Obstructionism Brings Dismissal

When Britain and France declared war on Germany after the latter's attack on Poland in September 1939, President Roosevelt issued a proclamation of neutrality and then, as required by the Neutrality Act of 1937, imposed a mandatory arms embargo on all belligerents. A few weeks later the President, who made no secret of his sympathy for the democratic nations and his desire to aid them, called Congress into special session and asked that legislation be passed that would permit the United States to sell implements of war "abroad." Although he said "abroad," it was clear that he meant to Britain and France. On 3 November, after six weeks of bitter debate, Congress scrapped the mandatory embargo provision of the Neutrality Act and replaced it with a "cash and carry" policy. The United States could now legally make war goods available to the Allies. Unfortunately, however, the President and his Secretary of War had vastly different views as to the extent of the aid that should be made available, and, as a consequence, friction increased between the two men.

As early as January 1939 the President, who felt that the best policy was to help provide Britain and France with the supplies that they needed to defeat Germany, made it quite clear that he was willing to sell the Allies anything that they requested as long as it did not violate the neutrality legislation.\(^1\) By late December of that same year he had gone much further, for he was then so determined to fulfill their requests for war supplies that he was willing to do so even if it meant temporarily denying such goods to
the United States Army. Since the President considered Britain and France to be America's first line of defense, his first priority became aid to the Allies, and his second became strengthening the forces of the United States. Secretary Woodring, on the other hand, was opposed to "frittering away" vital war materials by sending them abroad. He felt that the American military machine should be strengthened first, and then aid could be extended to the Allies. He was worried about the disastrous consequences should the United States impair its military strength by sending war supplies to Britain and France and should those nations then fall to Germany. Consequently, he continually advocated that the President reverse his priorities and place the defense needs of the United States first.

It must be kept in mind that in 1940 there was no way of telling which policy—aiding the allies or strengthening America's defenses—could best provide for the nation's security. Roosevelt bet on his "Allies First" policy, and time was to prove that he made the proper decision; thus, Roosevelt became a hero. Woodring, however, advocated a "United States First" policy, and time was to indicate that such a policy might have been fatal to the democratic cause throughout the world. While it is not the place of the historian to speculate as to what might have happened, it is indeed interesting to consider what the present American attitude toward Roosevelt and Woodring might be had Britain been unable to hold out against Germany in 1940.

The story of Woodring's activities in the first six months of 1940 revolves around his disagreements with the President over the questions of supplying American aircraft to the Allies and of turning military surpluses over to them. The disagreements between the two men became so great that Woodring not only failed to cooperate with Roosevelt, but even began to obstruct his policies. As the Roosevelt-Woodring clashes increased in frequency and intensity, the President turned more and more to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau to implement his policy of aiding the Allies.

After the 3 November 1939 change in the Neutrality Act had cleared the way for the procurement of American-produced implements of war, both Britain and France set up purchasing commissions in the United States. When it soon became apparent that the two nations were bidding against each other for the limited supply of war materials, they decided to merge their operations. Thus, on 6 December 1939 the Joint Anglo-French Purchasing Commission was established. On that same day the President, upon the recommendation of Secretary Morgenthau, established a special liaison committee, whose function was to coordinate the placing of foreign orders.
with American firms in such a way that they would not interfere with the United States rearmament program. The committee, which reported directly to the President, was composed of three individuals. The Treasury Department's Director of Procurement was chairman, and the other members were the Quartermaster General of the Army and the Paymaster General of the Navy. The President had deliberately kept Woodring and Johnson off the committee and had made an official of the Treasury Department chairman, so that Morgenthau, who firmly believed in aiding the Allies, would be able to supervise its activities.

Woodring immediately objected to the establishment of the President's liaison committee, because he disapproved of any foreign buying that conflicted, or might possibly conflict, with Army procurement. He also indicated to the President that he felt that the Army and Navy Munitions Board, not the liaison committee, should decide what items should be sold abroad. Assistant Secretary Johnson expressed the same view to the Commander in Chief, who defended his action on the grounds that the Procurement Division of the Treasury was already experienced in large-scale purchases and that over half of the foreign purchases were of nonmilitary, rather than military, items.

The most critical needs of the Allies in the winter of 1939-1940 were military aircraft and aircraft engines. In late December, Arthur Purvis, head of the Anglo-French purchasing commission, informed Morgenthau that a large order would be placed in several months, but that in the meantime the Allies wanted to secure as many military aircraft as they could. Officials of the War and Treasury departments realized that it would be extremely difficult to fill a large order, because production facilities were so limited and because it would take a minimum of nine months to complete the necessary expansion of war plants. Since the Allies wanted the planes as soon as possible and since American manufacturers could not meet the demands of the Army Air Corps and still fill the foreign orders, some sort of priority system had to be worked out. It was over that priority system that President Roosevelt and Secretary Morgenthau, on the one hand, and Secretary Woodring, on the other, were to come into bitter conflict.

In early January of 1940 Morgenthau, who was by then virtually the coordinator of the armament business and the foreign sale of military equipment, approached the President concerning the problems of aircraft production. Since American aircraft factories could not immediately provide Britain and France with the number of planes they desired, Morgenthau believed that every second one of the Army and Navy planes that were currently under production should be given to them. The President was unwilling to accept such a proposal, but he did agree to give the French
twenty-five of the first eighty-one P-40's that the Army was scheduled to receive prior to July. Roosevelt also expressed a desire to have an aircraft industry that could quickly expand its production to thirty thousand planes per year, and he and Morgenthau both agreed that Allied purchases could and should be utilized in order to bring about such an expansion.10

On 17 January, President Roosevelt called Secretaries Woodring and Morgenthau and Generals Marshall and Arnold to the White House, where he "emphasized the necessity for expediting delivery [of aircraft] to the Allies."11 The President's instructions were not in line with the ideas of War Department officials who had been giving serious consideration to the difficulties that the American aircraft industry would have in filling domestic and foreign orders. As early as 12 January, General Arnold had written to Secretary Woodring concerning British and French proposals "to set aside work now being done on Army airplanes to expedite foreign deliveries." Arnold vigorously opposed such a course for three reasons: first, it would delay the completion of the Air Corps Expansion Program; second, foreign nations would receive airplanes superior to those of the United States Air Corps; third, such action would antagonize and cause difficulty with Congress.12 Secretary Woodring was impressed with Arnold's arguments, especially the first two, and he was to use them repeatedly as reasons for opposing a policy whereby planes produced for the Air Corps would be made available to the Allies.

