

A Statement to the American People by
HONORABLE HERBERT HOOVER

NEW YORK
MAY 11TH, 1941

upon

**THE IMMEDIATE RELATION OF THE
UNITED STATES TO THIS WAR**



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For the last six months I have remained aside from the controversy on whether we should join in this war. I have been waiting to see the progress of our preparedness. I have wanted to see the situation abroad develop more fully. I had believed that the President was earnestly endeavoring to keep his promise to the American people of October 23rd:

... "We will not participate in foreign wars and will not send our Army, Naval or air forces to fight in foreign lands outside of the Americas, except in case of attack."

In the past ten days we have had many speeches and much propaganda, the meaning of which is to drive the American people into this war. One who has been honored by his country as a member of America's War Council in the last world war and as its Commander-in-Chief in subsequent troubled years must learn something of the principles of national defense and our setting in the world.

It is therefore my duty to speak out of my experience. I hope that by

sober discussion of the facts, I may contribute something of thought in this most fateful decision. I am not speaking as the representative of any party, of any group and committee, or any association. And despite the depth of emotion that I feel, I hope I may speak without passion and with respect for the views of my many troubled fellow citizens.

I do not need to express again my abhorrence of the whole totalitarian movement or its dangers to the world. That there be no misunderstanding, let me state at the outset that I support provision of the maximum tools of war to Britain; that I am convinced we can give this maximum during her next critical months only if we keep out of this war; that putting our navy into action is joining this war; that the whole European war situation is in transformation; that America is as yet unprepared even for adequate defense; that our people are not united. To go in now is neither wise nor for the interest of either Britain or ourselves.

As I have listened to these recent speeches it has constantly recurred to my mind that the problem before Mr. Roosevelt is far more difficult and complex than many of these speakers imagined. In the anxiety and emotion of the moment many do not recognize the stern facts.

The New Proposals to Join the War

It is now proposed that we should put the American Navy into action. That is a straightforward, understandable proposal which boldly makes clear the meaning of words like convoys or patrols. That is joining in this war, once and for all. From

here the steps would be automatic. Our Navy must attack German submarines, ships and planes, if it is to be of any use. To make it effective then we must expand naval and air bases abroad. We must equip these bases with expeditionary forces. And that is war for long years to come.

We Are Not Yet at War

There are those who say we are already in this war. That is not true. We are in a position of risk. But war has not been declared between ourselves and the Axis. Diplomatic representatives are still maintained on both sides. Our treaties are still in force. There is no killing of men between us. If this war were ended tomorrow, it would not be necessary for us to make a new peace with Germany.

I am not arguing the spirit of our relations with Germany. I am only discussing the situation which exists. But it is a certainty that we shall be at war the moment our Navy is put into action. We are in the war when we send our boys either by air or by sea or on expeditionary forces with an intent to shoot at the Germans. Let us not coddle ourselves by thinking otherwise.

It would be more consistent with American honesty and American courage for us to face the straight issue of a declaration of war by the Congress as the Constitution provides than to creep into an undeclared war. It is due our people that the Congress should vote on the real question which underlies all this: "Shall we declare war on Germany or Italy or Japan?" In a national debate on that issue the whole

of the facts could be placed before the American people and the people could reflect their views to the Congress. That question once openly determined by the only open process democracy knows, then our people would accept that decision — whatever it might be. The full facts and the truth is the way to achieve national unity.

Facing the Facts

We must face some hard facts. And there is among them, the transformation of the military and political situation abroad. There is our own unpreparedness. There is the practical aid that Britain now requires and requires at once. There is the lack of unity of our people.

This is no time for wishful thinking. Upon our decision depends the fate of our nation. It is the time, of all times, for a sober and frank appraisal of new facts and new situations.

The Transformation of the War

The first hard fact is the transformation of the character of this war. No one can deny the grim possibility that Hitler may take Suez, Iraq, North Africa and the Mediterranean. This would not, however, cut the vital lifeline of Britain. It might even release that British fleet to protect their Atlantic lanes. In any event, Hitler can occupy all of Continental Europe.

And from all this area he will get ample food supplies and vital raw materials for the German people. True, he is blockaded by the British fleet, but the blockade cannot starve the German people or cut off their vital raw material supplies. It is only the people in the occupied democ-

racies who will starve. Having been disarmed to their very carving knives, they cannot revolt.

