morgan firms; the former then extended a $10 million credit to France.[79]

In March 1915, Morgan and two other firms sought government approval for a $50 million "commercial credit" to France. In reality the transaction was a loan, but at the end of the month Bryan ruled that the State Department did not object.[80] Many businessmen supported such credits on one major assumption, the continued belief that otherwise American commerce would be paralyzed, a situation disastrous to the nation's entire economy. The administration had imposed the original proscription when it thought that the war would be brief. Now, as prolonged fighting obviously lay ahead, the belligerents desperately needed credit. If European nations could not pay for American goods, they would stop buying them. Though German sympathizers later criticized the reversal, at the time Berlin favored the change because it, too, pushed subscriptions for its cause. The United States was ceasing to be a borrower of capital; it was on its way to becoming a lender—and on a huge scale.

As early as October 1914, the American economy slowly started to rebound. Although cotton farmers remained destitute and large numbers of unemployed still pounded the pavements, Allied governments began placing massive orders for raw materials and manufactured goods. The steel industry in particular sprang into unprecedented activity. European demand for foodstuffs was virtually unlimited. Even horses and mules were sought. By the end of 1914, elements of the U.S. population became dependent on trade in war supplies, a phenomenon welcomed by a business leadership who even feared that an early peace might lead to relinquishing wartime gains.

In the long run, America had begun what one financial writer called "the most remarkable period of financial and industrial expansion that had been witnessed in history."[81] Full employment returned. In 1914 American exports to Europe exceeded imports by $500 million; in 1917 the total was $3.5 billion, a development unparalleled in the world's commercial history. Furthermore, the United States gained Asian and Latin American markets previously dominated by Europe. Despite the decline in trade with the Central Powers, within two years the economy was booming. Early in 1915 foreign purchases of cotton led to a healthy rise in prices.

To sustain the nation's recovery, the Wilson administration sought to maximize its trade with the belligerents, hoping to transport raw materials, foodstuffs, and manufactured goods to whatever nation was willing to pay. Britain sought the shipment of American goods to the Entente alone, seeking to prevent the Central Powers, and Germany in particular, from receiving U.S. imports. As British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey wrote in his memoirs: "The Allies soon became dependent for an adequate supply on the United States. If we quarreled with the United States we could not get that supply. . . . The object of diplomacy, therefore, was to secure the maximum of blockade that could be enforced without a rupture with the United States."[82]

The United States stressed that the rules for commerce in time of war lay in the Declaration of London, a document drafted in 1909 by the world's

major maritime powers, among them Britain, Germany, and the United States. Summarizing the world's most advanced thought on wartime trade, the declaration provided definitions for contraband, that is, those goods shipped by a neutral power, bound ultimately to a belligerent, and legally subject to enemy confiscation. Defined were *absolute contraband,* articles used exclusively in war and ranging from uniforms to warships; *conditional contraband,* articles capable of being used in war as well as peace (e.g., grain, fodder, clothing, fuel); and *noncontraband,* articles deemed as possessing no military use whatsoever (e.g., rubber, paper, soap). Conditional contraband could be seized only if bound directly for a belligerent port. The declaration allowed great freedom for neutral trade, specifically exempting from seizure the copper ore and cotton crucial to American commerce. It was ratified by the American Senate and the British House of Commons. Ironically, Britain's House of Lords rejected it on the grounds that its contraband restrictions were too severe. Although the declaration was not binding on the English government, one could still argue that its Admiralty had tacitly endorsed the declaration, even to the extent of incorporating its provisions unchanged in its manuals.

