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IX. American Military Operations in French North Africa

Messages of President Roosevelt to Officials of France, Portugal, Spain, Algeria, and Tunisia; and Replies

(Dept. of State Bulletin, November 21, 1942, Vol. VII, No. 177)

In connection with the current military operations in French North Africa, the President has sent the following message to the Chief of the French State, Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain:

“MARSHAL PÉTAIN:

“I am sending this message to you as the Chef d’État of the United States to the Chef d’État of the Republic of France.

“When your Government concluded the Armistice Convention in 1940, it was impossible for any of us to foresee the program of systematic plunder which the German Reich would inflict on the French people.

“That program, implemented by blackmail and robbery, has deprived the French population of its means of subsistence, its savings; it has paralyzed French industry and transport: it has looted French factories and French farms—all for the benefit of a Nazi Reich and a Fascist Italy under whose Governments no liberty loving nation could long exist.

“As an old friend of France and the people of France, my anger and sympathy grows with every passing day when I consider the misery, the want, and the absence from their homes of the flower of French manhood. Germany has neglected no opportunity to demoralize and degrade your great nation.

“Today, with greedy eyes on that Empire which France so laboriously constructed, Germany and Italy are proposing to invade and occupy French North Africa in

order that they may execute their schemes of domination and conquest over the whole of that continent.

“I know you will realize that such a conquest of Africa would not stop there but would be the prelude to further attempts by Germany and Italy to threaten the conquest of large portions of the American Hemisphere, large dominations over the Near and Middle East, and a joining of hands in the Far East with those military leaders of Japan who seek to dominate the whole of the Pacific.

“It is evident, of course, that an invasion and occupation of French North and West Africa would constitute for the United States and all of the American Republics the gravest kind of menace to their security—just as it would sound the death knell of the French Empire.

“In the light of all the evidence of our enemy’s intentions and plans, I have, therefore, decided to dispatch to North Africa powerful American armed forces to cooperate with the governing agencies of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco in repelling this latest act in the long litany of German and Italian international crime.

“These indomitable American forces are equipped with massive and adequate weapons of modern warfare which will be available for your compatriots in North Africa in our mutual fight against the common enemy.

“I am making all of this clear to the French Authorities in North Africa, and I am calling on them for their cooperation in repelling Axis threats. My clear purpose is to support and aid the French Authorities and their administrations. That is the immediate aim of these American armies.

“I need not tell you that the ultimate and greater aim is the liberation of France and its Empire from the Axis yoke. In so doing we provide automatically for the security of the Americas.

“I need not again affirm to you that the United States of America seeks no territories and remembers always the historic friendship and mutual aid which we have so greatly given to each other.

“I send to you and, through you, to the people of France my deep hope and belief that we are all of us soon to enter into happier days.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT”

In reply, Marshal Pétain sent the following message to President Roosevelt:

“It is with stupor and sadness that I learned tonight of the aggression of your troops against North Africa.

“I have read your message. You invoke pretexts which nothing justifies. You attribute to your enemies intentions which have not ever been manifested in acts. I have always declared that we would defend our Empire if it were attacked; you should know that we would defend it against any aggressor whoever he might be. You should know that I would keep my word.

“In our misfortune I had, when requesting the armistice, protected our Empire and it is you who acting in the name of a country to which so many memories and ties bind us have taken such a cruel initiative.

“France and her honor are at stake.

“We are attacked; we shall defend ourselves; this is the order I am giving.

PHILIPPE PÉTAIN”