The President's instructions of 17 January had little impact in late January and February, because the plane requests of the Allies were relatively small. Then in early March the Anglo-French purchasing commission presented the liaison committee with the large aircraft order it had previously promised to make. It called for ten thousand planes and twenty thousand engines to be supplied by July 1941.13 The Allies naturally wanted the very latest planes that could be produced, and Secretary Morgenthau supported them on that matter. Therefore, Morgenthau and Purvis requested that the War Department release the very latest in aircraft, aircraft engines, and superchargers. Secretary Woodring, upon the advice of his military aides, especially General Arnold, refused to release the items, because they were still classified as "secret" and were therefore not eligible to be released. Some of the items requested were not yet in production, and some were in production but had not yet been turned over to the Army.14

Woodring had no intention of releasing the items or of changing the release policy so that they could be turned over. Twice in 1939 he had consented to changes in the policy on the release of aircraft. In the spring he had agreed to reduce the time limit for release from one year to six months after delivery of the second production plane. Then in the fall he had
approved a new policy, which provided that "military aircraft will not be released for export until they have become identified as production articles." The 1939 changes made it easier for the Allies to receive more modern planes, but they still ensured that foreign delivery of one type of aircraft or aircraft engine would not be permitted until a later type was actually being manufactured for the Air Corps. Now, in March of 1940, Woodring was being asked to release to foreign nations airplanes that were more modern than those possessed by his own Army—and that he was unwilling to do.

On 11 March word of the sale of twenty-five new P-40's to France and of the War Department's opposition to releasing them appeared in Washington newspapers. Congressman Dow Harter, head of the Aviation Subcommittee of the Military Affairs Committee, immediately called for an inquiry into the administration's policy on releasing planes for export. According to Harter, the purpose of the hearing would be to determine whether purchases by the Allies were hampering the United States Army's procurement of aircraft. Chairman Andrew May of the Military Affairs Committee decided that the hearing would be conducted before the entire group, not just the Aviation Subcommittee. Woodring was summoned to testify on the fourteenth, but he requested and was granted a delay until the twentieth. While the House was preparing for its inquiry, Senator Robert La Follette, Jr., was calling for the Senate to do the same.

On 13 March the President, angered by public disclosure of conflict between himself and the War Department over release of military aircraft, called Secretary Woodring, Assistant Secretary Johnson, Secretary Morgenthau, General Arnold, and the newly appointed Secretary of the Navy, Charles Edison, to the White House. At that time Roosevelt informed those who were present of the need for "cooperation and coordination concerning foreign sales of aircraft and accessories," and he made it quite clear that he expected no more resistance from the War Department. He also advised that care be used in answering questions before congressional committees, adding that he had not been pleased with the way in which War Department witnesses had testified in the past. The President then turned to Arnold and said that there were places where officers who did not "play ball" might be sent—like Guam. After the meeting, General Arnold wrote, "It was a party at which apparently the Secretary of War and the Chief of Air Corps were to be spanked and were spanked." The meeting was pleasing to Secretary Morgenthau, who was getting tired of the Army's opposition to aiding the Allies.

The President had emphasized that he wanted to make it easier for Britain and France to get American-built planes. Therefore, it was necessary that the War Department come up with a new policy on the release of air-
craft. After the White House meeting on 13 March, Woodring asked Generals Marshall and Arnold to develop a plan that would satisfy the President but not endanger the nation's security. Five days later, on 18 March, they presented their recommendations. What they submitted was a list of all planes currently being produced for the Army, and beside each item on the list there was an indication of whether it should be retained or released. The planes approved for foreign sale were selected in such a way as to ensure that the United States Air Corps would always retain a better model. Woodring approved the plan in principle and asked that it be placed in a form suitable for presentation to the President. This had to be done immediately, because Woodring had to get Roosevelt's approval prior to his appearance before the House committee on the twentieth.

On the morning of 19 March, Secretary Woodring, General Marshall, and General Arnold met in the Chief of Staff's office to discuss the release policy that they would recommend to the President. During the course of that conversation a new idea emerged, which was incorporated into the proposed plan. General Marshall indicated that he felt that the Army Air Corps had more to gain than to lose if it permitted release of its reserve planes to the Allies and subsequently received, in lieu of those craft, later models with improved performance capabilities; this process was known as a "change order" or a "delayed order." Woodring agreed to such a delay in the delivery of reserve aircraft, but not to delays in the delivery of operational aircraft or a small maintenance reserve. At the close of the meeting, Woodring summarized the decisions agreed upon:

1. No military secret or secret development should be divulged or released to any foreign purchaser of military aircraft.
2. No American military plane would be released for foreign sale unless or until a superior plane was actually in the process of manufacture for the War Department.
3. The War Department would negotiate change orders on current contracts so it could obtain refined models.
4. No delivery delays would be tolerated in operating requirement needs or in a 15% maintenance reserve, but delivery delays would be accepted on aircraft scheduled for delivery over and above operational requirements plus a 15% maintenance reserve.

Since the last two provisions had just come out of the present meeting, Secretary Woodring asked that the conferees, plus Assistant Secretary Johnson, meet at his office at seven o'clock that evening to make a final review of the proposed policy before he took it to the President for his approval.

That evening, while Woodring and the others were on their way to the
meeting, they heard radio newscasts reporting that at an afternoon news conference President Roosevelt had said that every type of American-built military plane would be released for foreign sale. The President’s alleged statement caused considerable concern to the conferees, because it indicated a policy that was quite different from the one that they were about to recommend. In order to determine exactly what the President had said, both a complete transcript of the news conference and a ticker-tape press account were secured. Examination of those documents revealed that the radio reports had been somewhat misleading. The matter of foreign sales had come up at the news conference when a reporter had asked the President to clarify the administration’s policy on releasing airplanes and armaments for foreign sale. Roosevelt began by indicating that each case would have to be decided individually. He went on, however, to affirm the vital need for expanding the nation’s capacity for producing aircraft, and he added that this could be achieved only with the help of foreign orders. The President also had stated that as far as he was concerned, an airplane was no longer a military secret once it was under production. The implication of such a statement was that he would therefore have no objection to releasing any “secret” aircraft. Roosevelt’s statements, plus the fact that he made no mention of delayed orders, seemed to indicate that he intended to release the latest military planes with no strings attached.