Within a week after the fighting began, Bryan asked the leading belligerents to abide by the Declaration of London. Both Austria and Germany declared that they would honor the measure, provided their enemies did likewise. Britain hedged on the whole matter, saying on August 26 that it would adopt the declaration "subject to certain modifications and additions . . . they judge indispensable to the efficient conduct of their naval operations."[83]

Soon the British navy restricted Germany's access to copper, oil, food, and cotton. Exactly a month after the British note, Counselor Lansing triggered the first Anglo-American dispute of the war by calling the modification totally unacceptable. Yet, when the British rejected Lansing's grievance, on October 22 the United States found itself retreating to preexisting international law, a far more controversial and complicated entity.[84]

The British thought they had no choice. Grey realized that the declaration's contraband list was obsolete, as it excluded such strategic items as copper, chemicals, and cotton, the last item an ingredient of gunpowder. Furthermore, the London accord failed to recognize the doctrine of continuous voyage, which specified that it was the ultimate, and not immediate, destination that determined whether various exports were legally subject to confiscation. Goods at first slated for such neutral countries as Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway might end up in German hands. Not surprisingly, most trade with Germany went through the ports of neutral nations, in particular the Netherlands.

Over two years later, in September 1916, Ambassador Page defended the Entente practice, writing to Wilson: "That Declaration would probably have given a victory to Germany if the Allies had adopted it." Historians tend to concur. Link observes: "No government that promised to concede virtual freedom of the seas could have survived for an hour at Whitehall." Ernest R. May argues: "Were Britain to accept the Declaration, she would virtually forswear the use of economic weapons."[85]

In the meantime, Britain soon made clear its intentions. On August 20, 1914, it launched what in time historian Patrick Devlin called "the starvation policy." By executive decree, called an Order in Council, it began its policy of economic strangulation, capturing neutral ships if it deemed Germany a cargo's final destination. In practice, during the first three months of war, Britain seldom interfered with neutral trade. Late in October Britain ruled such items as copper, rubber, and gasoline as absolute contraband, finding a ship guilty until proven innocent.[86]

On October 29 Britain imposed a blockade, although it never used the term. By this order, it sought to control the coasts of neutral Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Since the entire North Sea might be mined, neutral ships could enter only "at their own peril." The measure was highly illegal, for, according to international law, a blockade must not extend beyond the enemy's ports and coasts. It forced neutral vessels into the English Channel, where they needed Admiralty pilots to guide them through newly laid minefields. Obviously the announcement made it far easier for Britain to search suspected cargoes. The Admiralty deemed it necessary, however, "to adopt exceptional measures appropriate to the novel conditions under which this war is being waged."[87] The British justified the measure on the ground that Germany had laid mines outside the legal three-mile limit (directly violating the second Hague convention of 1907), used submarines in the area to torpedo cruisers and battleships, and threatened the home islands with invasion.

Given the stalemate in western Europe, Britain increasingly saw its one hope in an effort to starve the enemy. Soon its cruisers stopped neutral vessels on the high seas. These ships would cruise near enough to intercept any approaching vessel, shepherd it to a "control station," and examine it at leisure. They even seized food cargo. Vessels could be delayed for months, held up without court hearings and sometimes without notice to the own-

ers. If British authorities judged the goods contraband, they were subject to confiscation. If they were not so judged, they could still be snatched, though in this case Britain would pay for the cargo. At times Britain would permit skilled pilots to guide "harmless" cargoes through its maze of mines.

Because such practices flagrantly violated international law, pro-Germans were not alone in believing that Britain not simply "ruled the waves but waived the rules." Even Allied sympathizer Theodore Roosevelt promised that if he were president he would never allow "the British or any other people" the right to engage in such conduct.[88]

Although the neutral nations of northern Europe protested vigorously, the United States acquiesced in the British practice. Late in September America filed an informal plea, claiming that it was "greatly disturbed," but the move was strictly for the record. Historians Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan find the American response "astonishing," although Ernest R. May notes that relatively few American vessels sailed the North Sea and American passengers were rare. Besides, the British government sweetened the new orders by its offer to safeguard those ships that complied with its new contraband rules.[89]

