

Foreign Relations: US: General 43/3/39

Mr. Brantwell

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Mr. Officer

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My Lord,

With reference to my telegram No. 6 of January 4th I have the honour to transmit to Your Lordship a copy of the annual message which the President read on January 4th before a joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives.

2. Mr. Roosevelt opened his speech by informing Congress that he had in the past felt it necessary to warn them of disturbances abroad and of the need of putting the American house in order in the face of storm signals from overseas; he now warned them once more. A war which threatened to involve the world in flames had been averted, but it had become increasingly clear that peace was not assured. Armaments, military and economic, were growing more deadly, and there were threats of new aggression. Storms from abroad directly challenged three institutions indispensable to Americans. The first was religion, and it was the source of the other two, democracy and international good faith. Where freedom of religion had been attacked the attack had come from sources opposed to democracy. Where democracy had been overthrown the spirit of free worship had disappeared and where religion and democracy

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The Right Honourable

Viscount Halifax, K.G.,

Etc. etc. etc.

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had vanished good faith in international affairs had given way to strident ambition and brute force. There came a time when men must prepare to defend not their homes alone, but religion, democracy and good faith among nations. If the new philosophies of force were to encompass the other continents and invade America this country no more than any other could afford to be surrounded by the enemies of our faith and our humanity. It was fortunate therefore that in the Western Hemisphere under a common ideal of democratic government there was a rich diversity of resources and of peoples living together in mutual respect and peace. The United States proposed to do its share in protecting this Hemisphere. This did not mean the Americas against the rest of the world: "We, as one of the Republics, reiterate our willingness to help the cause of world peace. We stand on our historic offer to take council with all other nations of the world to the end that aggression among them be terminated, that the race of armaments cease and that commerce be renewed."

3. The President proceeded to argue that the world had grown so small and weapons of attack so swift that no nation could feel sure of peace. Weapons of defence therefore gave the only safety if any government bristling with implements of war insisted on policies of force. Effective timing of defence was essential and survival could not be guaranteed by arming after the attack had begun. God-fearing democracies could not forever let pass without protest acts of aggression against sister nations. "The mere fact/

fact that we rightly decline to intervene with arms to prevent acts of aggression does not mean that we must act as if there were no aggression at all. Words may be futile, but war is not the only means of commanding a decent respect for the opinions of mankind. There are many methods short of war, but stronger and more effective than mere words, of bringing home to aggressor governments the aggregate sentiments of our own people".

4. Mr. Roosevelt next insisted that everything should be done to avoid encouraging or assisting an aggressor, and pointed out that the existing neutrality laws may operate unevenly and unfairly by actively giving aid to an aggressor and denying it to a victim. Another lesson was that the probability of attack was greatly decreased by the assurance of an ever ready defence. The country must have armed forces and defences strong enough to ward off sudden attack against strategic positions and key facilities, essential to ensure sustained resistance and ultimate victory. Secondly, the country must have the organisation and location of those key facilities so that they may be immediately utilised and rapidly expanded to meet all needs without danger of interruption by enemy attack. Mr. Roosevelt therefore in the next few days intended to send a special message to Congress making recommendations for such defence measures.

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5. The third essential lay in the underlying strength of citizenship, the self-confidence, the ability, imagination and devotion to see things through. Even a well armed nation might meet defeat if it was unnerved by self-distrust, endangered by class prejudice, dissension between capital and labour and unsolved social problems at home. "In meeting the troubles of the world we must meet them as one people". A democratic nation, not being regimented like a dictatorship, could only muster its united strength when the people felt that they were receiving the fullest opportunities for development. The nation's programme of social and economic reform was therefore a part of defence as basic as armaments themselves.

6. From this the President went on to summarise the achievements of the six years of his administration in social reform, and to claim that they constituted the greatest six years of internal preparedness in the nation's history, and that all this had been done without dictatorship, without conscription and without restriction of freedom of speech. New tools of Government had had to be forged, and some of them were roughly shaped and needed improvement. The tools could not be put to their maximum use until the executive processes of government were reorganised. After thus foreshadowing a fresh attempt to persuade Congress to pass a bill for greater government efficiency Mr. Roosevelt said that with the exception of legislative

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to ameliorate railroad and other transportation problems, past Congresses had more or less met the needs of the new order of things. The period of internal conflict in launching a programme of social reform was now past and energies could be released to improve existing legislation. Time was of paramount importance because "we are off on a race to make democracy work so that we may be efficient in peace and therefore secure in self-defence."

