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The First Essential of American Defense, August 4, 1940

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THE FIRST ESSENTIAL OF AMERICAN DEFENSE.

Agreement between President Roosevelt and Mr. Willkie on foreign policy and on the method of securing men for national defense, and declaration of their common beliefs on those matters, are essential to the security of America.

President Roosevelt and Mr. Willkie have abundant issues in domestic policy. They sharply disagree as to methods of obtaining national welfare at home. But to put our own house in order we must have first of all a secure wall around our house, so that we may work out our domestic reforms in peace. That is ^{one reason} why immediate adoption of a realistic and courageous foreign policy and defense policy now surpasses in importance every other issue. There never was a time when it was so vital as it is now to take foreign policy and defense policy entirely out of partizan politics.

Without public agreement between President Roosevelt and Mr. Willkie on foreign policy and national defense, and a common leadership by them in these matters, politics and pressure groups will continue to stultify the Administration, the Congress, and the will of the American people. ~~The~~ The fate of the world and the future of the United States hang in the balance today. These are quite likely to be decided before the beginning of ^{the} ~~the~~ next presidential term in January. At issue are the honor, the security, and the vital interests of America. At issue is the question whether the ethics and the civilization of the English-speaking peoples, and their freedom to determine their own way of life, shall endure; or whether the world shall be dominated by the brute force, bad faith, intrigue, and brutal suppressions which are the way of life of Hitlerism. If Hitler should triumph then the United States would be actually open to attack and humiliation. Our democracy, standard of living, trade, high wages, our Monroe Doctrine and our hope of prosperity would all be things of the past. We should be a regimented armed camp for an indefinite period.

Both President Roosevelt and Mr. Willkie have publicly acknowledged the vital importance to the United States of the survival of Britain. Both are anxious, no doubt, to give much stronger expression to their views on this point. But, in the absence ^{of} public agreement between them, if President Roosevelt demanded a bold policy, elements in the Republican Party would cry "war-monger"; and if Mr. Willkie called for a bold and realistic policy, New Dealers and some others would apply the same epithet to him. In this way the country is left in confusion, instead of facing facts, and is deprived of all vigorous leadership in a foreign policy of all aid to Britain, if necessary not even "short of war".

The same lack of declared agreement between President Roosevelt and Mr. Willkie is fatally hampering the passage by Congress of adequate measures of national defense,--especially a law providing for universal registration for war service conscription, a measure that would be useful, too, in combatting "Fifth Column" activities.

If Britain and the British fleet fail, the United States cannot escape a future of humiliation and tragedy. Germany could easily outbuild the United States in ships, planes, guns and munitions if the British blockade of Germany should be broken; for then Germany would have access to raw materials and would have all the industrial plant of conquered and subservient countries added to her own.

Britain and the British fleet might go down through failure of the British blockade of Germany, Italy and contiguous countries, or, conceivably, through invasion of the British Isles. Britain and the British fleet would go down if German-Italian sea and air attack should be able to ^{block} ~~sever~~ the sea-route from the United States, because supplies from ^{the} Americas are vital to the survival of the British Isles. If we lost the protection of the British fleet, we should immediately be confronted by the potentially overwhelming sea-power of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Of what use, in that case, would be the billions of dollars appropriated

for a great American fleet and air force to be ready in four or five years! "A stitch in time saves nine". It is a question of high national policy, not a question to be left to the technical opinion of the War and Navy Departments, whether we are to help Britain now with our ships and planes, and turn the tide of this war, or whether we are to take the chance of having to fight the world alone against overwhelming odds. What are the U. S. Navy and Merchant Marine for, if not to defend the United States when danger is most critical and when the use of our Navy is most likely to avert disaster? One American destroyer to help stop Hitler now may well be worth ten a few weeks or months hence.

There is no thought of sending an expeditionary land force to fight in Europe. Isolationists who talk about "keeping out of war" seem to forget that it takes only one nation to make a war; and that, with Hitler victorious, the United States would have only the choice between humiliation and misery, or war,--without allies and unprepared. Isolationists who obstruct American aid to Britain now, and who oppose registration for universal service now, are paving the way for years of humiliation and war for the United States a little later on,--if Britain falls. Failure to help Britain and the British fleet now, even to the point of joining the naval warfare against Germany, is to make it almost certain that American youth will be sacrificed in hundredfold greater numbers later on.

No thoughtful and informed American who looks at the situation without prejudice, and with nothing but the good of America at heart, can deny that Britain and the British fleet are the only adequate defense that today stands between the United States and Hitler. In this unprecedented crisis, are the American Government and people to be stultified by political and pressure groups,--until it is too late?

Woodbury, Conn., August 4, 1940.

F. H. Huntington