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# Neither Friend nor Foe: The European Neutrals in World War II

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mind. In their eyes, the United States should not antagonize "nationalist forces" in the Middle East by even a hint of approval of "Western" intervention in the affairs of an Arab nation, no matter how much the American government might wish that nation's leader to be overthrown.

Frustrated by what he saw as American inaction, British prime minister Anthony Eden unilaterally approached the French and Israelis to develop a military solution to the problem. Israel welcomed his initiative, for Nasser had just closed the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping, thereby blocking Israel's oil imports.

Thus the stage was set for the disaster that would bring down a British government and lead France to seek its own independent nuclear deterrent. The Europeans and the Israelis would be forced to withdraw by the end of December. The canal would be returned to Egyptian control, and the Soviet Union, not the United States, would reap the propaganda benefits of having saved the "Arab World" from "Western imperialism." Recriminations echoed throughout Whitehall and the White House.

There are no real heroes or villains in this story, only honorable men trapped by their perceptions and the decisionmaking machineries in which they worked. For Britain, Suez was a watershed for its influence and policies in the Middle East and indeed, perhaps, in the rest of the world. London continued to have global interests and presence, but it

had found itself increasingly dependent upon American support to sustain its policies. Eden's decision to act in concert with France and Israel represented a final assertion that Britain did not require American approval to defend its interests. In that, it failed; subsequent British initiatives in the region have been conducted with America's tacit approval, if not active support.

*Divided We Stand* is a stellar work with many lessons for anyone interested in the Middle East. The author tells a complex story in a clear and convincing manner. The parallels with, and divergences from, the recent situation in the Persian Gulf will intrigue many. It is lacking only in its paucity of maps and tables. It would have been nice to see the force dispositions as they were when the cease-fire was implemented. However, this is a minor flaw in an otherwise outstanding depiction of the unique Anglo-American relationship during one of its most trying episodes.

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Packard, Jerrold M. *Neither Friend nor Foe: The European Neutrals in World War II*. New York: Scribner's, 1992. 432pp. \$30

[The views and opinions expressed herein are solely the reviewer's and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. government.]

Perhaps it should not seem strange that most Americans feel troubled by the concept of neutrality. Only a minority of citizens remember December 6, 1941, the last day the United States was neutral in worldwide military conflict. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor torpedoed neutrality and swept the United States into a war that was easily portrayed as a struggle between good and evil.

The Cold War that followed had a similar moral quality, and only since the fall of the Berlin Wall has it seemed necessary to ask what are the proper security foci of the United States and what strategy the U.S. should employ to defend and promote its interests in the world. It may be timely, therefore, to review how some nations defined their interests differently and the strategic options they chose in pursuing their policies.

Jerrold M. Packard, who has previously written books on the British and Japanese monarchies and the papacy, provides a detailed and even-handed history of how European countries successfully pursued policies of neutrality in World War II—i.e., they maintained the essence of sovereignty and were not invaded militarily. The countries were Eire, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Packard makes clear that their governments chose policies deliberately to avoid injury after they had concluded that to seek involvement would have made little difference in the overall outcome of the conflict but

could have been costly for their countries in terms of lives and property.

Packard makes equally clear that the countries shared two other characteristics: their neutrality was neither passive nor absolute. Sweden and Switzerland both followed strategies of simultaneously bending to meet the needs of Hitler and trying to develop enough strength to make a military attack seem unattractive to him. Packard recalls that “Foreign Minister Christian Gunther expressed Sweden’s purpose: ‘to make ourselves as indigestible as possible.’” Military preparedness was pursued in tandem with appeasement in the form of allowing German troops and material to transit Sweden in sealed trains to resupply forces in Norway and Finland. Similarly, the Swiss government permitted free rail passage between Germany and Italy even as it prepared against a German invasion by prepositioning explosives in rail tunnels and industrial plants and readied plans to harass Nazi troops from a redoubt deep in the Alps.

While the other successful neutrals lacked the military capacity of Sweden and Switzerland, they did enjoy the geographic advantage of location on the periphery, where Germany felt less compulsion to attack. In the case of Spain, Franco’s heart was with Hitler, but his country lay devastated from civil war. Franco had to calculate that more war could have jeopardized not only tranquility but his regime as well. He avoided intervention by outsiders carrying the battle to Spain by

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resupplying German naval units only clandestinely while denying Hitler access through Spain to Gibraltar. Winston Churchill later acknowledged that Spain "held the key to all British enterprises in the Mediterranean, and never in the darkest hours did she turn the lock against us." Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, whom Packard greatly admires as "a man who lived solely for his country," held Germany at bay by lobbying Franco against letting Hitler use Iberian territory and by counting on Spain's centuries-old alliances with England for protection.

Packard notes that Eire was the only country among the five that was seriously threatened by invasion from both the Allies and the Axis. Ironically, the issue that kept Eire from participating with the other Commonwealth countries on the side of England—the continued inclusion of the island's six northeastern counties in the United Kingdom—gave London the capacity to surveil and protect sea lanes into the Atlantic without inserting troops into Eire. The effort was aided further by the cooperation of Eamon de Valera's government, which, without revealing its hand to the violently anti-British Irish Republican Army, helped London keep track of German ships in the waters off Ireland by the simple expedient of radioing reports of sightings in the clear, where by prearrangement British monitors could pick them up.

Striving throughout his comprehensive review to explain how the

five countries escaped involvement in the war, Packard recognized that "of the score of the continent's neutrals at war's outbreak, only this handful successfully maintained their outsider status." He paraphrases a Swedish historian that "there were more Norways—and Hollands and Hungarys and Greecees—than there were Swedens." Packard's writing is interesting and relevant but flawed by an uneven style that ranges from elegant analysis to colloquial slang. He never tires of reminding his readers which side in the war embodied evil, and his editor let stand a few annoyingly redundant passages.

Nonetheless, the book provides a useful reminder of the proposition that not to become involved militarily is sometimes a strategic option that serves a nation's interests.

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Wiley, Peter Booth with Korogi Ichiro. *Yankees in the Land of the Gods*. New York: Penguin, 1991. 577pp. \$14.95

This book tells the story of a fascinating episode in American history, when Japan was opened to the West in the mid-nineteenth century by Commodore Matthew C. Perry. This was the beginning of a collision course that would lead almost inexorably to the attack on Pearl Harbor ninety-one years later.