

THE NAVY AS A PEACEMAKER

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Eighth Article in His Series on What America Should Learn from the War

THE course of the present Administration in foreign affairs has now and then combined officiously offensive action toward foreign powers with tame submission to wrongdoing by foreign powers. As a nation we have refused to do our duty to others and yet we have at times tamely submitted to wrong at the hands of others. This has been notably true of our conduct in Mexico; and we have come perilously near such conduct in the case of Japan.

It is also true of our activities as regards the European war. We failed to act in accordance with our obligations as a signatory power to The Hague treaties. At the same time, by certain manifestos issued by the Administration, and by certain laws which Congress passed, we took positions in regard to our shipping rights which there was grave reason for certain neutral powers to question; inasmuch as these positions were adverse to their interests, and inasmuch as it was at least doubtful whether they were warranted by the principles of real neutrality. But when a neutral nation, having been thus provoked by our own improper action, itself acted improperly in searching or seizing our ships the Administration tamely submitted.

Of course it would be a base and ignoble action on our part, after having conspicuously failed to protest against the violation of Belgian neutrality, to show ourselves over-eager to protest against comparatively insignificant violations of our own neutral rights. But we should never have put ourselves in such a position as to make insistence on our own rights seem disregard for the rights of others. The proper course for us to pursue was, on the one hand, scrupulously to see that we did not so act as to injure any contending nation, unless required to do so in the name of morality and of our solemn treaty obligations, and also fearlessly to act on behalf of other nations which were wronged, as required by these treaty obligations; and on the other hand with courteous firmness to warn any nation which, for instance, seized or searched our ships against the accepted rules of international conduct, that this we could not permit, and that such a course should not be persevered in by any nation which desired our good-will.

United States Must Depend on Itself for Protection.

I believe I speak for at least a considerable portion of our people when I say that we wish to make it evident that we feel sincere good-will toward all nations; that any action we take against any nation is taken with the greatest reluctance and only because the wrongdoing of that nation imposes a distinct, although painful, duty upon us; and yet that we do not intend ourselves to submit to wrongdoing from any nation.

Until an efficient World League for Peace is in more than mere process of formation, the United States must depend upon itself for protection where its vital interests are concerned. All the youth of the nation should be trained in warlike exercises and in the use of arms—as well as in the indispensable virtues of courage, self-restraint, and endurance—so as to be fit for national defense.

But the right arm of the nation must be its navy. Our navy is our most efficient peacemaker. In order to use the navy effectively we should clearly define to ourselves the policy we intend to follow and the limits over which we expect our power to extend. Our own coasts, Alaska, Hawaii, and the Panama Canal and its approaches should represent the sphere in which we should expect to be able singlehanded to meet and master any opponent from overseas.

I exclude the Philippines. This is because I feel that the present Administration has definitely committed us to a course of action which may very probably make

the early and complete severance of the Philippines from us not merely desirable but necessary. I have never felt that the Philippines were of any special use to us. But I have felt that we had a great task to perform there and that a great nation is benefited by doing a great task.

It was our bounden duty to work primarily for the interests of the Filipinos; but it was also our bounden duty, inasmuch as the entire responsibility lay upon us, to consult our own judgment and not theirs in finally deciding what was to be done. It was our duty to govern the Islands or to get out of the Islands. It was most certainly not our duty to take the responsibility of staying in the Islands without governing them. Still less was it—or is it—our duty to enter into joint arrangements with other powers about the Islands; arrangements of confused responsibility and divided power of the kind sure to cause mischief.

"Silliness Which Is Worse Than Wickedness."

I had hoped that we would continue to govern the Islands until we were certain that they were able to govern themselves in such fashion as to do justice to other nations and to repel injustice committed on them by other nations. To substitute for such government by ourselves either a government by the Filipinos with us guaranteeing them against outsiders, or a joint guarantee between us and outsiders, would be folly. It is eminently desirable to guarantee the neutrality of small civilized nations which have a high social and cultural status and which are so advanced that they do not fall into disorder or commit wrongdoing on others. But it is eminently undesirable to guarantee the neutrality or sovereignty of an inherently weak nation which is impotent to preserve order at home, to repel assaults from abroad, or to refrain from doing wrong to outsiders.

It is even more undesirable to give such a guarantee with no intention of making it really effective. That this is precisely what the present Administration would be delighted to do, has been shown by its refusal to live up to its Hague promises at the very time that it was making similar new international promises by the batch. To enter into a joint guarantee of neutrality which in emergencies can only be rendered effective by force of arms is to incur a serious responsibility which ought to be undertaken in a serious spirit. To enter into it with no intention of using force, or of preparing force, in order at need to make it effective, represents the kind of silliness which is worse than wickedness.