A second phase of this transformation is that substantial army fighting seems likely to go into the background for many years. The British armies cannot invade Hitler's Europe. Nor do I believe with all the 6,000,000 men that Hitler commands and his superior air force that he can now cross the Channel to England. To invade Hitler's Europe would require us to prepare 5,000,000 men in addition to the British army. This time to invade Germany we would need to land them quickly and that might take 40,000,000 tons of ships to carry our army over the Atlantic. And they might not be able to land even then. It would take ten years to build those ships. And Hitler could not start toward the United States without equal preparation.

Therefore, with this transformation it does not appear that this war can be brought to a conclusion by armies or navies for years and years to come.

The undetermined weapon against Hitler is air power. And the character of air war is also being transformed. It is rapidly emerging to be long-range bombing with fighter planes to defend against the bombers. Accurate action in destruction of industrial and military objectives by daylight is no longer possible because of the efficiency of fighter planes on both sides. Manufacture of more and more planes will thus continue on both sides. But so far there is no effective answer to night bombing. It serves mostly to destroy large objectives, the cities and harbors, reducing them to rubble and killing civilians. And in this destruction Hitler

has to fly only one-third the distance that the British have to fly, to reach his point of attack.

And there is a transformation in the German blockade of England. The long-range bomber is developing as a primary weapon in the attack upon harbors and upon ships. Submarines are today partly scouts, sending word to the air forces. Naval protection of Britain's sea lanes is now subsidiary to air protection.

This moving transformation of the relation of army power, sea power and air power presents new situations which are not yet clear. They involve many new considerations. They plainly indicate that America would be joined in a long, long war without a clear method of conclusion. And they emphasize England's immediate need which I will discuss later on.

The Situation in the Pacific

The second hard fact we must frankly face is that in the last war Japan was our ally and we had no need to defend the Pacific. But Japan is now openly allied to the Axis. She only awaits a favorable moment to realize her ambitions in Asia. That opportunity comes to her if we go to war in the Atlantic. Even if she does not open war upon us, her action and attitudes will be so potentially dangerous to us that we must instantly divert our energies to strengthen our defenses in the Pacific.

Our Unpreparedness

The third of these hard facts that we have to face is our unpreparedness. We have been slow to organize for defense, as is always the case in democracies.

We are not prepared to go to war. Our industry will not be tuned up for another eight or ten months to produce enough of the tools of war to equip our own defense and at the same time supply the needs of Britain. We do not have 300,000 men who are sufficiently equipped with planes, tanks and guns to meet 300,000 Germans, to say nothing of victory over 5,000,000 of them. We will not even have 1,500,000 men so equipped for probably another 12 months. We have no substantial air force of the type now being used in this war. It is true we have a magnificent navy, but even that is not yet big enough for the job which it may have to undertake if we join in this war.

And preparedness for war consists not alone of men and tools and munitions. It also embraces the spirit of a people. This war is a total war. That means every energy of a people must be mobilized. We must have a united people to make successful total war. We are united in resolution to defend the Western Hemisphere from military aggression. We are united in building whatever of a war machine is necessary for this purpose. We are united in our condemnation of aggressor nations. We are united in wanting to help England defend her independence.

But beyond this we are a divided people. Do I need to prove this disunity? There is an obvious large majority of people who oppose the sending to foreign wars of our boys either on our Navy or on convoys or airplanes or expeditionary forces where they may have to shoot or be shot at. These oppositions are strongest in our youth and it is youth who must die. There is no unwill-

lingness in them to die to defend our Hemisphere.

And to have a united people the Government must be united with the will of the people. A divided people cannot act effectively in the supreme issue of total war. That failure in unity was part of the disaster of France. The first necessity is to follow an objective upon which our people will agree.

History will assess the condemnation or the praise for the policies and the methods which have brought us to these dangers. That is not the question now. The question is what to do from here on.

Aids to Britain

Our every sympathy, our interest is to assist the heroic defense of England. We have pledged ourselves to give Britain the aid of our factories and our farms.