7. The rest of the message dealt mainly with the President's argument that capital and man power must be brought together, existing capital put to employment in order to create a national income of 80 billions of dollars a year, and existing expenditure increased rather than curtailed to achieve that end. I have referred to this part of the message in another despatch.

8. The tremendous emphasis which Mr. Roosevelt laid in his speech upon the need for defence organisation and preparedness for war is an indication of how strong is his alarm at the present state of affairs in Europe and Asia. I understand that he talks quite openly with his intimates about the probability of war in Europe this Spring. Speaking the other day privately to a group of journalists he is said to have called their attention to two dates, April 6th 1917 when the United States entered the war and May 20th, 1918 when American troops were first engaged in battle, and to have remarked that

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America could not always in the future rely on others to fight her battles for her. The President will have a considerable tussle with Congress to get his way about an adequate defence programme. The legislature is full of amateur strategists who will all have their own ideas, and there is a strong nucleus of complete pacifists who consider that America should not fight in any circumstances. Generally, I believe that Congress is in favour of increased armaments for self-defence, although it reflects the opinion of the electorate in believing that America should and can keep out of a great war. The President is convinced to the contrary and is out to educate the people away from isolationism. He began the process at Chicago in the Autumn of 1937, but in spite of the "Panay" incident he met with very little success. The shock of events in Europe last September has made his hearers more receptive, but the Munich settlement is not popular and the President's part in it has been rather played down of late. The present session of Congress may well prove educational to the country at large, but the real test will come over the Neutrality debates and I foresee considerable reluctance to give the President as free a hand as he would like.

9. The press has on the whole received the President's message with more enthusiasm for its defence section than for the part dealing with internal affairs and continued spending for prosperity. The

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"New York Times" thinks the message marks a turning point in the Administration's history, but is cautious with praise. It is disheartened to find lavish government spending still championed when, in the paper's view, the record shows such spending to be a relatively minor factor in recovery. It calls the President's foreign policy, "if put into action ... a sharp break with the traditions of the immediate past" and considers that the policy needs more definition. It believes, however, that it is time to reconsider whether the Neutrality Act "represents the opinion or promises to conserve the interests of the American people". The "New York Herald Tribune" in a leading article headed "Spending from fright", says the nation "faces a possible war emergency with the greatest debt in history and the budget completely out of control" and calls the President's attempt to shift responsibility on to Congress "naive". The paper holds that the road of active intervention against aggressors cannot be followed alone but requires a clear working understanding with the other great democracies, which, in its turn, depends on the reality of the menace. The "Baltimore Sun" finds the President "not definite in his bases" for demanding more arms. It charges him with "groping" and "inconclusiveness" despite his "discovery" that for six years America has been getting ready for Hitler. "Never has Mr. Roosevelt shone more brilliantly in the improvisation of life-long convictions." The lesser papers tend to

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approve the President's foreign policy while dealing according to their lights with his attitude on domestic affairs, or criticizing his linking of the two. None goes further in this latter angle of attack than the "Chicago Tribune" which, in a leader entitled "Mr. Roosevelt goes to War", asserts that Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese generals are as necessary to the President as he is to them. "A dictator seeks the role of deliverer and protector", it says: "the greatest danger is not over the water".

10. Of the columnists, Arthur Krock, writing in the "New York Times", believes that the President's linked programme will be strongly resisted in Congress and that the chief effort of its critics will be to deal with the two parts one by one. Frank Kent, in the "Baltimore Sun", considers that the interest in the new Congress lies in the attitude of the Democratic Senators. If the President, he says, has lost control of the Senate Democrats, he has lost control of the Democratic Party. Dorothy Thompson calls the message the greatest speech of the President's career, and fully approves its foreign policy. She holds however that the New Deal has lamentably failed to secure the cooperation of capital and labour, and she calls not for spending alone, but for a policy on spending. Walter Lippmann, in a wide-ranging article, calls the message a landmark in the history of western thought. In its opening insistence on religion as the source of
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democracy and international good faith, he thinks it registers a fundamental change of ideas that is in general progress throughout the world. Mr. Roosevelt has seen, he says, that it is not enough to denounce tyranny and oppression abroad; "that it is necessary to bring to an end ... those deep and ancient antagonisms (i.e. the class struggle and the hitherto assumed opposition of religion and patriotism to freedom and progress) within the democratic nations that have paralyzed and disorganized them in their conflict with revolution at home and with aggression from abroad."

11. I am sending a copy of this despatch to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in Canada.

I have the honour to be
with the highest respect,
My Lord,
Your Lordship's most obedient
humble servant,

(SGS) V.A.L. Mallet

H. M. CHARGE D'AFFAIRES