While those present at the evening meeting were discussing what the President had really meant by his statements, Secretary Woodring received a phone call from Roosevelt. The Chief Executive, who had been informed of the move to get the stenographic notes of the press conference, told Woodring that his afternoon statements outlined quite clearly the policy that he intended to follow. Next he stated that if there was anyone who did not go along with his program, he would take “drastic” action. Then he issued a warning that he would consider any individual who appeared before the House Military Affairs Committee on the question of release policy to be on trial as far as any statements he might make. Before Woodring could question his superior or explain the new policy that was being prepared, the President hung up. Woodring then informed the group of the President’s decision and voiced his dissatisfaction with it. General Arnold, although he was disappointed, stated that since the Commander in Chief had made his decision, there was nothing to do but implement it. For the next three hours, Woodring, Johnson, Marshall, and Arnold argued, debated, and discussed a new release policy. By 1:00 A.M. they had come to agree on a plan that would provide for the release of the latest planes but would assure the Air Corps of receiving improved models at a later date. Before the meeting adjourned, Woodring called Chairman May and asked if his appearance
before the House Military Affairs Committee, scheduled for later that morn­
ing, could be postponed until 27 March. May consented to Woodring’s request.30

On the following day, General Marshall presented the new plan to the President. Roosevelt gave it his tentative approval and told Marshall to place it in final form. On 25 March, Woodring, Johnson, and Marshall took a prepared statement on export policy to the White House and got the President’s final acceptance of it.31 Woodring and his military advisers were not pleased with the new policy, but it was what the President wanted, and there was nothing that they could do about it. One contemporary report described the Army’s action on the release matter quite well when it said, “Highest War Department officials swung around to the President’s view on selling latest model airplanes to the Allies when they discovered that on that issue Mr. Roosevelt’s mind was set and determined.”32

In late March the Secretary of War set forth to def end the new release policy before the House and the Senate Military Affairs committees. In appearing before the House group on 27 March, Woodring explained that the new policy would let the War Department defer the delivery of planes already contracted so that manufacturers could fill their foreign orders. In return, the producers had to agree to deliver a more refined model to the Army at a later date. Such a system would thereby provide aircraft for the Allies, assure the Army Air Corps of receiving planes that incorporated the latest developments, and provide for the expansion of the American aircraft industry. Another provision of the policy was that foreign nations receiving the planes were required to furnish the Army with complete information on the combat performance of the American-built planes so that their short­comings could be corrected. In the questioning that followed, Woodring assured the committee that the new scheme would not interfere with the procurement of planes needed for the operational requirements of the Air Corps. He also claimed that no secret devices had been or would be re­

In response to further questions concerning his acceptance of the new policy, Woodring denied published reports that he had been opposed to it. He claimed that the entire matter had been worked out with his advisers and without coercion. At that point, Congressman Arthur Anderson asked, “Is it true that Secretary Morgenthau was responsible for this program?” Before Woodring could reply, Chairman May intervened by rapping his gavel and saying that he did not consider the question appropriate. At May’s request, Anderson withdrew the question.34 Thus Woodring was saved from what could have been a very embarrassing situation. After Secretary Woodring’s appearance, Assistant Secretary Johnson and Chief of Staff
Marshall further explained and defended the new plan. When the hearing ended, Chairman May issued a public statement in which he said that the testimony clarified all questions concerning the new policy on the release of aircraft and that the Military Affairs Committee considered it to be quite satisfactory.\textsuperscript{35}

On the following day, Woodring appeared before the Senate Military Affairs Committee, where he said essentially the same things that he had said the day before. One new matter arose when he was asked whether the new planes would be released only to Britain and France or to any nation. To this, Woodring replied, “Any Government has the right to come here and negotiate and purchase on a cash-and-carry basis. . . . [The War Department] will handle any country and every country on the same basis.”\textsuperscript{36} In answering the question affirmatively, Woodring was saying the same thing that the President had said several days before;\textsuperscript{37} however, while Woodring’s answer was probably made in good faith, Roosevelt’s sincerity would be open to question. When Woodring had finished testifying, Johnson and Marshall also spoke in favor of the new policy. At the close of the session the committee, by the narrow margin of 5-to-4, rejected a proposal to conduct a formal investigation into the sale of military aircraft to Britain and France.\textsuperscript{38}

In spite of Secretary Woodring’s attempts to give the impression that the new release policy had not been a source of conflict, the press was well aware of what had been going on. Typical of accounts appearing in news magazines was that of the \textit{United States News}, which said: “[The] breach between President Roosevelt and his War Secretary is widening near to the breaking point. Argument over the question of supplying latest model planes to the Allies really is more bitter inside than has appeared on the surface.”\textsuperscript{39} Newspaper columnists Drew Pearson and Robert Allen wrote: “Over the vital question of selling latest types of Army airplanes to the Allies, Secretary of War Woodring was in such disagreement with his Chief that there was a near break in the Cabinet.”\textsuperscript{40} Publisher John C. O’Laughlin, who was in frequent contact with Woodring during this period, reported to General Pershing that a break had been avoided only because Woodring “surrendered, and he did so in order to hold on to his job.”\textsuperscript{41}

At his meeting with the President on 25 March, Woodring had agreed to accept the new release policy, and in the days that followed, he even defended it before the House and the Senate Military Affairs committees. However, he soon made it apparent that he did not intend to carry it out. On 22 March, Woodring had refused to release for export a General Electric supercharger that was currently being produced for the Army. Even after the new policy had been declared to be in effect, he continued to deny its
release. He also refused to sign the orders to release the latest American aircraft for export to the Allies. Assistant Secretary Johnson urged Woodring to sign the releases, but the Secretary refused to do so.\footnote{42}

On 9 April, Secretary Morgenthau called Johnson and informed him that the Anglo-French purchasing commission was anxious to complete aircraft contracts with the American manufacturers, but that they could not do so until the War Department signed the necessary releases for the aircraft. Johnson reported that there was nothing he could do. "I'm having all kinds of trouble with Woodring," he said. He then informed Morgenthau that Woodring not only refused to sign the releases, but that he was also threatening to reappear before the House Military Affairs Committee and tell them that he had opposed the new release policy. To this Morgenthau replied, "When the President gives me a job to do, if anybody puts any obstacles in my way I tell the President about it." Morgenthau then stated that he was going to see Roosevelt on the matter, and he suggested that Johnson do the same. Later that day both men informed the President of the Secretary of War's refusal to cooperate. Roosevelt immediately called Woodring and made it abundantly clear that he expected the planes to be released at once. Consequently, the Secretary yielded to the pressure and released the planes. On the next day, arrangements were made to sell to the Allies twenty-four hundred of the latest fighters and twenty-two hundred new bombers. Several weeks later, American manufacturers began to turn over to Britain and France planes that had been built for the United States Air Corps.\footnote{43}

Secretary of War Woodring's efforts to keep the latest military aircraft in the hands of the Air Corps, rather than turn them over to the Allies, were paralleled by attempts to keep from selling or turning over surplus military equipment to belligerent nations. On both matters Woodring was motivated by a desire to retain for the United States Army all military items that he considered to be necessary for defense of the nation.

