Franklin Roosevelt's Speeches As The Embodiment Of American Patriotism

This essay will show how US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's speeches and political actions contributed towards the US overcoming ingrained isolationism, thereby bolstering popular support and mobilising economic resources for World War II. This essay will explore the ingrained isolationism prevalent in the US at the time, the circumventory actions that Roosevelt took to bypass isolationism and how his speeches embodied American principles of virtue and democracy as a way to boost patriotism.

The 1930s was a period of abundant isolationism in the American milieu, due to an amalgamation of years of experiences that drew America inward. Some of those experiences are listed here. Disillusioned Americans returning from WWI had a desire to return to a normal life and stay away from outside affairs. The League of Nations, spurned forth by Woodrow Wilson's internationalist vision, was impotent to enact real change on the world stage. Years of economic depression caused widespread unemployment and poverty throughout the United States. The Kellogg-Briand pact embodied attitudes campaigning against the modus operandi of war. The Nye Committee investigation in 1935 again whipped up isolationist sentiments against war profiteers; the Neutrality Act solidified this sentiment into law. Roosevelt shrewdly circumvented this ingrained attitude of isolationism, by recanting internationalism to win elections and doing "anything short of war" to achieve peace in Europe.

With vast amounts of internal pressure against intervention in worldly affairs, Roosevelt had to find ways of supporting American internationalism while appearing neutral. The Neutrality Act, which imposed embargoes on trading arms and materials to any nation involved in a war, was the main barrier to internationalism; Roosevelt would have to find ways to sidestep this obstacle. Initially Roosevelt pushed for a reform that would repeal the mandatory and non-discretionary arms embargo provision, therefore allowing for presidential discretion to arms sales, but was rebuffed. Despite these restrictions, Roosevelt found creative ways to use the Neutrality Act to support internationalist agendas. Roosevelt used the Act to revoke trading with Italy during the 1935 Italo-Ethiopian War, essentially imposing sanctions on the invading Italian government. Later changes to the Neutrality Act in 1937 would work in Roosevelt's favour as a 'cash and carry' amendment allowed sale of raw materials and non-military items to warring nations; so long as they paid cash and arranged transportation themselves. Roosevelt would again enact a 'cash and carry' amendment in 1939 as a pretence of neutrality to sell arms to allies fighting against the belligerent forces. In this way Roosevelt could use the principle of neutrality to mobilise economic resources on foreign soils.

While Roosevelt was a shrewd political navigator, able to work around imposed isolationism to mobilise economic resources, it was his talent for communication that helped him to promote support for war. Roosevelt's speeches and radio broadcast 'fireside chats' were a key strategy in overcoming isolationistic tendencies. Roosevelt's manner of communication was effective; by using radio to speak directly with citizens his broadcasts conveyed an intimate feeling and drew upon American ideals to increase listener certitude. His speeches, however, were not convincing enough alone to overrule popular opinion. This is highlighted in Roosevelt's 1937 'Quarantine the Aggressor' speech, which aimed to rouse interventionist sentiments amid the

expanding outbreaks of violence occurring internationally; the reaction to which showed strong opposition for US involvement in international affairs. This speech signalled Roosevelt's interest for American intervention in issues of peace; while the reaction intimated that he would have to achieve this without getting drawn into war.

Roosevelt's speeches drew upon the American principles of virtue and democracy to garner support. When war broke out in Europe on September 1st, 1939, Roosevelt declared that America would remain a neutral nation. In his announcement Roosevelt spoke of the need for peace in all nations, and appealed to American virtue to encourage intervention; "we have every right and every reason to maintain as a national policy the fundamental moralities, the teachings of religion and the continuation of efforts to restore peace". Additionally, Roosevelt's 1940 'Arsenal of Democracy' speech calls for America to be a protectorate of democracy in the US and nations abroad. At the heart of the speech was the idea that Europe's safety and America's safety were inexorably linked; Roosevelt stated that if Britain fell, America would be in danger of being attacked. "We must be the great arsenal of democracy. For us this is an emergency as serious as war itself. We must apply ourselves to our task with the same resolution, the same sense of urgency, the same spirit of patriotism and sacrifice as we would show were we at war."

Come 1941, Roosevelt for the first time explicitly appealed for an end to isolationist policies and to uphold American democratic virtues in all nations. Roosevelt, in his 'four freedoms' speech, stated that a more secure world would be built upon four essential human freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. In calling for the worldwide enactment of these virtues, Roosevelt urged the nation to put "patriotism ahead [of] pocketbooks" and espoused the need to supply Allies with "munitions and war supplies of many kinds". This speech was a direct attempt to increase popular support for the war and the deployment of economic resources to the front-line; it had some success. Polling taken at the time indicated that 80% of Americans favoured supporting Britain in the war, however only 10% supported the US joining the war itself. With large support for sending aid overseas, Roosevelt introduced the 1941 Lend-Lease bill. This bill allowed the US to send military equipment, rations, and arms to the Allies. In general, the supplies were sent for free and the US received leases on army and navy bases in Allied territory. The Lend-Lease act ended the pretence of American neutrality, and the Neutrality Act was repealed in November of that year. The US entered the war on 8th December 1941 after the Pearl Harbour attacks. While popular support for the war was never bolstered enough for the US to enter WWII voluntarily, popular support for war-time economic assistance was sufficient to give a substantial advantage to the Allies.

In conclusion, Roosevelt's rhetoric and political decisions were important in contributing towards overcoming isolationism in America. This is because Roosevelt's speeches drew upon notions of democracy and American virtue to rise above isolationism. As well, Roosevelt shrewdly bypassed isolationistic barriers when needed to enact internationalistic measures.