Her most critical period is right now. It is during the next months. What is the urgent need of England as expressed by her leaders time and again? Plainly she needs bomber planes to guard her sea lanes. She needs bomber planes and fighter planes to offset the attacks upon her cities and her harbors. She needs tanks, munitions and food. She needs merchant ships to replace her losses. She needs minor naval warships to guard her sea lanes.

We are today giving her only a part of the scant production of our industries and retaining the other part for our own preparedness.

If we join this war we must join in earnest. We shall lose it any other way. If we join we must at once increase our army to 3,000,000 or 5,000,000 men. We would have to use a larger part of our immediate

manufactures to supply our own army. We would have to use a larger part of our air production to defend our own coast cities. We would have to at once increase our protections for the Pacific Coast and our island possessions. We would have to use a larger part of our production of fighter and bomber planes for them. We would have to hold merchant ships in reserve to carry troops to protect them. We are not building enough merchant ships now to meet British needs. We would have to use our light naval craft to convoy and protect our own sea lanes, especially in the Pacific.

In net, if we join this war we must use a larger portion of our present scant production for our own equipment and defense. We would have to do this at once. And that means if we join in this war we must give Britain less tools of war during her most critical period.

If we stay out of this war we can take more risks in parting with our tools of war.

The British have said time and time again that if we give them the tools they have the manpower to repel invasion, they have the men to man the warships, the merchant ships, and the airplanes.

The Course We Should Pursue

Today we are confronted with not one problem but many. What is the constructive American course amid these problems? Is it not clear that we will give less tools to Britain if we join in the war? The solution is not for us to go to war but to give her every tool that will really aid her regardless of our own preparedness. There are risks in this course but it is the least perilous road we can now

take. This solution will not please extremists on either side. Common sense and stark truth rarely do. But I am convinced that here lies the road to national unity that is so essential to America at this time.

Some Other Questions

We must also think other things through. And there are some other very disagreeable questions that must be answered before we take the plunge to war. We cannot refuse to face the facts of the situation when the fate of the nation is at stake.

We wish to aid Britain, but we must face the fact that if she cannot maintain the independence of the British Isles with the tools and policies I have mentioned, it cannot be maintained by our joining in the war. If we are in the war and should Britain fail, we would be left to carry the war alone. And that war against Nazi-controlled Europe will have to be fought at a distance of 3,000 miles and for years and years.

In that event, are we going to blockade Europe? If so, are we going to starve the 40 million people in Great Britain? And how will we bring such a war to a conclusion?

We Must Not Be Swept Off Our Feet

What the course of the American people may be in this conflagration of the world cannot rightly be determined now. We cannot appraise all of the factors. At the present we cannot judge the effect of the transformation going on in this war. But there are some things we can state with assurance.

Right now we need calm thinking. We need reason. We need tolerance. We need to approach these problems

with deliberation. Until this picture is more clear it is folly to gamble with the fate of a nation. Strong men do not need to rush. We must not be swept off our feet by the profound depth of our emotions. By no hasty or emotional act must we jeopardize the aid to Britain and the future of America.

The Price of War

Finally we must not forget the price we shall have to pay if we join in this war.

It means the sacrifice of our most precious lives and the hopes of millions of mothers and wives. It means the sacrifice also of our own liberty to a dictatorship of our own, inevitable in total war.

If we go into war, we must pass through post-war bankruptcy. The savings of the people will be lost. The endowments of our universities, colleges, hospitals will be destroyed. And when the day of transformation of war into peace comes the Government will not be able to support the unemployed and the farmers. In this gulf all major industry must be operated by the Government. When we go to the peace table, hate will again as before sit at that table endeavoring to destroy the hope of any real peace among men. Liberty will not recover on this Continent for a generation.

But if despite all this price we are compelled to act with our military power, let us be thoroughly prepared. Let us make our determination within the frame of our Constitution by the decision of Congress. And when that decision is made, there will be no disunity in America.

The Germans know all about our slow preparedness. They need have

no momentary satisfaction in our unpreparedness. That will be forthcoming. The potential might of this nation is the strongest thing in this whole world. If necessary, we can raise and we can eventually equip an army of as many millions of men as we need. We can make more ingenious tools of war and we can operate them better than any nation in the world. That strength is always here in America. The defense of the United States is not dependent upon any other nation. America cannot be defeated.



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