One of many problems facing the War Department was that of disposing of "surplus military property." Prior to 1940 the problem was minimal, because the limited Army budgets created problems of scarcity of supplies, not problems of surplus. Occasionally, however, an Army inventory would reveal that certain supplies and equipment, including arms and ammunition, were in excess of Army needs and were therefore "surplus." When such a situation occurred, it was not unusual for the surplus supplies to be sold to a foreign government. The sales were usually made to Latin American nations; this was done with the encouragement and expressed approval of President Roosevelt, who saw the sales as a way of further implementing his policy of hemisphere defense.\footnote{44} While Woodring formally approved of
such disposition of surplus, he did so reluctantly, because he felt that the
nation was so short of military equipment and supplies that none of it could
or should be disposed of. He believed that if war ever came to the United
States, every rifle, every mortar, and every artillery piece, regardless of age,
would be of value.\footnote{\text{45}}

After the Soviet Union had attacked Finland in November 1939, the
Finnish government requested permission to purchase arms, ammunition,
and other implements of war from American producers on a credit basis;
however, on 7 February the President decided not to extend such assistance.
Although Roosevelt had originally favored aid to the Finns, he yielded to the
pressure of Secretary of State Hull and Secretary Woodring, who opposed
such a move. Hull did not want to extend direct aid, because he feared the
reaction of congressional isolationists and believed that such action might
endanger United States neutrality. Woodring's opposition was based pri­
marily on the belief that no military supplies could be diverted abroad with­
out further weakening the nation's defenses.

Following the President's decision to deny Finland the funds to pur­
chase war supplies from American manufacturers, consideration was given
to selling, or otherwise providing, surplus war materials to that nation. On
9 February, Roosevelt conferred with Secretaries Hull, Woodring, and
Edison on the feasibility of relinquishing surplus war materials to neutral
nations so they could in turn sell the items to Finland. Woodring opposed
the plan on two counts. First, he claimed that the Army had no surplus war
goods to dispose of. Second, since the purpose of the plan was to supply
war goods to Finland, it would be an unneutral act which could ultimately
lead to involvement in a foreign conflict. In spite of Woodring's pleas, the
President decided that the War Department would sell surplus artillery to
Sweden, which would in turn sell it to Finland. The President also directed
the Secretary of War to determine what other items of military surplus could
ultimately be made available. Within a few days, negotiations for the sale of
artillery were undertaken, but Finland fell to the Russians before the trans­
action could be completed.\footnote{\text{46}}

As a result of the meeting of 9 February, Secretary Woodring asked
General Marshall to have G-4, the Supply Division of the General Staff,
make a survey to determine what and how much ordnance equipment could
truly be declared surplus, so that it could be turned over to foreign govern­
ments. On 9 March the survey was completed, and two days later, Woodring
was asked to approve the sale price of a list of surplus ordnance materials
which would be eligible for sale to foreign governments. Included on the
list were 100,000 Enfield rifles, 11,000 machine guns, 237 three-inch mortars,
300 75-mm. guns, and a handful of other weapons in lesser quantities.\footnote{\text{47}}

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of the items listed had been Army property since World War I. Woodring followed the President’s explicit instructions and approved the disposition to foreign nations; however, he did so very reluctantly, in part because he believed that the material could not be spared and in part because he felt that the items might not go to neutral nations. His criticism of the means that were being used in disposing of the goods is indicated by the following comment, which he appended to the memorandum asking for his approval of the transaction:

I approve the above paper as a method of carrying out the policy determined by higher authority for the sale of surplus property. But—I continue, as for several years, to absolutely disapprove of the sale of surplus United States Army property. I insist, regardless of any higher authority direction, that if Army surplus property is to be sold, it only be sold by this government to another neutral government.48

Woodring’s fear that United States Army surplus property might go to belligerent rather than to neutral nations led him to issue a departmental order on 15 March which provided that “no surplus arms or ammunition will be disposed of to any state or foreign government engaged in hostilities.” Before taking this action, Woodring had consulted with Secretary of State Hull, who approved of Woodring’s action.49 Sooner or later that order was certain to cause some difficulty, because its provisions were in direct conflict with President Roosevelt’s policy of extending aid to nations that were trying to halt Nazi aggression. During the first two months that the order was in effect it caused no problems, because the question of disposing of surplus property did not arise. No problem appeared, because in April, Germany attacked and took control of Norway and Denmark so quickly that the Roosevelt administration did not have time to consider making supplies available to these countries. Consequently, in early May the surplus property that Woodring had released for foreign sale on 11 March was still in Army warehouses.

Germany attacked the Low Countries on 10 May, and in the next few days the rapid advance of Hitler’s Army seemed to endanger all of Europe. On the fifteenth of the month, Britain’s new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, sent a message to Roosevelt, telling him of the British determination to meet the Nazi challenge and asking the President to “help us with everything short of actually engaging armed forces.” Specifically, Churchill asked for forty or fifty “older destroyers,” several hundred modern aircraft, antiaircraft equipment, and ammunition.50

Upon receiving Churchill’s message, Roosevelt consulted with Secretary Morgenthau on the feasibility of filling the request. Roosevelt then directed
Morgenthau to see what he could get the Army to release. Morgenthau first asked the Chief of Staff and the Chief of the Air Corps if there would be any objection to the immediate release of one hundred pursuit planes that were about to be delivered. General Arnold vigorously opposed such a move, claiming that it would set the development of the United States pursuit squadrons back six months.51 Marshall concurred with Arnold, and on 17 May he wrote to Morgenthau: "I do not think we can afford to submit ourselves to the delay and consequences involved in accommodating the British Government in this particular manner." In spite of this indication that the Army desired to hold on to everything it could, Roosevelt, on 18 May, sent an optimistic message to Churchill. After informing the British Prime Minister that turning over the destroyers was temporarily out of the question, because it would require congressional approval, the President pledged to "facilitate to the utmost the Allied Governments obtaining the latest types of United States aircraft, anti-aircraft equipment, ammunition, and steel." Roosevelt’s willingness to assist the Allies soon led to additional requests for small arms and ammunition, as well as for iron and aluminum.

In his efforts to carry out the President’s request to see what the War Department could turn over to the Allies, Morgenthau dealt almost exclusively with General Marshall, rather than with Woodring. This was not only because of the personal dislike that Woodring and Morgenthau had for each other, but it was also because of Woodring’s increasing tendency to obstruct the President’s policy of actively aiding the Allies.54 In his desperate search for more war goods, Morgenthau, on 17 May, asked General Marshall if he would conduct a new survey to determine what ordnance materials might be released as surplus without endangering the national defense. Although the last such study had been completed less than three months before, a new one was undertaken. On 22 May the survey had been completed, and a list of surplus items from World War I was turned over to the Chief of Staff. The new report contained many items that had not been included on the surplus list of 9 March, and the quantities on the newer one were much larger.55 Major discrepancies between the two lists can be seen from the following comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>9 March 1940 List</th>
<th>22 May 1940 List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enfield Rifles</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.30-caliber ammunition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100,000,000 rounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>machine guns and automatic rifles</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-mm. guns</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-inch mortars</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The greatly expanded list of 22 May revealed an attempt on the part of the Army to meet the President’s demands to assist the Allies by all means short of war.

On the afternoon of 22 May, General Marshall took the new list of surplus items to the President. He explained that the supplies were available for transfer to the Allies but that the decision on whether or not to make the transfer was up to the President. After expressing approval about the type and quantity of items on the list, Roosevelt directed Marshall to consult with Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles to see if a way could be found to legally turn the material over the Allies.

