

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN the present crisis the duty of all good citizens is to say and do nothing which may in any way jeopardize the standing of the United States in the face of the great nations of Europe now engaged in so terrible a struggle, or which would hamper our official representatives in any of their actions. However great our regret that we have not as a Nation during the last few years adhered as effectively as we ought to have adhered to the policies which alone can make the United States a real and efficient factor for the peace of righteousness throughout the world, yet in the present crisis such regret must not be permitted to interfere with facing facts as they are. In common with the immense majority of our fellow-countrymen, I shall certainly stand by not only the public servants in control of the Administration at Washington, but also all other public servants no matter of what party, during this crisis; asking only that they with wisdom and good faith endeavor to take every step that can be taken to safeguard the honor and interest of the United States, and, so far as the opportunity offers, to promote the cause of peace and justice throughout the world. My hope, of course, is that in their turn the public servants of the people will take no action so fraught with possible harm to the future of the people as to oblige far-sighted and patriotic men to protest against it. In what I have to say now I wish to speak of actions which affect our permanent National policy. As regards any actions affecting only our immediate interests in this crisis, I shall, wherever possible, simply support the position the Administration takes. What I desire now to say has reference not primarily to the effects of action at this moment, but to the effects as they will be felt for many years after the present crisis is over.

There are certain lessons of continuing National policy which we as a Nation should draw from this contest. It would be a capital mistake on our part if we failed to draw them aright. The time for inculcating such lessons is when the facts are so vividly before us that men of good sense and sound patriotism should be able clearly to see and understand them. Furthermore, the necessity for

immediately inculcating such lessons is proved by the astounding fact that some well-meaning but shortsighted persons by their comments and actions show that they possess the uncanny power attributed to witches in the Middle Ages of reading the most vital lessons backward, and interpreting them in exactly the inverse manner to that which the facts require.

THE PANAMA CANAL

War-ships can now go through the Panama Canal, those of our own as well as those of foreign nations. If the Canal were not in process of fortification, and if we did not have a first-class battle fleet, it would be a mere case of "Ephraim feedeth on wind" if we endeavored to say anything whatever about the Canal. In such case we would in the present crisis occupy the proud position of Luxemburg. But we have taken steps to protect the Canal. Moreover, we have a fleet of good fighting ships. Some well-meaning persons, having in view the fact that the Canal is open, have agitated for a division of our fleet, requesting that part of it be put in the Pacific and part kept in the Atlantic. If there is one lesson more obviously taught than any other by ancient and modern naval history alike, it is that such division of a moderate-sized fleet is unpardonable. It can do no good, and if ever necessity for using the fleet should suddenly arise—and it is only this necessity that warrants the existence of the fleet at all—it might do incalculable harm. The Pacific is as much our home waters as the Atlantic. The Panama Canal should be used continually to transfer our fleet in a body from one ocean to the other. During the course of a great war, which has resulted in all the military and naval nations of the world either using their armies and navies in action or gathering them ready for action, the time is more inopportune than ever to separate our fleet. The effectiveness of the fleet, not merely in action, but as a means of preventing any necessity for action, depends upon the knowledge that it can be used with efficiency. In addition to being well trained in cruising and battle maneuvers, no less than

in the use of great guns, the fleet must be concentrated, or it becomes a positive invitation to attack. At this very moment a powerful German war-ship is in grave jeopardy because it was cruising in the Mediterranean, separated from the main German fleet in the North Sea. In the war between Russia and Japan the greatest factor in securing the Russian defeat was the handling of her navy, and, above all, its division into three parts. The Russian fleet had not been trained in peace so as to be efficient in war; and, moreover, it was scattered in the Baltic, in the Black Sea, in the Yellow Sea, and off Vladivostok. It would have been better had the fleet not been in existence. It was an unpardonable act of folly not to have kept the whole fleet together; just as it was an unpardonable act of folly to leave the most important part of it, that in the Yellow Sea, unprepared for the torpedo attack that was delivered upon it before there was any formal declaration of war. Our battle fleet should always be kept substantially as a unit. The people of the Pacific Slope are quite right in their view that this battle fleet is theirs just as much as it is the fleet of the people along the Atlantic coast or the Gulf of Mexico. It should exercise in the Gulf, it should exercise in the Pacific, and it should exercise in the Atlantic. But it never should be separated into squadrons remote from one another. The war-ships should never be used save as war-ships; they should be kept in a condition of preparedness for war; and they should be kept together, in whatever position may be deemed best on account of military considerations.

ARBITRATION TREATIES

It is well also to think seriously of our National attitude as regards the pending arbitration treaties. There are a number of these now before Congress. It is stated in the papers that they are to be reported and adopted at the present moment, under the idea that in some vague and unstated way the fact may act as a sedative upon the minds of the great military powers now spending all their strength in the tremendous cataclysm of the European war.