After another month and a half of frequent British seizures, the State Department, acting on December 26, issued its first public protest. Accusations included inconsistent regulations, designating food as conditional contraband, seizure of cargoes without proof they were bound for an enemy, and detention of ships without prize court proceedings. "Many great industries," it asserted, suffered because they were denied long-established European markets. Producers and exporters were particularly damaged, as were steamship and insurance companies. There existed the feeling, "doubtless not entirely unjustified, that the present British policy toward American trade is responsible for the depression in certain industries which depend upon European markets." If the situation was not alleviated the friendship of the American people could be lost. The note gave the British a loophole by recognizing "the momentous nature of the present struggle" and the belligerents' "imperative necessity to protect their national safety."[90]

Editorial opinion tended to back the department. The *New Republic,* for example, expressed gratification that the United States was no longer submitting "meekly to the British exactions" but had "come to the assistance of the American merchant."[91]

The protest posed no real challenge to the British. Written in a polite, indeed friendly tone, the message repeated past entreaties and did not threaten retaliation. Emphasizing commercial details more than broad policy, it involved no frontal assault upon Britain's behavior. British foreign secretary Edward Grey and Prime Minister Herbert Asquith correctly found little threat in the note and acted accordingly. By the beginning of 1915, the British system was almost fully intact. On January 9, 1915, Wilson told Chandler P. Anderson, Page's legal adviser just returned from London, that he saw no major principles at stake; all controversies could be resolved once the war ended.[92]

Grey formally replied to Wilson on January 7, denying that the United States had any legitimate grievance because its trade losses were grounded in "the existence of a state of war." Attempting to justify the British seizures, he stressed that "under modern conditions" the right of search could only be exercised in such manner. He questioned whether American trade had really been hampered, given the radical rise in U.S. exports to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Italy over the past year.[93]

By and large, the American press did not accept Grey's arguments, although it expressed relief that the issue was still under negotiation.[94] This type of exchange over neutral rights, a U.S. protest and a British rejoinder, was repeated continually, sometimes more harshly than other times, almost until the time the United States entered the war.

The United States was in a quandary. If it continued to export contraband, the Allies benefited because they dominated the seas and bought most of the U.S. war supplies. If it withheld such trade, the Central Powers would be strengthened and America would weaken its own economy. Moreover, if it conceded rights of blockade to the Allies, the United States would condone what would be called a "starvation" policy. Any American action was bound to help one side at the other's expense, making most pertinent Link's claim that genuine neutrality consisted of doing things that would give the least advantage to one side or the other.[95]

One must note that neutrality is a legal status, one that brings into operation an entire series of rules regulating relations with belligerents. The neutral state possessed both duties and rights that it must exercise in a nondiscriminatory manner. At the same time, a neutral had no obligation to ensure equality of outcome, something well-nigh impossible anyhow. A belligerent, in other words, lacked grounds for complaint if the commerce of a neutral state worked to its disadvantage.

Wilson was not about to challenge the British, and his defenders offer several reasons why. First, they judge international law as both ambigu-

ous and outmoded, the advent of the submarine alone rendering much of it obsolete. For example, international law was vague concerning the laying of mines, the Hague Conventions restricting their use but still accepting them as legitimate weapons. Wilson biographer Ray Stannard Baker calls the traditional legal order "merely a feeble and contradictory assemblage of precedents backed by no real sanctions," as useful as oxcarts in an age of airplanes.[96] Its codification, drafted at The Hague in 1907, could not bind belligerents in a war begun in 1914. Nor could precedents established at the time of the American Civil War or the Spanish-American War.

Second, even if the United States adhered to a more rigid neutrality, most of its trade, as had been the case before war had begun, would have been with the Allies, who, at any rate, needed American goods far more than did the Central Powers. Third, convenience played a role. Wilson wrote Bryan in March 1915: "We are face to face with *something they are going to do,* and are going to do it no matter what representations we make. We cannot convince them or change them." As historian Ross Gregory writes: "Wilson acquiesced in the British system because it seemed the best way of avoiding difficulty, was profitable, and seemed perfectly safe."[97] In short, why seek trouble when there was no compensating reward?