While efforts were being made to supply critical war items to Britain and France, Woodring continued to maintain that surplus materials could not be turned over to the Allies because they were at war; thus, to aid them in the proposed manner was a violation of the policy of the War Department. He believed it was one thing to permit American industries to manufacture goods and sell them to the Allies, but it was quite another to provide them with war materials that were currently, or had been previously, owned by the United States government. On 23 May, Marshall discussed the transfer of the surplus materials with Welles, who, much to his own dismay, was forced to agree with Woodring’s view that under existing legislation the transfer would be impossible. Welles did, however, refer the problem to legal officers in the State Department, and Marshall also asked G-4 to seek a solution to the dilemma.

In an attempt to find a legal means by which the surplus property could be turned over to the Allies, officials in the War and State departments turned to post–World War I legislation governing the sale and disposition of surplus military property and deteriorated ammunition. On 27 May 1940 Gen. Richard C. Moore, the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, gave the opinion that the surplus property could be disposed of “in any way that the Secretary of War may deem expedient.” The next day the legal opinion of the State Department was set forth by counsel Green Heckworth. He maintained that Army surplus property that was exchanged as part payment for new equipment could be resold by the manufacturers to a belligerent without involving the neutrality of the United States. This view was further strengthened on 29 May, when Attorney General Robert Jackson informally expressed his agreement with Heckworth’s conclusion. These legal opinions seemed to open the way for the War Department to turn in or sell surplus war matériel to a private manufacturer, who could in turn sell it to the Allies. When Welles informed the President of these legal opinions, which would permit disposition of the surplus property to Britain and France, Roosevelt told him to see that the War Department proceeded with
the transfer immediately. There remained, however, one obstacle to the transaction—Secretary Woodring.

When Welles informed Woodring of the President’s request to turn in the surplus matériel to the manufacturer, Woodring was unwilling to go along with the request. In previously disposing of surplus matériel, Secretary Woodring had always adhered to a ruling by the Comptroller General, which provided that before surplus items could be sold or turned in as part payment on new purchases, they had to first be publicly advertised, and if the amount of the bid was greater than the exchange value, the items had to be sold for cash. Roosevelt, Morgenthau, and Welles opposed such a procedure in the present case, because it was a lengthy process, usually taking several months, and the Allies needed the goods immediately. Furthermore, the three men were antagonized by Woodring’s actions, which they saw as just one more attempt to obstruct a policy that he did not favor.

At a meeting of 31 May, Woodring discussed the proposed transfer with Roosevelt. The Secretary informed the President that he had arranged to have inserted into legislation currently under consideration an amendment enabling him to exchange surplus property without previously obtaining bids; but until such legislation was enacted or until the Attorney General issued a formal ruling making it advisable for him to do otherwise, he would continue to proceed as he had in the past. The President, who already knew the Attorney General’s view on the matter, agreed to go along with the longstanding policy until a formal opinion could be given by the Justice Department.

That opinion was set forth on 3 June by Acting Attorney General Francis Biddle. His conclusion was: “The provision that such supplies may be sold upon ‘such terms as may be deemed best’ undoubtedly gives the Secretary of War power to sell without advertisement.” After reading the opinion, Woodring agreed to the transfer, the details of which were left to General Marshall. On the following day, Marshall met with Arthur Purvis to determine just what and how much of the surplus goods the Allies desired. After examining Marshall’s list (that of 22 May), which included every ordnance item that G-4 had declared to be surplus, Purvis announced that he wanted “the whole damned lot.” The Chief of Staff, having anticipated such a request, had already sent orders to arsenals and depots throughout the country, instructing them to pack the equipment and send it to New Jersey for shipment overseas.

On 4 June, Gen. Charles Wesson, Chief of Ordnance, went to see Edward R. Stettinius, Chairman of the Board of United States Steel Corporation. Wesson asked Stettinius, who a few days before had been appointed by the President to serve on the National Defense Advisory Commission, if
his corporation would serve as a middleman in the transfer of goods from the War Department to the Allies. Stettinius replied that he could not make such a decision, because his resignation from U.S. Steel was to take effect that very afternoon, but he added that he was almost certain that his successor, Irving Olds, would go along with the idea. After receiving board approval, Olds agreed; and negotiations were undertaken between the War Department and United States Steel Export Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel Corporation. The details were soon worked out, and on 11 June, officials of the Export Company met with Woodring and signed the contracts, which sold all the surplus property on the list of 22 May for $37,619,556. Five minutes later the officials from the Export Company met with representatives of the Anglo-French purchasing commission and sold them the matériel for the same amount that they had just paid for it. The surplus goods then belonged to Britain and France, and within a few days they were on their way to those countries. Before the goods left the United States, Woodring prepared a memorandum for the President in which he requested retention of the 500 75-mm. guns that had been turned over, but for some unknown reason the memo was never sent.

Woodring's reluctance to make American aircraft and Army surplus goods available to the Allies antagonized many top administrative officials who were striving to carry out the President's professed policy of aiding Britain and France. Woodring's actions were more popular with most military leaders, who were opposed to having the nation's small supply of war matériel further depleted but were hesitant to speak out against the policy advocated by the President. Word of Roosevelt's warning to General Arnold about what might happen to officers who did not "play ball" had spread among the military men, and they were not about to jeopardize their careers. General Marshall and his top advisers found themselves in a situation in which the Secretary of War was advocating a policy that they personally favored, but they were bound to carry out the policy of their Commander in Chief—a policy that they were less than enthusiastic about.

General Marshall probably revealed the attitude of many military leaders when, during a meeting on 4 June at which Secretary Morgenthau complained about all the difficulty that Woodring was causing him and the President, Marshall said, "Now, everybody in town is shooting at Woodring and trying to put him on the spot and I don't want to see him get on the spot. Everybody is trying to get him out of there and I am not going to be a party to it."

Until early June, Woodring was the only War Department official to speak out against the danger of aiding the Allies at the expense of the United States Army; however, that situation began to change quickly after an
announcement made by the President on 11 June that he was ordering a "re-survey" to determine what additional military matériel could be turned back to the manufacturers for ultimate sale to the Allies. At last the military began to speak out. Feeling that to release anything more would endanger the nation's security, the War Plans Division voiced opposition to the President's proposal. General Marshall also came to the conclusion that it was time to call a halt to the disposition of Army material to foreign nations. Therefore, on 22 June he sent the following message to his Commander in Chief: "To release to Great Britain additional war material now in the hands of the armed forces will seriously weaken our present state of defense." He then recommended that "the United States make no further commitments of this sort." Unfortunately, Woodring did not know about this recommendation, because two days before this the President had forced him to resign as Secretary of War.

