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U.S. Policy and the European War, 1939–1941

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Few periods in history have been as crucial as the years 1939–1941, particularly the interval between Germany's invasion of Poland and the Japanese strike on Pearl Harbor. Contemporaries realized that at stake was nothing less than the course the world would take for decades to come. During this time, Western Europe was subjected to a German occupation that gave every indication of becoming permanent, the Soviet Union stood in

mortal danger, and Japan appeared to be poised for lasting domination of all Asia. Under the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the United States was moving ever closer to an undeclared naval war against Germany and economic confrontation with Japan.

This essay focuses on current trends in the historiography of this period, with particular attention to U.S. policy between 1 September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, and 7 December 1941, when...

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