Given the argument that American trade with the Allies entwined the U.S. economy with Britain and France, one might ask: Why not embargo all foreign trade, thereby minimizing friction with any foreign power? Several problems arise here. Domestic statute code gave Americans the freedom to trade with whomever they chose. The president lacked authority to stop any transatlantic commerce. Wilson would have faced great difficulty securing Congress's authorization to halt exports, even the shipment of war goods, unless he could show convincingly that American security and world peace were at stake. In addition, to retain its legal status as a neutral power under international law, a nation faced the obligation of permitting its citizens to trade with anyone they chose.

Historian Link argues that a total embargo would have been a singularly unneutral act, threatening the entire rationale for asserting one's neutral status, which was to conduct America's legitimate war trade. Even Britain's orders of October 29, which tightened the categories of contraband, were based upon international law and practice that enjoyed legality through custom and usage. The United States had applied the doctrine of continuous voyage to Britain during its own Civil War. Could a truly neutral nation

deny Britain the right to seal off materials essential to Germany's war machine? Such a policy would be "tantamount to undeclared war."[98]

Conversely, some observers argued that a general embargo could have threatened the entire American economy, maintaining that by mid-1915 the economic well-being of the United States depended upon the Allied trade. House wrote Wilson in July: "If it came to the last analysis and we placed an embargo upon munitions of war and foodstuffs to please the cotton men, our whole industrial and agricultural population would cry out against it." The loss of the $5 billion gained from Allied trade, warned journalist John Callan O'Laughlin, would precipitate "domestic cataclysm." Historian Ross Gregory argues that the nation possessed the means to survive without its European trade but at the cost of intense distress. Production, distribution, and perhaps the nation's political system itself would have required alteration. "The merchant needs the customer no less—at least little less—than the customer needs him." In a curious paradox, Gregory contends, the maturation of the American economy over the preceding quarter century had made the United States more dependent upon others, for the nation was now part of an international trade structure that left it most vulnerable to changes overseas. The United States still needed to sell goods to Europe while requiring raw materials from both Entente nations and their empires.[99]

Suppose, ask Wilson defenders, such a move had caused the Allies to lose the war. To challenge British sea power could well ruin America's friendship with the great European democracies (ignoring despotic Russia) and ensure the victory of the far more autocratic Central Powers, implacably hostile by 1917. "In short," Link affirms, "destroying the British blockade would have brought not a single compensating gain to the United States while it would, at the same time, have imperiled its own national security."[100]

Besides, the nation would sacrifice any chance of mediating the conflict. A great power, Link argues, should not simply defend traditional neutral rights; it should use its economic power to achieve particular ends, in this case ending the war. Otherwise the United States might risk everything without securing a single gain for its own people—and for humanity.[101]

Several historians have challenged such arguments. Ray Stannard Baker suggests that if Washington had "realized the immense strength of its position," it could have "played the game as cleverly as the British government." By threatening London with embargoes to enforce what it considered its legal rights, it might have kept noncontraband trade open to Germany and

neutral nations. To Robert W. Tucker, Wilson's acquiescence in the Allied blockade and later his opposition to Berlin's sole means of retaliation led inevitably to one outcome: war with Germany. Even though Wilson was certainly sincere in his desire for neutrality, his actions were counterproductive. "Wilson was unneutral from the outset," claims Tucker, "and he remained so until events finally left him with no alternative but war."[102]

Legal historian John W. Coogan accuses the president of permitting, at times encouraging, "systematic British violation of American neutral rights on a scale unprecedented at the height of the Napoleonic Wars," abandoning in the process the viable system of international law created before 1914. According to Coogan, the president feared repetition of James Madison's folly in 1812: inadvertently making war against a "civilized" nation, Great Britain, while siding with a "tyrannical" one, Bonaparte's France. Unfortunately for the United States, Wilson placed the preservation of Anglo-American friendship above the defense of his nation's legal rights. He helped destroy a system that "offered the United States a realistic opportunity to maintain effective neutrality, to mitigate the horrors of war for other neutrals and for belligerent civilians, and perhaps to create a favorable position for mediation."[103]