The President's decision to ask Woodring for his resignation was to come as a surprise to everyone, including Woodring. The only thing more surprising than the forced resignation was that Roosevelt retained his recalcitrant War Secretary as long as he did. On numerous occasions throughout 1939 and early 1940 the President had told close associates that he was about to remove Woodring; however, he had not done so, and by the late spring of 1940 the general feeling was that he never would. There were several factors that made Roosevelt reluctant to act: his extreme distaste for firing anyone, especially an old friend like Woodring; his desire not to antagonize congressional isolationists and noninterventionists; and his yearning to ensure his control of the Kansas delegation at the 1940 Democratic Convention. Nevertheless, in early May the President began to give serious consideration to the appointment of a new Secretary of War. The earlier reasons he had had for retaining Woodring were now being overridden by other factors, but the primary reason for seeking a replacement for him was the increased difficulty that he was having in getting Woodring to carry out his policies. From March 1940 on, Woodring made no secret about opposing the President's policy of aiding the Allies at the expense of the United States. During March and early April he fought against the release of modern military aircraft to Britain and France; then in May he did the same thing in regard to surplus ordnance items. As Woodring's obstructionism increased, the President's fear of antagonizing the isolationists declined, because Germany's successes in Europe had done much to weaken their cause. Another reason for considering removal of Woodring was Roosevelt's desire to unite the country behind him in this period of crisis. The President had come to be-
lieve that the best way to provide the national solidarity that he desired was to appoint several prominent Republicans to the cabinet, thereby creating a coalition cabinet.\textsuperscript{75}

In order to make the coalition a reality, Roosevelt first had to find qualified Republicans who would be willing to join his administration. One man that the President wanted to have join his team was Frank Knox, the 1936 Republican candidate for Vice-President. In December of 1939 Roosevelt asked Knox to become his Secretary of the Navy, but Knox refused to accept unless another Republican was also appointed to the cabinet at the same time. Because Roosevelt was unwilling to take such a step at that particular time, he asked Knox to let the matter ride for a while.\textsuperscript{76}

As the situation deteriorated in Europe in the spring of 1940 and as Secretaries Woodring and Edison continued to lose favor at the White House, Washington was filled with rumors that the President was about to form a coalition cabinet. The names most frequently mentioned as possible appointees were Knox and Alfred M. Landon, the 1936 Republican nominee for President. Landon was invited to the White House, perhaps to be offered a cabinet position, but before he went, he issued a statement saying that he was opposed to a coalition cabinet. On 22 May, Landon visited Roosevelt. At that time the President said that he was looking for replacements for Secretaries Woodring, Edison, and Perkins and that he had a number of men under consideration; however, he did not mention the possibility of a post for Landon. Apparently the anticoalition statement had eliminated the former Republican standard-bearer from further consideration.\textsuperscript{77}

It was at about this time that Roosevelt again approached Knox about accepting the Navy post, and again Knox replied, though not as vehemently as he previously had, that he would do so only if another top Republican were appointed to the cabinet at the same time. Thereupon, Roosevelt left the invitation to Knox open, and he began anew a serious search for another capable appointee. The President considered a number of qualified men for that second cabinet position. Knox personally favored William Donovan, who was a distinguished soldier of World War I, a former Republican candidate for Governor of New York, and a former law classmate of Roosevelt’s. The President, however, for reasons known only to himself, rejected Donovan.\textsuperscript{78} Another possibility, William Bullitt, Ambassador to France, was championed by Secretary Ickes, but the President felt that Bullitt was more valuable in his diplomatic position.\textsuperscript{79} Serious consideration was also given to selecting New York’s Mayor, Fiorello La Guardia. When word of the possible appointment of La Guardia spread to the newspapers, the conservatives who dominated the House Military Affairs Committee became alarmed because of the “extreme liberalism” of the New Yorker. Therefore,
in early June, Chairman Andrew May and Congressman Charles I. Faddis went to see the President. They emphatically informed the Chief Executive that they did not want to have La Guardia made Secretary of War and that if he were appointed, they would refuse to work with him. Roosevelt was angered by such a dictate, but realizing the power and influence wielded by the two men, he assured them that the appointment would not be made.\textsuperscript{80}

As the President continued his search for the right Republican to join Knox in his cabinet, the pressure to remove Woodring grew to considerable proportions. In addition to the longstanding pressure from such members of the anti-Woodring inner circle as Harold Ickes, Henry Morgenthau, Steve Early, and Edwin Watson, there now appeared “outside pressure” from the press and the public. Newspaper columnists were especially active in this move. Drew Pearson and Robert Allen continued their long-time criticism of Woodring, calling again for his dismissal. Frank Kent reported the likelihood of the removal of Woodring, adding that he had no idea why the President had retained him for so long. Joseph Alsop and Robert Kintner talked of the lack of leadership in the War Department and called on the President to appoint a new Secretary of War.\textsuperscript{81}

In June the calls for replacement of Woodring began to reach the editorial pages. In its edition of 14 June, the \textit{New York Times} contained an editorial criticizing the leadership of the Navy and War departments. In discussing the War Department, it said: “It seems incredible, but it is unfortunately true, that at such a time as this . . . the offices of Secretary of War and Assistant Secretary of War should be occupied by two men who do not see eye to eye, do not pull together, and, reputedly, do not even speak.” Mention was then made of the many important defense measures that had to be taken, but “none is more urgently important than the immediate appointment to the top posts in the Navy and War Departments of thoroughly competent, thoroughly non-political and thoroughly cooperative executives.”\textsuperscript{82} Three days later an editorial in \textit{Life} magazine called for replacement of Woodring, saying that the need for such action was “obvious.”\textsuperscript{83}

The foreign press also got into the act. On 5 June the \textit{London Daily Telegraph} reported that United States aid to the Allies was being delayed by Secretary of War Woodring, who was the leader of American “obstructionists.” The article then suggested that perhaps President Roosevelt should “take the risk . . . of kicking out this disloyal member of the Cabinet who has made a hollow mockery of the profession of his chief that the administration’s policy was to aid the Allies by every means short of war.”\textsuperscript{84}

By early June the retention of Woodring in the cabinet was also on the way to becoming a possible political liability to Roosevelt. In a speech on 8 June, New York’s Governor, Thomas A. Dewey, who was seeking the
Republican presidential nomination, called upon the President to dismiss Secretaries Woodring, Perkins, and Hopkins, who were "symbols of incompetence, disunity and class hatred." Although Perkins and Hopkins were also criticized, the speech was especially critical of Secretary Woodring. Such things as Dewey's speech, along with newspaper and magazine articles and editorials calling for dismissal of Woodring, soon led to a steady stream of letters to the President, asking that he replace his Secretary of War.

