

War Assistance from U.S. (general)

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(No. 524.)

My Lord Marquess,

Foreign Office,

May 31, 1940.

THE United States Ambassador asked if he might come and see me this afternoon, not, as he said, because he had anything in particular to tell me, but in order to hear if I had anything to say to him.

2. I told his Excellency that there were one or two matters with regard to which I should like to ask for his advice and assistance. In the first place, in the retirement on Dunkirk, the British Expeditionary Force had inevitably left a number of wounded behind, and the Secretary of State for War had enquired whether it would be possible for the United States Embassies in Brussels, Berlin and Paris to take care of them in any way.

3. Mr. Kennedy said that he would at once get in touch with each of the three Embassies and ask them to do whatever might be possible on the spot for the British wounded.

4. I then asked the Ambassador whether he thought it would be possible for President Roosevelt to give instructions that a United States warship should visit Eire in the near future. We thought that such a visit might have a salutary effect in present circumstances.

5. His Excellency, who admitted to feeling a certain anxiety with regard to the situation in Eire, promised to take the necessary steps to have the suggestion considered at once.

6. When I asked Mr. Kennedy whether there was any chance of the United States Government agreeing to let us have the destroyers in regard to which the Prime Minister had approached the President, and of which we were in urgent need as a result of our recent losses, he said that he intended to inform President Roosevelt very shortly that the psychological moment had now arrived and that any assistance which the United States could afford the Allies within the next week would be worth ten times as much as similar assistance in a month's time.

7. The Ambassador expressed great admiration of the courage and skill shown by His Majesty's Forces, in particular the Royal Air Force, and said that, if the British alone had been fighting this war, he felt that there would be no need for alarm. At the same time he could not help feeling some doubts about the French; and he was sure that, if President Roosevelt, supported as he now was in this matter by all the Republican leaders, were to announce that the United States were prepared to send assistance to the Allies, it might have a decisive effect on French morale. As regards the question of the destroyers, he felt confident that, if it were simply a question of legislation, Mr. Roosevelt would be able to make the necessary arrangements.

8. I told the Ambassador that I entirely agreed as to the present being the psychological moment. I told him of M. Reynaud's suggestion for an appeal to the United States, and of the view which I had expressed to your Excellency that a despairing appeal for help might well have the opposite effect to that which we desired, and that opinion in the United States would be far more inclined to help us if we, for our part, were to show by our conduct of the war that we were resolved to defend ourselves to the last.

9. Mr. Kennedy said that he cordially agreed. Public opinion in the United States was being kept very closely informed of the military situation, and, from the point of view of public opinion, what we had been doing at Dunkirk was worth forty appeals by M. Reynaud.

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I am with great truth and respect,
My Lord,
Your Excellency's obedient Servant,

Agostino

(for the Secretary of State)

His Excellency
The Most Honourable
The Marquess of Lothian, C.H.,
etc., etc., etc.
WASHINGTON.

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