Chapter 5


When Welles arrived in London on 10 March, the objectives for the mission that he had embarked on had already evolved notably. In London this would continue in light of his quest for information. Having heard from Daladier that he might consider a settlement with the Nazi regime, Welles pressed those in London on what it would take for them to contemplate peace with those in Berlin. He did so not for the purpose of genuinely exploring peace with Hitler’s government after his time in Berlin but in order to inform Roosevelt about the British government’s war aims and their commitment to them. This fulfilled Welles’ objectives as he saw them by this stage of his mission. The British government’s intention on the eve of Welles’ arrival was to impress upon the Under Secretary their steadfast commitment to the war in order to dispel any notion that Welles’ may have had that they would be prepared to accept peace with Hitler’s regime.

As Welles landed in London, relations between the Roosevelt Administration and the Chamberlain government were far from harmonious because of the minor crisis of late January and tension caused by the disclosure of Welles’ intended mission at the beginning of February. While these tensions were somewhat mitigated by the British influence on the mission’s objectives—notably the removal of the word “peace”—and by Welles’ silence on his mission thus far, Chamberlain’s government still harbored concerns as to what Welles would have to say on the issue of a settlement. Through the course of the conversations Welles undertook, these worries were somewhat alleviated but never completely dispelled and were augmented by concerns...
over Welles’ conception of disarmament and security. The net effect of Welles’ time in London was largely neutral in terms of a positive or negative influence on Anglo-American relations. Nevertheless, one can see a hint of accord between the United States and Great Britain in one area despite the difficulties that arose. Jay Pierrepont Moffat arrived in London, having limited his efforts on the mission up to that point to meeting a number of diplomatic colleagues across Europe. In London his presence was important, because in a semiofficial capacity he met a number of representatives of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Economic Warfare. The latter were a significant audience for Moffat as he presented the State Department’s concerns over the British economic practice that had prompted the minor crisis of early 1940.

With Welles in London, this chapter continues to consider the spectrum of the mission’s objectives against the backdrop of the themes this book has explored. Naturally, Welles continues to play a prominent part in this analysis, and, given the circumstances, so does consideration of Anglo-American relations. It is important also to remember that the concerns of Hull and the limits to American foreign policy continued to be relevant to Welles in his discussions. A number of Hull’s anxieties in particular would be replicated by the British. Further, Welles was conscious of not appearing to exhibit any favoritism to the British for fear of being cast in a “Colonel House mold” and so continued to remain silent about the progress of his mission to the press.

This chapter will also continue its analysis of the interaction of Welles’ objectives. In London his emphasis was on the most straightforward one: the gathering of information, with a particular focus on information that revealed British war aims. This focus fitted in with the recognition that the exploration of peace for the purpose of resolving the conflict was nonsensical after Welles’ experience in Berlin. Likewise, there was little value in pushing the case for Italian neutrality in London, although this would definitely be reinvigorated when Welles returned to Rome. Furthermore, Welles’ objective of prolonging the “phony war” in London served only to increase tension in Anglo-American relations. British second-guessing of Welles’ motives did little to dispel the notion that his mission might produce something. In an indirect fashion this helped Welles to sustain the doubt he wanted to engender in the minds of those whom he had met in Berlin as to his ultimate course of action. In this environment, the gathering of information was Welles’ most achievable goal.

To support the analysis, this chapter will chart Welles’ numerous conversations in London and consider the emphasis of those discussions. This will be of particular relevance in his two meetings with Chamberlain (11 and 13 March). The records of Welles’ meetings in London are drawn from two main official sources and a third, personal account. The British Foreign