One obstacle to the creation of a coalition cabinet was cleared in late May, when Secretary of the Navy Edison was nominated as the Democratic candidate for Governor of New Jersey. This political maneuver, which had been arranged by James Farley at the request of President Roosevelt, provided Edison with a graceful means of stepping aside, and he took advantage of it. On 21 May he submitted his resignation, to be effective 15 June. A position was now open for Frank Knox, but Roosevelt still had not found another prominent Republican to join the administration. Then, at a luncheon on 3 June, Roosevelt's good friend Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter suggested Henry L. Stimson. According to Frankfurter, Stimson would be a perfect choice. He was a well-known Republican; he was well qualified, having served as Secretary of War under Taft and Secretary of State under Hoover; and his views on foreign policy and aid to the Allies were quite similar to those of the President. In the days that followed, Frankfurter continually pressed for the appointment of Stimson.

As the President gave serious consideration to the appointment of Stimson, he also turned to the problem of how to effect the removal of Woodring. It was quite apparent by this time that the Secretary of War would not leave voluntarily. On numerous occasions the President had offered him fine positions, but in each instance the offer had been turned down. As Drew Pearson, writing in mid June, put it: "If there is anything Roosevelt ought to know by now it is that only a blast of TNT will oust his Secretary of War." Furthermore, the President could not bring himself to just call him in and fire him. This left the alternative of finding some pretext for asking Woodring to resign.

On 17 June a series of events started that was to give Roosevelt the excuse for removal that he was seeking. That morning Secretary Morgenthau informed the President that the British urgently needed some four-engine bombers (B-17's). When Roosevelt asked if the Army could spare eight or nine, Morgenthau said that he felt that they could spare ten. "That's fine," Roosevelt replied, "You have been doing grand work and continue to give the English the same help." Later that day, in talking with Gen. Edwin Watson, the President's Military Aide, Morgenthau said that he intended to transfer twelve B-17's and that there was no need to consult the
Army on the transaction. When Watson asked whether the transfer could be made without first asking the War Department, Morgenthau assured him that “we have the authority.” At Watson’s insistence it was finally agreed to sound out the Army on the proposed transfer of the twelve aircraft. That afternoon Watson informed Woodring that the transfer was under consideration and asked for the Army’s reaction.

On the following morning, 18 June, Woodring and General Marshall discussed the consequences of such a transfer. Marshall explained that he strongly opposed the proposed action, because the Army had only fifty-two B-17’s, all of which were essential to the defense of the Canal Zone and the Caribbean. Both men agreed that none of the planes should be released. Marshall then wrote a recommendation to that effect and forwarded it to Woodring, who gave it his approval on the morning of 19 June, and then immediately sent it to the White House.

Upon receipt of this memorandum the President decided that the time had come to remove his Secretary of War. Whether his decision was made because he was fed up with Woodring’s obstructionist tactics and the B-17 matter was simply the “last straw,” or whether he had previously decided on dismissing him and merely seized upon this incident as an excuse, will never be known. Nevertheless, the President sat down and personally wrote, in longhand, the following letter to his Secretary of War:

June 19, 1940

Dear Harry,

Because of a succession of recent events both here and abroad, and not within our personal choice and control, I find it necessary now to make certain readjustments. I have to include in this a change in the War Department—and that is why I am asking that you let me have your resignation.

At the same time it would be very helpful to me if you would accept the post of Governor of Porto Rico. In the light of the international situation Porto Rico and its administration are of the utmost importance to this country.

Your service as Secretary of War has been carried out loyally and faithfully—and for this I shall ever be grateful to you. This note goes to you with the warmest feeling of friendship on my part—and let me repeat, Harry, that I shall be always thankful to you for your help to me during all these seven years.

Affectionally yours,

Franklin D. Roosevelt

On the next morning the Secretary of War sat down and wrote in longhand a letter which, in spite of the fact that its exact contents were not to be known until years afterward, was to become a source of great speculation and controversy:
Dear Mr. President,

Your request of yesterday afternoon for my resignation as Secretary of War is acknowledged and you may consider this note compliance therewith.

I assure you that my refusal of yesterday morning to agree to your request for the release of the flying fortress bombers to foreign nations was based upon my own belief, supported by the General Staff, that it was not in the best interests of the defense of our own country.

Fearful of a succession of events to which I could not subscribe I prefer not to accept your proffer of continued service in another post. For the stated reasons I ask that my resignation be considered effective today.

I feel, Mr. President, that I cannot retire with my knowledge of the inadequacy of our preparedness for war without most respectfully urging you to maintain your pronounced non-intervention policy. I trust you will advise those who would provoke belligerency—a state of war for our nation—that they do so with the knowledge that we are not prepared for a major conflict. Billions appropriated today cannot be converted into preparedness tomorrow.

I am indeed grateful to you for having given me this opportunity to serve my country and the President of the United States to the best of my ability. I am also grateful for your kind expression of friendship and believe me I retire with equally warm personal affection. May I remain always most respectfully—

Harry H. Woodring

Accompanying the letter was a note in which Woodring said that he would not make any statement or release any part of the correspondence surrounding the resignation. He asked that any announcements concerning the matter be made by the White House.

A few hours after receiving Woodring's resignation, Roosevelt sent to the Senate for confirmation the names of Frank Knox and Henry Stimson as Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of War. Roosevelt was able to act so quickly because he had offered the War post to Stimson the previous afternoon, and the latter had accepted with the understanding that he could name Judge Robert P. Patterson as Assistant Secretary. (This was accomplished five weeks later, when Assistant Secretary Louis Johnson was forced to resign in order to make room for Patterson.) At the same time that the names of the new appointees were sent to the Senate, Press Secretary Steve Early issued more detailed announcements on the new appointments and on Woodring's resignation. There was one very unusual facet of the news release concerning Woodring—the usual practice of releasing the letter of resignation of an outgoing cabinet member was not followed. The reason for the omission was that the letter to the President was "too personal."

The removal of Woodring and the appointment of Stimson came as a surprise to everyone, including Woodring. Just a few days before, he had
told Congressmen May and Faddis that there was nothing to the rumors that he was about to be replaced; in fact, he told the two Congressmen that the President was quite satisfied with the job that he was doing. Assistant Secretary Johnson was both surprised and disappointed; he was surprised that the President had finally mustered the courage to dismiss Woodring, and he was extremely disappointed that he himself had not been made Secretary. After hearing of Stimson’s appointment, Johnson went to the White House and expressed his dissatisfaction: “But, Mr. President, you promised me not once but many times,” said the angry Johnson. Most Senators were on the chamber floor when the announcement of the impending appointments was made. The shocked surprise of that body was typified by Senator Bennett Clark, who cried out, “Is this true?”

The next morning the *Topeka Daily Capital* carried a story reporting that three weeks before, on 1 June, Woodring had told friends in Topeka that a “small clique of international financiers” was trying to force him from the cabinet because he was opposed to “stripping our own defenses” to aid the Allies. Almost immediately, newspapers throughout the country carried the story from Topeka, and Harry Woodring was once again the center of controversy—this time over his dismissal from the cabinet.