Above all, we should keep our promises. The present Administration was elected on the outright pledge of giving the Filipinos independence. Apparently its course in the Philippines has proceeded upon the theory that the Filipinos are now fit to govern themselves. Whatever may be our personal and individual beliefs in this matter, we ought not as a nation to break faith or even to seem to break faith. I hope, therefore, that the Filipinos will be given their independence at an early date and without any guarantee from us which might in any way hamper our future action or commit us to staying on the Asiatic Coast.

I do not believe we should keep any foothold whatever in the Philippines. Any kind of position by us in the Philippines merely results in making them our heel of Achilles if we are attacked by a foreign power. They can be of no compensating benefit to us. If we were to retain complete control over them and to continue the course of action which in the past sixteen years has resulted in such immeasurable benefit for them, then I should feel that it was our duty to stay and work for them in spite of the expense incurred by us and the risk we thereby ran.

But inasmuch as we have now promised to leave them and as we are now abandon-

ing our power to work efficiently for and in them, I do not feel that we are warranted in staying in the Islands in an equivocal position and incurring great risk to ourselves without conferring any real compensating advantage, of a kind which we are bound to take into account, on the Filipinos themselves. If the Filipinos are entitled to independence, then we are entitled to be freed from all the responsibility and risk which our presence in the Islands entails upon us.

The great nations of southernmost South America, Brazil, the Argentine, and Chile, are now so far advanced in stability and power that there is no longer any need of applying the Monroe Doctrine as far as they are concerned; and this also relieves us as regards Uruguay and Paraguay, the former of which is well advanced and neither of which has any interests with which we need particularly concern ourselves. As regards all these powers, therefore, we now have no duty save that, doubtless if they got into difficulties and desired our aid, we would gladly extend it, just as, for instance, we would to Australia and Canada. But we can now proceed on the assumption that they are able to help themselves and that any help we should be required to give would be given by us as an auxiliary rather than as a principal.

Our naval problem, therefore, is primarily to provide for the protection of our own coasts and for the protection and policing of Hawaii, Alaska, and the Panama Canal and its approaches. This offers a definite problem which should be solved by our naval men. It is for them, having in view the lessons taught by this war, to say what is the exact type of fleet we require, the number and kind of submarines, of destroyers, of mines and of airships to be used against hostile fleets, in addition to the cruisers and great fighting craft which must remain the backbone of the navy. Civilians may be competent to pass on the merits of the plans suggested by the naval men, but it is the naval men themselves who must make and submit the plans. Lay opinion, however, should steadily keep certain elementary facts in mind.

The navy must primarily be used for offensive purposes. Forts, not the navy, are to be used for defense. The only permanently efficient type of defensive is the offensive. A portion, and a very important portion, of our naval strength must be used with our own coast ordinarily as a base, its striking radius being only a few score miles or a couple of hundred at the outside.

The events of this war have shown that submarines can play a tremendous part. We should develop our force of submarines and train the officers and crews who have charge of them to the highest pitch of efficiency, for they will be useless in time of war unless those aboard them have been trained in time of peace. These submarines, when used in connection with destroyers and with airships, can undoubtedly serve to minimize the danger of successful attack on our own shores.

We Must Continue to Strengthen Our Navy.

But the prime lesson of the war, as regards the navy, is that the nation with a powerful seagoing navy, although it may suffer much annoyance and loss, yet is able on the whole to take the offensive and do great damage to a nation with a less powerful navy. Great Britain's naval superiority over Germany has enabled her completely to paralyze all Germany's sea commerce and to prevent goods from entering her ports. What is far more important, it has enabled the British to land 400,000 or 500,000 men to aid the French, and has enabled Canada and Australia to send a hundred thousand men from the opposite ends of the earth to Great Britain. If Germany had had the more powerful navy, I think no one doubts that England would now have suffered the fate of Belgium.

The capital work done by the German cruisers in the Atlantic, the Pacific, and in the Indian Ocean shows how much can be accomplished in the way of hurting and damaging an enemy by even the weaker power if it possesses fine ships, well handled, able to operate thousands of miles from their own base. We must not fail to recognize this. Neither must we fail heartily and fully to recognize the capital importance of submarines as well as airships, torpedo boat destroyers, and mines, as proved by the events of the last three months.

But nothing that has yet occurred warrants us in feeling that we can afford to ease up in our programme of building battleships and cruisers, especially the former. The German submarines have done wonderfully in this war; their cruisers have done gallantly. But so far as Great Britain is concerned, the vital and essential feature has been the fact that her great battle fleet has kept the German fleet immured in its own home ports, has protected Britain from invasion, and has enabled her land strength to be used to its utmost capacity beside the armies of France and Belgium.

President Is Deliberately Inviting Disaster.