Had Wilson ordered warships to escort American merchantmen, Coogan argues, Britain could not have retaliated, because its navy was already strained to the limit in fighting Germany. Bailey and Ryan concur, adding that London simply could not afford to fight its leading munitions supplier. Wilson did not play "this trump card" partly because his sympathies lay with the Allies, as did those of most advisers, and partly because such a course would have been unpopular with a predominantly pro-Allied public.[104] Moreover, as the American merchant fleet was extremely small, any such escort could little affect the blockade's effectiveness.

Ship incidents were not long in coming. On January 28, 1915, a German passenger ship turned auxiliary cruiser, *Prinz Eitel Friedrich,* sank an American steel clipper, the *William P. Frye,* off the Brazilian coast. Owned by Arthur P. Sewell Company of Bath, Maine, and named after a senator from that state, the *Frye* was transporting wheat, an item considered conditional contraband, from Seattle to Britain's Queenstown. The *Frye*'s crew was taken aboard the *Prinz Eitel* and then, six weeks later, safely transported to Newport News, Virginia, where the German ship sought supplies and repairs. The released passengers and crew complimented Korvettenkapitän Max Thierichens on being treated so well, but the State Department strongly protested the sinking. Because of the incident, Berlin reaffirmed the valid-

ity of a treaty that the United States had made with Prussia in 1778, which defined how limited were the immunities possessed by neutral ships in wartime. In April press reports noted that Germany agreed to pay $180,000 in damages, though the matter was never really resolved.[105]

One commercial controversy centered on an American arms embargo affecting all belligerents. In his "Contraband Circular" of October 15, 1914, Bryan issued a public statement declaring that the United States might sell any product to a warring power. The executive could not prevent such commerce.[106] The British sought to keep supplies to the Allies open while limiting American access to the Central Powers. After the battle of the Marne, they found themselves markedly deficient in artillery and high explosive shells and becoming dependent upon American supplies. When, in May 1915, David Lloyd George became Britain's minister of munitions, he sought massive shipments of American weaponry. Even U.S. factories devoted to electrical work or locomotive production accepted contracts for explosives that ran into millions of dollars.

Until the Marne battle, the Germans had been indifferent to the embargo issue; now they suddenly became quite embittered. In December 1914 Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz accused the United States of prolonging the war, telling former senator Albert J. Beveridge (R-Ind.): "If America would not send any more powder, guns and food to our enemies, this war would very soon be over."[107]

Beginning on December 7, 1914, several midwestern congressmen introduced resolutions that would have given the president discretion to prohibit munitions exports. One representative, Richard Bartholdt (R-Mo.), was born in Germany. Others spoke for strong German American constituencies; included were Horace Mann Towner (R-Iowa), Charles O. Lobeck (D-Neb.), and Henry Vollmer (D-Iowa), the latter also president of the German American Central Verein of Davenport and Scott counties. By mid-February 1915, pro-embargo forces organized the American Independence Union. In time similar groups were formed—the American Neutrality League, the American Humanity League, the American Embargo Conference, the Friends of Peace, the League of American Women for Strict Neutrality. Congress was flooded with letters, telegrams, and a petition supposedly fifteen miles long and bearing a million signatures. The language was invariably harsh, the argument was repetitious, and the signers often bore German names. Of course, not every advocate was markedly pro-German; some of the pacifist inclination endorsed the strategy.