Of course the action would have no such effect. If the nations in question even knew of the action, they would regard it with contemptuous and impatient derision, attributing it either to hypocrisy or to unspeakable silliness. I wish to speak respectfully of those

engaged in the advocacy of these treaties. Yet no really patriotic man ought to refrain from pointing out the facts about them when their immediate passage and promulgation seem to be impending. I do not believe that these treaties would do much harm, simply because in the event of any serious trouble they would not be worth the paper on which they are written. But they may do a little harm either by lulling a few well-intentioned but ill-informed people into a false sense of security, or else by causing the United States to act in seeming bad faith if, as might very well happen, her vital interest in some crisis demanded their immediate disregard. There is no use in arguing with the persons who have already made up their minds to favor these treaties, because most of these persons, however worthy and well-meaning, are quite impervious to argument. But there is a large body of citizens who are indifferent in the matter because they are ill informed, and surely these ought to look into the matter.

On July 26, on the eve of the outbreak of the greatest war since the close of the Napoleonic struggles, the Secretary of State gave out to the newspapers a statement about these arbitration treaties, which he apparently thought heralded immediate and universal peace. In this statement he alleged that the especial merit of these treaties was that they closed "the gap" left by the existing arbitration treaties, which specifically state that we will not arbitrate the vital interest, the independence and the honor of the United States. This seems a "gap" which it is not well to close. The proposed treaties provide that even if the vital interest, the independence and the honor of the American people are menaced, there shall be no armed action by us in our defense until investigation by a joint commission is had of the matter at issue. Inside of a week after this amiable declaration, Luxemburg, in spite of treaties explicitly guaranteeing her neutrality and independence, was taken possession of by one of the great military Powers which was on the eve of going to war, and Belgium also, in spite of similar treaties, saw her territory invaded.

I am not taking sides one way or the other as concerns the violation or disregard of these treaties. When giants are engaged in a death wrestle, as they reel to and fro they are certain to trample on whoever gets in the way of either of the huge, straining combatants, *unless it is dangerous to do so.*

I mention these two cases merely as an example. At the present moment there are in existence a score of treaties for the protection of neutrals, for securing the interests of weak powers, for guaranteeing rights to small nations under the rule of big nations, every one of which has been disregarded or has been repudiated without any warning or any excuse by the powers engaged in, or fearful of being drawn into, the tremendous European contest. Weak powers, weak nationalities, weak peoples or sections of peoples everywhere are at this moment lying helpless and oppressed in spite of obligations undertaken and treaties entered into just as solemnly as any of these arbitration treaties could be entered into; and this because of the simple fact that, as the world is now constituted, a treaty, unless potential force is back of it, is not worth the paper upon which it is written. Luxemburg, for instance, did not arm, relying upon the promises of other nations to respect her rights and to protect them. The pacifists had their way in the matter, and in consequence Luxemburg is off the map at this moment. Belgium, however, was armed and went to war. If she succeeds in protecting herself, it will be because she has armed and has not trusted to the treaty, and because she receives aid from big military powers, who would have given it anyhow, as a matter of self-defense—not merely for the defense of Belgium, but for the defense of themselves. When before our eyes a score of treaties and of engagements of the most solemn kind are thus shown literally not to be worth the paper they are written on, there is something both pathetic and ludicrous in the belief that signing names to a bit of paper will of and by itself forward the cause of peace.

Nor is this all. The treaties reported are, it is announced, to be followed by similar treaties with all the nations of the world. They include, for instance, treaties with Denmark and Holland. Both of these small nations are in imminent danger at the present moment of being drawn into the great European cataclysm. They hold islands in the West Indies. Under the proposed treaties, if they, of their own free will, or because they were forced to do so, disposed of these islands to a great military power of Europe, we should be obliged to permit the transfer to be made. Then, during the year or so while the "Commission of Investigation" in-

vestigated with normal diplomatic deliberation, the great power would of course, and in strict accordance with the treaty, take possession of and fortify the islands. We would be left the alternatives of submission or of undertaking war at a disadvantage; whereas in the absence of the treaty we could undoubtedly stop the affair at the outset. In the same way, if Mexico disposed of Magdalena Bay to some great Asiatic power, we would be obliged to permit a joint commission to investigate the matter during a period sufficiently long to enable the place to be turned into a hostile Gibraltar. In events like these, remember, we might be dealing with great military nations; and great nations, as is illustrated in the case of the present European war, only too often pay not one faintest sign of regard to the most solemn treaty which they feel is hostile to their interests. Be it remembered further that any arbitration committee following the principles of international law would in such event certainly refuse to recognize the Monroe Doctrine, and would declare that the party in interest had the right to dispose of St. Thomas, or of Magdalena Bay, or of the Dutch West Indies, to any European or Asiatic power it pleased. Under these circumstances, if we in good faith executed the treaty, we would irreparably damage the United States. As a matter of fact, I have very little doubt that the American people would insist upon the immediate repudiation of the treaty. It would be calamitous if we failed to do so. Yet it would be only less calamitous to repudiate the treaty, and would expose us to the charge of bad faith. Surely it is a dishonorable thing for the Nation to enter into treaties which it might be disastrous, indeed impossible, to keep. An honorable nation, like an honorable man, does not make promises which may be impossible or improper to carry out. Certain matters can and ought to be arbitrated between nations. Our existing arbitration treaties make provision for all such matters. By all means let us carry out these treaties. But let us avoid the unwisdom of making new promises which we would not keep.

