

A Globalization Moment: Franklin D. Roosevelt in Casablanca (January 1943) and the Decolonization/"Development" Impulse

Author(s): Ronald W. Pruessen, University of Toronto

This chapter emerged from a number of perhaps simplistic questions — questions that occurred to me as I began to look at the phenomenon of globalization from the perspective of a historian. Although it is common to think of globalization as a feature of very recent days (the 1990s and after, perhaps), I found myself wondering about the potential relevance of a number of key earlier developments. Did it mean something that the two great conflicts of the twentieth century were long ago labeled "World" War I and "World" War II, for instance? And did it mean something that the economic crisis of the 1930s is called the "Great" Depression because it was both intensely severe and virtually worldwide in reach?

Simplistic or not, such questions led me to speculate about ways in which what we have come to call "globalization" might have emerged initially as a cluster of efforts designed to prevent a repetition of the economic, social, political, and military crises that had plagued the world (literally "the world") during the first half of the twentieth century. To me, the work and thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt seemed especially important in this respect. His early work with Woodrow Wilson (during World War I) and his long presidential career from 1933 to 1945 revealed the powerful impact of evolving and accumulating global crises — and it seemed evident that these crises played a significant role in leading Roosevelt to energetically plan for both domestic and international "reform." Given this, I asked myself whether the policies and practices that emerged from his reform enthusiasm had helped pave the way for the type of globalization we see around us by the early twenty-first century.

I think Roosevelt's enthusiasm did lead in this direction — and my research explores one of many "globalization moments" evident during his tenure in the White House.

Roosevelt's experiences at the 1943 Casablanca conference offers a window into the potential linkage between globalization and American planning during World War II. Pressing strategic matters were the primary focus of Roosevelt's meeting with Winston Churchill, but thoughts about the postwar world regularly filtered into discussions. In particular, the president demonstrated an interest in decolonization and "development" that can be seen as representative of his grand scale vision of international reform. This was a vision in which specific types of reforms proved to be of central importance to the priorities and practices associated with the international system's gradual move toward "globalization."

The US president saw the deconstruction of traditional colonial empires, for example (which he advocated at Casablanca and on many other occasions), as a crucial step toward the avoidance of future wars over imperial spoils. Like many American leaders, he hoped to see a more open international environment replace a patchwork of fenced-in colonies — and it would be difficult to miss the connection between this vision and the freer movement of goods, people, and ideas so

much associated with globalization.

Roosevelt also believed the economic, social, and political "development" of former colonial territories would make for a more peaceful and prosperous world. His thoughts along these lines were also evident at Casablanca. On one hand, he saw "development" as a way of reducing the resentments of previously subject peoples — a reduction designed to eliminate some of the sparks that could generate future wars. On the other hand, he believed the advancement of societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America would yield significant economic benefits to the world as a whole. Roosevelt took a Depression-era and "liberal" philosophy interest in the multiplier affects of equitably distributed "growth" — typified by a New Deal initiative like the Tennessee Valley Authority — and applied it to the international arena as he dreamed about the possibilities of the post-World War II future. In the process, he powerfully articulated some of the optimistic convictions so dear to later globalization enthusiasts.

Awareness of Roosevelt's early 1940s concerns and agenda has real value for the exploration of many globalization and autonomy issues. At the most abstract of levels, for example, the president's "postwar planning" suggests how later twentieth century impulses and practices were taking shape decades earlier. More precise linkages are also evident — and this chapter concludes with a consideration of the ways in which the *limits* and *flaws* of Roosevelt's vision are also revealing.

If there are signposts to globalization in 1943, for example, a historian's perspective also makes it clear that there was a long road yet to be traveled. Roosevelt may have envisioned the way in which decolonization could help to create an open and permeable global arena, for instance, but it would take years to overcome the resistance of traditional imperial powers. Nor did Roosevelt have it in his power to prevent the Cold War struggles that would actually see the creation of a whole new set of international walls and barriers.

The limited nature of Roosevelt's reform inclinations (as opposed to the limits of his power) also highlights some of the most problematic features of what we have come to call "globalization" — with the problematic features being distinctly relevant to a consideration of "autonomy." My research highlights the ultimately paternalistic character of Roosevelt's development concepts: American policies tilted toward what has appropriately been termed a form of neo-colonialism, one that gave formerly subject peoples only limited real control of their futures. Somewhat ironically, paternalism also informed US attitudes toward the so-called imperial powers: policies and relationships evolved toward a measure of American hegemony — and inevitable limitations on the freedom of movement of even once powerful states (whether they ranked among the victors or the defeated of World War II).

In the end, a consideration of Franklin D. Roosevelt's impulse toward decolonization and "development" reforms (evident in his Casablanca experience) suggests the importance of looking at globalization as a historical phenomenon whose roots are deeper than usually imagined. "Globalization moments" that go back as far as 1943 — and indeed much earlier — underline the way the forces fostering current processes and dynamics accumulated their strength over a long period of time. This has great relevance for contemplating the prospects of reforming or resisting the globalization with which we live in the early twenty-first century.