Embargo supporters advanced several arguments, at times drawing on precedent. From 1794 to 1914, the United States, maintained Vollmer, had enacted a number of arms embargoes itself. Psychologist Münsterberg recalled that in 1913 the Taft administration had embargoed weapon shipments to warring factions in Mexico. Other backers of an embargo argued that the munitions trade prolonged the conflict. Vollmer claimed that the measure could end the war within ninety days, while Bartholdt forecast a peace in which "the markets of the whole world will again be thrown open to our cotton and all other American products," something that could outweigh a hundred times temporary profits for a few manufacturers.[108]

In the late 1930, a time when postwar disillusionment was extremely high, historian Charles Callan Tansill alleged that an arms embargo might have kept America out of the war. A journalist writing at the same time, Walter Millis, insisted that Wilson missed a valuable opportunity; there was nothing whatever in international law to prohibit imposing such measures, provided they applied equally to each belligerent. Early in the conflict, an embargo would not have damaged American prosperity or the Allied war effort to the degree that it would have later. "At the time," Millis wrote, "we might have preserved a much greater share of practical neutrality at relatively small cost."[109]

Furthermore, embargo proponents asserted, the arms traffic made the United States a homicidal nation. "By permitting the export of arms and ammunition when we have the right and power to stop it," cabled Vollmer in December to a mass meeting in Boston, "we are helping part of our dear friends kill others of our dear friends." Similarly, art historian Edmund von Mach, who had served in the German army, accused Americans of committing outright murder, because they were "turning their factories over to the god of war." Representative Clyde H. Tavenner (D-Ill.), who had headed publicity for his party's national congressional committee in 1910 and 1912, attacked what he called the "war trust." His accusations were not limited to merely the exporting of armament; he accused military officers and such steel companies as Bethlehem, Midvale, and Carnegie of collaborating in a huge international combination that fleeced the "taxpayers of the world."[110] In an effort to avoid confusion and prevent increased prices, the British war and Admiralty offices designated J.P. Morgan and Company as their sole purchasing agent in America, a move that added to populist denunciations of Wall Street.

The Wilson administration quickly countered, stressing that arms trade had always been the legal right of any neutral power. In mid-October 1914 the State Department released *Neutrality and Trade in Contraband,* a document announcing that American citizens could sell any article they chose to whom they chose, unrestrained by international law, treaty provision, domestic statute, presidential authority, or congressional prerogative. The pro-administration *New York Times* cited precedent: American statesmen from Alexander Hamilton to John Hay had defended arms sales. To shift ground suddenly was in itself deemed unneutral. On December 10, Counselor Lansing wrote Wilson: "Any change in our statutes by amendment or repeal would undoubtedly benefit one or the other of the belligerents." Early in January, Secretary Bryan concurred, adding that Bartholdt's resolution deliberately aimed at assisting one side at the expense of the other. The president quickly agreed. The *New Republic* branded the embargo agitation as "nothing less than a barefaced and unscrupulous attempt to drag the United States into the European war as the ally of Germany."[111]

Moreover, as anti-embargo forces noted, the European powers never limited arms sales. Ambassador Gerard recalled that Germany had supplied Spain during its recent war with the United States, aided Britain during the Boer War, and helped Mexican general Victoriano Huerta during his conflict with America. Besides, noted Lansing, Germany sold "enormous quantities of arms and munitions" to both belligerents in the recent Russo-Japanese and Balkan wars. Admittedly, the United States had banned arms from reaching Latin American nations, but that policy was motivated only by the desire to avoid abetting the "civil strife" there.[112]

In December 1914 even German ambassador Bernstorff conceded that the United States possessed this right. Similarly, German American historian Kuno Francke warned that an embargo might drive the United States into war with England.[113]

The resolutions were quickly tabled, for the Wilson administration was not about to risk much-needed economic recovery. In November 1914 Wilson told House that any such move would "restrict our plants and, in a way, make us less prepared than we are now." Ambassador Gerard wrote: "There is no doubt, however, that a real neutrality would stop the sale, but would our people 'stand' for such a curtailment of American industry?" The *Chicago Tribune* implied that embargo advocates possessed dual loyalties; they had "gone to Congress to close down American factories and put American

citizens out of work in order to benefit one of the contesting parties." Expressing itself more crassly, the *Nashville Banner* wrote: "Let 'em shoot! It makes good business for us!"[114]