If the men who for years have clamored against Britain's being prepared had had their way; if Britain, during the last quarter of a century, had failed to continue the upbuilding of her navy; if the English statesmen corresponding to Messrs. Wilson and Bryan had seen their ideas triumph, England would now be off the map as a great power and the British Empire would have dissolved, while London, Liverpool, and Birmingham would be in the condition of Antwerp and Brussels.

The efficiency of the German personnel at sea has been no less remarkable than the efficiency of the German personnel on land. This is due partly to the spirit of the nation, and partly to what is itself a consequence of that spirit, the careful training of the navy during peace under the conditions of actual service. When, early in 1909, our battle fleet returned from its sixteen months' voyage around the world, there was no navy in the world which, size for size, ship for ship, and squadron for squadron, stood at a higher pitch of efficiency. We blind ourselves to the truth if we believe that the same is true now.

During the last twenty months, ever since Secretary Meyer left the Navy Department, there has been in our navy a great falling off relatively to other nations. It was quite impossible to avoid this while our national affairs were handled as they have recently been handled. The President who intrusts the Departments of State and the Navy to gentlemen like Messrs. Bryan and Daniels deliberately invites disaster in the event of serious complications with a formidable foreign opponent.

On the whole, there is no class of our citizens, big or small, who so emphatically deserve well of the country as the officers and the enlisted men of the army and navy. No navy in the world has such fine stuff out of which to make men-o'-warships. But they must be heartily backed up, heartily supported, and sedulously trained. They must be treated well, and, above all, they must be treated so as to encourage the best among them by sharply discriminating against the worst. The utmost possible efficiency should be demanded of them. They are emphatically, and in every sense of the word, men; and real men resent with impatient contempt a policy under which less than their best is demanded.

The finest material is utterly worthless without the best personnel. In such a highly specialized service as the navy constant training of a purely military type is an absolute necessity. At present our navy is lamentably short in many different material directions. There is actually but one tor-

pedo for each torpedo tube. It seems incredible that such can be the case; yet it is the case. We are many thousands of men short in our enlistments. We are lamentably short in certain types of vessel.

But the shortcomings in our training are even more lamentable. To keep the navy cruising near Vera Cruz and in Mexican waters, without manoeuvring, invites rapid deterioration. For nearly two years there has been no fleet manoeuvring; and this fact by itself probably means a 25 per cent. loss of efficiency. During the same periods most of the ships have not even had division gun practice. Not only should our navy be as large as our position and interest demand, but it should be kept continually at the highest point of efficiency and should never be used save for its own appropriate military purposes. Of this elementary fact the present Administration seems to be completely ignorant.

It has been said that the United States never learns by experience but only by disaster. Such method of education may at times prove costly. The slothful or shortsighted citizens who are now misled by the cries of the ultra-pacifists would do well to remember events connected with the outbreak of the war with Spain. I was then Assistant Secretary of the Navy. At one bound our people passed from a condition of smug confidence that war never could occur (a smug confidence just as great as any we feel at present) to a condition of utterly unreasoning panic over what might be done to us by a very weak antagonist.

One Governor of a seaboard State announced that none of the National Guard regiments would be allowed to respond to the call of the President because they would be needed to prevent a Spanish invasion of that State—the Spaniards being about as likely to make such an invasion as we were to invade Timbuctoo or Turkestan.

One Congressman besought me to send a battleship to protect Jekyll Island, off the coast of Georgia. Another Congressman asked me to send a battleship to protect a Summer colony which centred around a large Atlantic Coast hotel in Connecticut. In my own neighborhood on Long Island clauses were gravely inserted into the leases of property to the effect that if the Spaniards destroyed the property the leases should terminate. Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, municipal authorities, leading business men, from one end of the country to the other, hysterically demanded, each of them, that a ship should be stationed to defend some particular locality; the theory being that our navy should be strung along both sea coasts, each ship by itself, in a purely defensive attitude—thereby making certain that even the Spanish Navy could pick them all up in detail.

Only Really Useful Defensive Is the Offensive.

One railway President came to protest to me against the choice of Tampa as a point of embarkation for our troops on the ground that his railway was entitled to its share of the profit of transporting troops and munitions of war and that his railway went to New Orleans. The very Senators and Congressmen who had done everything in their power to prevent the building up and the efficient training of the navy screamed and shrieked loudest to have the navy diverted from its proper purpose and used to protect unimportant seaports. Surely our Congressmen and, above all, our people need to learn that in time of crises peace treaties are worthless, and the ultra-pacifists of both sexes merely a burden on and a detriment to the country as a whole; that the only permanently useful defensive is the offensive, and that the navy is properly the offensive weapon of the nation.

The navy of the United States is the right arm of the United States and is emphatically the Peacemaker. Woe to our country if we permit that right arm to become palsied or even to become flabby and inefficient!

Theodore Roosevelt

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