

The Need of a Navy

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One of the penalties of desiring to speak one's mind is that the man so speaking it must be ready to back up his words by acts, unless he is willing to find himself in a peculiarly humiliating position. This applies just as much to a nation as to an individual. Therefore, if a nation desires any weight in foreign policy of any kind—that is, even if it desires only a guarantee that no foreign nation will adopt towards it a hostile policy—then it must possess the means to make its words good by deeds. In the case of a nation whose interests in foreign affairs are concerned primarily with powers touching it by land, this means that it must be ready to face invasion by land, or, in case of necessity, itself to invade by land. If, as in the case of the United States, there is no great military empire abutting on the country in question, then it must look primarily to its navy as the means for carrying out any policy on which it has resolved. The United States has on one side Mexico, on the other Canada. Canada, it is true, is part of one of the greatest empires in the world; but the British empire, though it has ever been fertile in able generals and gallant soldiers, nevertheless owes its high standing primarily to its navy; and in the very unlikely event of any trouble between England and the United States the British forces in Canada, and the American Navy on the ocean, would be almost equally at a disadvantage. Aside from Great Britain, however, practically every other nation which could by any possibility have trouble with us would have to meet us at sea. This of course means that if the United States is to have any foreign policy whatsoever it must possess a thoroughly efficient navy.

I shall be met by two sets of objections. The merely ignorant man, who is patriotic, but who does not take the

trouble to think or to know the facts, is apt to assume that the United States is so big that no foreign power will tackle it; and that anyhow we can immediately improvise a navy if we need one. Of course the answer to this is that the position is absurd. No nation can afford to rely upon utterly unprepared strength. Even the strongest man can with safety rejoice to run a race only on condition that he is in some kind of training to make the effort. If he lets his muscles become mere fat, he can rest assured that he will be beaten by any one who takes the trouble. The unwieldy possibility of strength would not save the United States any more than it saved China. Of course Americans are very different people from the Chinese; and I have altogether too firm a faith in my countrymen not to believe that ultimately they would make any antagonist regret having assailed them; but this might well be only after terrible disaster and bitter humiliation; only after repeated defeat in battles and campaigns, or, indeed, defeat in the first war itself. If our lack of preparation caused us such defeats, though we might subsequently redeem them, we could never wipe out their memory or undo the damage they did.

The second set of objections comes from men who are not ignorant, but who either lack the robust patriotism common to most Americans, or else who have lost the proud, masterful instincts which have always been part of the character of any really great race—instincts I may add which do not in the least indicate a desire wantonly to oppress any weaker race or people. The man of mere wealth, to whom the stock market is everything, and whose shortsighted vision is bounded by the horizon of a material prosperity; the anæmic man of culture, whose education has been so one-sided as to develop cultivation and refinement at the expense of the virile qualities; the good quiet soul, with many indefeasible civic virtues, who is decent and respectable, but who is incapable of those generous and lofty thoughts which make a nation rise above the level of the commonplace—all these object to a navy on the ground that we ought not to have any foreign policy at all. Of course to men of this stamp the Monroe Doctrine, for instance, is merely something unpleasant and wicked, which

may possibly bring us into war ; and they are apt to be devout believers in the degrading doctrine that even a dishonorable peace is better than a just war. They have not the slightest desire to see the Monroe Doctrine enforced. They have no objection, or at best but a feeble objection, to see any great European power establish itself afresh on this continent ; and they are quite unable to understand why any man should object to seeing the Americans who have made Hawaii civilized fall under the dominion of some Asiatic or European sovereign.

Either kind of sentiment, either the belief that we can dare anybody to fight, without preparation, or the belief that we ought never to fight or adopt a policy which might lead to fighting, is bad enough ; but the result of a mixture of both is even worse ; and it is this mixture in our foreign policy which offers a perpetual menace to our welfare and honor. If we build and maintain an adequate navy and let it be understood that, while we haven't the slightest intention to bluster or to commit any wrong, yet that we are perfectly ready and willing to fight for our rights, then the chances of war will become infinitesimal, and no power will dream of protesting against the Monroe Doctrine. If, on the other hand, we announce in the beginning that we do not class ourselves among the really great peoples who are willing to fight for their greatness, that we intend to remain defenseless, hoping thereby to escape the anger of anyone, and that we shall of course refrain from pushing any policy, whether that embodied in the Monroe Doctrine or any other, if it can possibly be distasteful to nations who actually will fight—why, under such circumstances we doubtless can remain at peace, although it will not be the kind of peace which tends to exalt the national name, or to make the individual citizen self-respecting. But if together with a policy of refusing to fight at need we allow the policy of blustering self-assertion to go hand in hand, we may at any time find ourselves in a very awkward position. We asserted the Monroe Doctrine as against Great Britain in the Venezuelan case. Personally I am very glad we so asserted it, but it would be a cause for bitter humiliation if, having once taken this position,

we failed again to assert it against any other power, no matter what it might be, which should attempt a policy of territorial aggrandizement at the expense of any state in America.

General principles always have their value; but their greatest value comes in when they apply to concrete cases. Just at present Hawaii is the concrete case. If the United States desires to become what it undoubtedly should become, the great power of the Pacific, then our people must heartily back up President McKinley's course in preparing the annexation treaty. We must take Hawaii just as we must continue to build a navy equal to the needs of America's greatness. If we do not take Hawaii ourselves we will have lost the right to dictate what shall be her fate. We cannot play hot and cold at the same moment. Hawaii cannot permanently stand alone, and we have no right to expect other powers to be blind to their own interests because we are blind to ours. If Hawaii does not become American then we may as well make up our minds to see it become European or Asiatic. Furthermore, if we fail to continue the building up of our navy, as our means allow, and fail to make all foreign powers understand that when we have adopted a line of policy we have adopted it definitely, and with the intention of backing it up by deeds as well as words, then we might as well abandon once for all any idea that foreign powers will regard the Monroe Doctrine as anything more than an idle threat.