It is an entire mistake to suppose that the adoption of these treaties will render easier any possible action by the United States Government in the direction of mediating between the Powers at war in the interest of peace. President Wilson very properly has offered his services as such mediator. Of

course at this stage of the war there could have been no expectation that these offices would be accepted; but later, especially if, after great exertion and great exhaustion, both parties remain able to continue the fight, even though one is at a disadvantage, it may well be that mediation would be more acceptable. In such case, if it is to the interest of both sides to accept it, it will be accepted in precisely the manner that Russia and Japan nine years ago accepted the offer of mediation which led to the Peace of Portsmouth. The fact that the then President did not believe in arbitrating matters which affected the National interest and the honor of the American Nation, so far from being a hindrance, was rather a help in securing the assent of the two Powers concerned to the mediation proposal. Ratification of the proposed arbitration treaties by the Senate of the United States would certainly not increase in even the smallest degree the willingness of any great Power to profit by our offer of mediation. Such action would probably not have any effect one way or the other; for the Powers would accept the offer only when they believed it to their self-interest to do so, and the part we played would be determined either wholly by conditions in Europe or else by these conditions plus the ability shown by our governmental representatives; or, in other words, while the passage of the treaties probably would not militate against any offer of ours of mediation, it is certain that they would not help, and it is barely possible that harm would result, because no competent foreign statesman of the first class believes we would be bound to our detriment by foolish treaties, and therefore our action in passing such treaties and in making promises which would certainly be repudiated is accepted abroad as an evidence partly of utter heedlessness and indifference on our part and partly of a certain insincerity and bad faith. I speak with first-hand knowledge of the effect produced upon all foreign statesmen and foreign leaders of public opinion who possess any weight in their respective countries.

International law is not law at all in the sense that municipal law is law. There can be no real law in any real sense of the word unless there is a judge to declare it and a policeman to enforce it. In international affairs there is no policeman, nor can there be a satisfactory judge as regards many cases. I have already alluded to the Monroe

Doctrine. I shall discuss it again in another moment. It is vital to our interests. Yet it is not a doctrine that we could expect a court of arbitration to accept. Moreover, such a court would often be bound by technical rules which would prevent it from doing justice in the case at issue. Beyond all question, if in 1898 we had submitted to arbitration the questions at issue between us and Spain, any court would have been bound to declare that we had no right to go to war with Spain; and in that case Cuba and the Philippines would to-day be Spanish colonies in which utterly destructive civil wars were still dragging their miserable lengths of butchery and rapine. If in 1846 our differences with Mexico had been put to arbitration, any court would have undoubtedly decided that Mexico had the right to retain Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico; and if the decree of the court had been observed, these four States and portions of Kansas and Colorado would during the last three years have been "enjoying" all the benefits of the self-government, order, happiness, and prosperity that have marked the Mexico of Messrs. Huerta and Villa during this period.

THE MONROE DOCTRINE

Finally, take the Monroe Doctrine. Well-meaning but unwise people have stated that the Monroe Doctrine was obsolete; in other words, that the United States ought no longer to object to Old World Powers acquiring a permanent foothold on the soil of the Western Hemisphere. Remember that this is all that the Monroe Doctrine means. We, who believe in the Monroe Doctrine, insist that no great military Power of the Old World shall be allowed to acquire any foothold on this continent. In Europe at this moment many Powers most anxious to avoid war have nevertheless been drawn into war because it was a physical impossibility to keep out of the conflict into which the great military nations had been precipitated. If these military nations gained a foothold on American soil, or if any others like them gained a foothold, sooner or later this hemisphere would be involved in their conflicts; and in addition to war we should all be required to bear our share of the tremendous burdens which have turned Europe into an armed camp. The arbitration treaties of which I have above spoken, whether consciously or unconsciously, aim to prevent our enforcing the Monroe Doc-

trine. The only way of keeping this continent free from the curse of militarism is to insist upon that Doctrine. Our people have before their eyes in Europe at the present time an example of what would assuredly come to this country if the Great Powers now engaged in hostilities, and the others looking

on and ready to strike if necessary, had been permitted to acquire territorial empire in the Western Hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine is the most potent factor that tells for the future peace of the Western world. It would be criminal folly to discard it, or to adopt any policy inconsistent with it.