

ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY

A Careful Balance

When Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany following the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the United States of America found itself in an uncomfortable position. The policy question of whether to support close partner Great Britain came in conflict with a strong isolationist attitude. A balancing act had to be maintained, as the United States was in no position to enter a war that many citizens believed wasn't theirs to fight.



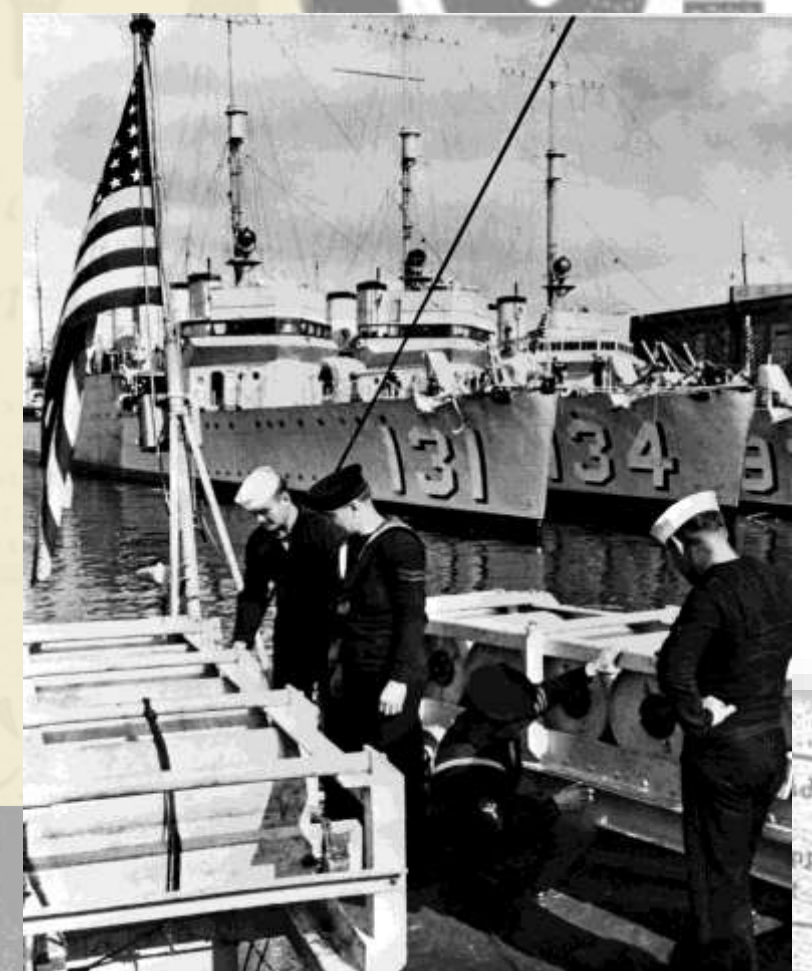
One Foot Out

The threat that a war between European powers would spill over into the Western Hemisphere concerned many. After meeting in Panama, the United States and twenty other neutral countries ratified the **Panama Declaration** on 2 October 1939. With the exception of Canada, which was already at war, a security zone was created 300 nautical miles off the coasts of the Americas. On the Atlantic coast of the United States, this line was cut nearly evenly down the 60th parallel. Enforcing this border was a **Neutrality Patrol** led by ships and personnel of the United States Navy and Coast Guard.

One Foot In

Alarm grew with the fall of France in the summer of 1940. While able to maintain an uneasy peace with Japan, a consensus grew in Washington that the United States would likely be at war with Germany before long. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration adopted a "Short of War" policy that sought to rapidly expand the military capabilities of the United States and supply the British war effort.

The United States Navy was large, but outdated and stretched thin. On 19 July 1940 the **Two-Ocean Navy Act** was passed, providing \$8.55 Billion for the construction of hundreds of ships and 15,000 aircraft. It remains the largest one-time naval procurement in the history of the United States. With the growing threat of German U-Boats, part of this allocation was set aside for the construction of patrol and escort ships.



Admiral H. R. Stark—Author of the Two-Ocean Navy Act



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No Choice but to Fight

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by the Empire of Japan on 7 December 1941 would immediately propel the United States into the war it sought to avoid. While the actions taken in the previous year meant production of new ships was already underway, the attack renewed urgent calls for faster shipbuilding. Communities across the country were soon called to take up both tools and arms for the war effort.



U.S.S. Shaw explodes at Pearl Harbor—7 December 1941
Courtesy of the National Archives

Task
(An Editorial.)

RAIDERS BLAST HONOLULU, AIR AND NAVY BASES

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