Congressmen and journalists looked at the story coming out of Topeka and at the President’s refusal to make public Woodring’s letter of resignation, and they concluded that there must be some connection between the two. Congressional reaction was immediate. On the floors of the House and Senate a score of Congressmen praised Woodring for the job that he had done and deplored the President’s decision to remove him. Resolutions calling for an investigation into the circumstances surrounding Woodring’s resignation, demanding that the President release the controversial letter of resignation, and summoning Woodring to appear before the Military Affairs Committee in order to explain his reason for resigning were introduced in both houses. Although none of the resolutions was passed, the Senate Military Affairs Committee authorized its chairman, Morris Sheppard, to invite Woodring to testify if he cared to. Sheppard made the offer, but the former Secretary of War, in response to a general request from President Roosevelt that he not let his resignation become a political issue, rejected the offer.

The only public statement that Woodring made concerning his resignation was made to reporters on 21 June, when he said, “No one sympathizes with the European democracies any more than I do, but I feel it is America’s duty to put our own defenses in order before going to their aid. I simply could not go along beyond the point where I felt we would be jeopardizing our own defenses.” With Woodring refusing to tell what had happened
and the President failing to release the Secretary of War's letter of resignation, the entire controversy slowly dropped into the background, and Congress and the nation turned their attention to more pressing matters. Although there was never an official explanation as to why Woodring had resigned, it was “universally accepted that he quit rather than go along with Roosevelt's policy of 'anything short of war to help the Allies.'”

One facet of the dismissal that is worthy of examination is Roosevelt's later contention, made in private, that Woodring's refusal to transfer the B-17's to the Allies was in no way connected with the decision to ask for his resignation. In a personal letter written to Woodring on 25 June, the President indicated that he had fully accepted the recommendation not to release the large bombers and that, since they both favored the same course of action, that particular matter could not have been the basis for dismissal. The impression that Roosevelt gave was that by 19 June the time for a cabinet reshuffle had at last come, and the fact that the bomber issue happened to be before Woodring at that particular time was merely a coincidence.

While Roosevelt's explanation could in fact be true, several factors would lead one to think otherwise. First, the President's letter to Woodring asking for his resignation and the call to Henry Stimson offering him the War post were made almost immediately after receiving the War Department memorandum opposing the transfer of the bombers. It is difficult to believe that the memo did not affect the President's decision. Second, in a telephone conversation at 12:52 P.M. on 18 June, presidential aide Edwin Watson told Secretary Morgenthau that Roosevelt had said to him, “If you and Henry think they [the Army] ought to do it [transfer the bombers] go ahead.” That conversation, plus a similar one an hour and a half before, indicates that the President, Morgenthau, and Watson were all determined to carry through the transfer regardless of what the War Department said. Yet in a personal letter to Woodring on 22 June, Watson stated, as the President was to do three days later, that the White House had fully intended to go along with the War Department recommendation regardless of what it was. These stated intentions, along with Roosevelt's directive of 20 June to Morgenthau to “lay off on the ten four engine bombers,” are quite different from the views expressed by Watson, Morgenthau, and the President in the days preceding Woodring's dismissal. Both the Watson letter and the Roosevelt letter appear to be efforts to lay the basis for a cover-up should the isolationists attempt to make removal of the Secretary of War a cause célèbre. Fortunately, Woodring kept that from happening.

One question remains to be answered, and that is why, after years of threatening to replace Secretary Woodring, did the President finally decide to act? Certainly, political considerations were important; after all, it was
an election year, and Roosevelt wanted to bring about national solidarity by forming a coalition cabinet. Furthermore, the President realized that bringing two key Republicans into the administration on the eve of their national convention was bound to cause confusion in the ranks of the opposition. Internal and external pressures were also factors: members of the inner circle, who considered Woodring to be anti-New Deal, continued to urge his removal, and by early 1940 the press and the public were starting to make the same demand. Basic disagreements over policy were also important, but in themselves they were not solely responsible, because the President encouraged different viewpoints and saw certain benefits in having in the same department men with divergent views. That “Woodring was the most outspoken anti-interventionist in the cabinet” was becoming increasingly embarrassing in light of Roosevelt’s policies of aiding the Allies. All of the above reasons undoubtedly influenced Roosevelt’s decision, but he had tolerated each of them and probably would have continued to do so.

There was one factor, however, that, by June of 1940, could no longer be ignored—Woodring’s obstruction of and his delay in carrying out the President’s policies. In late 1939 Roosevelt made it abundantly clear that he wished to aid Britain and France by all means short of war, even if it meant a temporary weakening of United States military strength. Woodring, while not necessarily opposed to sales to the Allies, believed that United States defenses should receive first priority. His views were, therefore, completely different from those held by the President. To disagree with his Commander in Chief when a policy decision was being made was, and should have been, quite acceptable. However, once the President had made up his mind and had clearly indicated the policy that he intended to follow, Woodring should have carried it out without delay. Instead, he did what he could to keep that policy from going into effect. In January 1940 the President emphasized that he wanted to provide the Allies with the latest American-built military aircraft, but because of Woodring’s obstructionism and delaying tactics this was not done until April. That spring, the turning over of surplus ordnance material to the Allies was also delayed for several weeks because of Woodring’s reluctance and near refusal to carry out a policy that he disagreed with. Then, in mid June, when the question of transferring a dozen B-17’s arose and Woodring again gave evidence that he was not going to “play ball,” President Roosevelt made the decision to replace him with a man whose views were similar to his own.

In attempting to delay the flow of American-built aircraft and of Army surplus goods to the Allies, Secretary Woodring was doing what he sincerely considered to be in the best interests of the United States. His conscience and his military advisers told him to hang on to those items, but his superior
told him to turn them over to the Allies. Woodring was inclined to follow the first two rather than the last. In pursuing the courses of action that he did, the Secretary of War was in effect attempting to override the decisions of the Commander in Chief. If there is to be order in a military establishment or in government, a proper superior-subordinate relationship must be understood and carried out at all echelons. Secretary Woodring did not follow that principle. He undoubtedly realized how unfortunate the consequences would be if every American soldier obstructed or delayed in carrying out the orders of his superior; however, he failed to realize that equally disastrous consequences could result if he, the Secretary of War, balked and delayed in carrying out the orders of his superior. Once Woodring had demonstrated that he would not carry out policies that he disagreed with, the President had no alternative to dismissing him. There can be no doubt that Roosevelt had the right and that he had sufficient reason to act as he did.

On 26 June, just one week after his resignation, Harry Woodring, along with Helen and the three children, went to the White House to pay a farewell visit to the President. The atmosphere was relaxed and almost festive as the two men exchanged pleasantries and reminisced about some of the trials and tribulations of the past nine years. Again Roosevelt offered his friend the governorship of Puerto Rico, and again it was refused. After pledging to keep in touch, the men shook hands and said good-by. The following morning the Woodrings piled into the family station wagon and headed for Kansas—Harry Woodring was going home.