Besides, embargo opponents feared Britain might retaliate. Journalist O'Laughlin, for example, warned that Britain would withhold such needed goods as rubber and wool. More important, it could finance a Japanese war on the United States. "With the British navy and troops operating upon our Atlantic seaboard, the Japanese navy and troops operating on our Pacific slope, and Canada menacing us from the north, we could be in an exceedingly dangerous situation." Although he conceded that such a contingency was remote, O'Laughlin wanted to show that Britain was far from helpless.[115]

Moreover, Germany was not perceived as being in dire straits. Horace White, who had briefly been governor of New York, noted that the Reich possessed the great Krupp works, which employed ninety thousand employees round the clock and controlled a major Belgian arms factory at Liège. The *New Republic* claimed that an embargo might stop the war but found the price too high: German retention of Belgium and the richest part of France.[116]

Bryan articulated his objection on January 20, 1915, in a letter to Senator William J. Stone, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Missouri's former governor. Responding to Stone's accusation that the United States pursued a markedly one-sided commercial policy, the secretary maintained that any arms embargo would violate the nation's neutrality. Bryan, whose text had been dictated by Counselor Lansing, made a wider point. "The fact that the commerce of the United States is interrupted by Great Britain is consequent upon the superiority of her navy on the high seas. History shows that whenever a country has possessed such superiority our trade has been interrupted and that few articles essential to the prosecution of the war have been allowed to reach its enemy from this country."[117] Aided by the Republican leadership, he helped keep embargo resolutions buried in committee.

An overwhelming majority of the press backed the administration. The *New Republic* found pro-embargo sentiments rooted in "the anti-Americanism of American citizens," although it did add that the asymmetrical nature of U.S. trade was grounded in "a difference of interest" that was "incapable of legal solution." Predictably, the *Fatherland* accused Bryan of subservience to Britain ("Sir Wm. Jennings," it called him), while the *New York American*

saw him as lacking genuine patriotism. Americans, Hearst's paper continued, must not "bow our necks to the yoke of Great Britain."[118]

In mid-February 1915, this issue surfaced in the Senate. Gilbert M. Hitchcock sought to attach an arms embargo amendment to a major shipping bill. Duncan Fletcher (D-Fla.) effectively tabled the proposal, his motion carrying 51-36. Most Democrats and eastern Republicans supported Fletcher. Delegations from Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, and North Dakota backed Hitchcock. Such prominent Republican progressives as George Norris of Nebraska, John D. Works of California, William E. Borah of Idaho, and Albert B. Cummins of Iowa were pro-embargo. Robert M. La Follette spoke for many peace progressives in finding but one purpose to the munitions trade: "to sacrifice human life for private gain."[119]

A *Literary Digest* poll published in early February 1915 revealed a similar geographical lineup. Of 440 editors who responded to an inquiry concerning an arms embargo, 244, that is, over half, opposed the move; 167 favored the ban; and the remaining 29 were noncommittal. Just as revealing, many midwestern editors endorsed the prohibition, as did a considerable number of southerners. So, too, did numerous small-town newspapers throughout the entire nation.[120]

The administration cracked down on one form of armament exportation. Early in November, the State Department learned that Bethlehem Steel and the Fore River Company of Quincy, Massachusetts, had contracted to build submarines, deliverable in sections, to the British government. Wilson, acting against both Lansing and his Joint Neutrality Board, supported Bryan in finding the proposed transaction "a violation of the spirit of neutrality."[121] Bethlehem's president, Charles M. Schwab, formally retreated but circumvented the president by shipping prefabricated parts to Canada, where they were assembled at the Canadian Vickers shipyard in Montreal. By mid-1915 the yard had launched ten such submarines.

Most initial conflicts centered on British action. This circumstance soon changed because of a decision made in Berlin on February 4, 1915, that radically altered the nature of the war itself. Even the faintest hope that the war might remain something of a gentleman's conflict was about to vanish.