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XLVIII. Defense of Iceland by United States Forces

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Following is the text of President Roosevelt's message to Congress, announcing occupation of Iceland by United States forces, together with the texts of the message from the Prime Minister of Iceland inviting such action, and of Mr. Roosevelt's reply:

Message to Congress

I am transmitting herewith for the information of the Congress a message I received from the Prime Minister of Iceland on July 1, and the reply I addressed on the same day to the Prime Minister of Iceland in response to this message.

In accordance with the understanding so reached, forces of the United States Navy have today arrived in Iceland in order to supplement, and eventually to replace, the British forces which have until now been stationed in Iceland in order to insure the adequate defense of that country.

As I stated in my message to the Congress of Sept. 3 last regarding the acquisition of certain naval and air bases from Great Britain in exchange for certain over-age destroyers, considerations of safety from overseas attack are fundamental.

The United States cannot permit the occupation by Germany of strategic outposts in the Atlantic to be used as air or naval bases for eventual attack against the Western Hemisphere. We have no desire to see any change in the present sovereignty of those regions.

Assurance that such outposts in our defense frontier remain in friendly hands is the very foundation of our national security and of the national security of every one of the independent nations of the New World.

For the same reason substantial forces of the United States have now been sent to the bases acquired last year from Great Britain in Trinidad and in British Guiana, in the south, in order to forestall any pincers movement undertaken by Germany against the Western Hemisphere. It is essential that Germany should not be able successfully to employ such tactics through sudden seizure of strategic points in the South Atlantic and in the North Atlantic.

The occupation of Iceland by Germany would constitute a serious threat in three dimensions:

The threat against Greenland and the northern portion of the North American continent, including the islands which lie off it.

The threat against all shipping in the North Atlantic.

The threat against the steady flow of munitions to Britain—which is a matter of broad policy clearly approved by the Congress.

It is, therefore, imperative that the approaches between the Americas and those strategic outposts, the safety of which this country regards as essential to its national security and which it must therefore defend, shall remain open and free from all hostile activity or threat thereof.

As Commander-in-Chief I have consequently issued orders to the Navy that all necessary steps be taken to insure the safety of communications in the approaches between Iceland and the United States, as well as on the seas between the United States and all other strategic outposts.

This government will insure the adequate defense of Iceland with full recognition of the independence of Iceland as a sovereign state.

In my message to the Prime Minister of Iceland I have given the people of Iceland the assurance that the American forces sent there would in no way interfere with the internal and domestic affairs of that country, and that immediately upon the termination of the present international emergency all American forces will be at once withdrawn, leaving the people of Iceland and their government in full and sovereign control of their own territory.

Prime Minister's Message

In a conversation of June 24, the British Minister explained that British forces in Iceland are required elsewhere. At the same time he stressed the immense importance of adequate defense of Iceland. He also called my attention to the declaration of the President of the United States to the effect that he must take all necessary measures to insure the safety of the Western Hemisphere—one of the President's measures is to assist in the defense of Iceland—and that the President is therefore prepared to send here immediately United States troops to supplement and eventually to replace the British force here. But that he does not consider that he can take this course except at the invitation of the Iceland Government.

After careful consideration of all circumstances the Iceland Government, in view of the present state of affairs, admit that this measure is in accordance with the interest of Iceland, and therefore are ready to entrust the protection of Iceland to United States on the following conditions:

1. United States promise to withdraw all their military forces land, air and sea from Iceland immediately on conclusion of present war.
2. United States further promise to recognize the absolute independence and sovereignty of Iceland and to exercise their best efforts with those Powers which will negotiate the peace treaty at the conclusion of the present war in order that such treaty shall likewise recognize the absolute independence and sovereignty of Iceland.
3. United States promise not to interfere with Government of Iceland neither while their armed forces remain in this country nor afterward.

Picked Troops Requested

4. United States promise to organize the defense of the country in such a way as to insure the greatest possible safety for the inhabitants themselves and to assure that they suffer minimum disturbance from military activities; these activities being carried out in consultation with Iceland authorities as far as possible. Also because of small popula-

tion of Iceland and consequent danger to nation from presence of a numerous army, great care must be taken that only picked troops are sent here. Military authorities should be also instructed to keep in mind that Icelanders have been unarmed for centuries and are entirely unaccustomed to military discipline, and conduct of troops toward the inhabitants of the country should be ordered accordingly.

5. United States undertake defense of the country without expense to Iceland and promise compensation for all damage occasioned to the inhabitants by their military activities.

6. United States promise to further interests of Iceland in every way in their power, including that of supplying the country with sufficient necessities, of securing necessary shipping to and from the country and of making in other respects favorable commercial and trade agreements with it.

7. Iceland Government expects that declaration made by President in this connection will be in agreement with these promises on part of Iceland, and Government would much appreciate its being given the opportunity of being cognizant with word of this declaration before it is published.

8. On part of Iceland, it is considered obvious that if United States undertake defense of the country it must be strong enough to meet every eventuality and particularly in the beginning it is expected that as far as possible effort will be made to prevent any special danger in connection with change-over. Iceland Government lays special stress on there being sufficient airplanes for defensive purposes wherever they are required and they can be used as soon as decision is made for United States to undertake the defense of the country.

This decision is made on the part of Iceland as an absolutely free and sovereign state and it is considered as a matter of course that the United States will from the beginning recognize this legal status of the country, both states immediately exchanging diplomatic representatives.

The President's Reply

I have received your message in which you have informed me that after careful consideration of all the circumstances

the Iceland Government, in view of the present state of affairs, admits that the sending to Iceland of United States troops to supplement and eventually to replace the present British forces there would be in accordance with the interests of Iceland and that, therefore, the Iceland Government is ready to entrust the protection of Iceland to the United States on the following considerations:

[At this point the message repeated verbatim the eight conditions set forth in the message of the Prime Minister.]

You further state that this decision is made on the part of Iceland as an absolutely free and sovereign State and that it is considered as a matter of course that the United States will from the beginning recognize the legal status of Iceland, both States immediately exchanging diplomatic representatives.

I take measure in confirming to you hereby that the conditions set forth in your communication now under acknowledgment are fully acceptable to the Government of the United States and that these conditions will be observed in the relations between the United States and Iceland. I may further say that it will give me pleasure to request of the Congress its agreement in order that diplomatic representatives may be exchanged between our two countries.

It is the announced policy of the Government of the United States to undertake to join with the other nations of the Western Hemisphere in the defense of the New World against any attempt of aggression. In the opinion of this Government, it is imperative that the integrity and independence of Iceland should be preserved because of the fact that any occupation of Iceland by a power whose only too clearly apparent plans for world conquest include the domination of the peoples of the New World would at once directly menace the security of the entire Western Hemisphere.

It is for that reason that in response to your message, the Government of the United States will send immediately troops to supplement and eventually to replace the British forces now there.

The steps so taken by the Government of the United States are taken in full recognition of the sovereignty and independ-

ence of Iceland and with the clear understanding that American military or naval forces sent to Iceland will in no wise interfere in the slightest degree with the internal and domestic affairs of the Icelandic people; and with the further understanding that immediately upon the termination of the present international emergency, all such military and naval forces will be at once withdrawn, leaving the people of Iceland and their government in full sovereign control of their own territory.

The people of Iceland hold a proud position among the democracies of the world, with a historic tradition of freedom and individual liberty which is more than a thousand years old. It is, therefore, all the more appropriate that in response to your message, the Government of the United States, while undertaking this defensive measure for the preservation of the independence and security of the democracies of the New World should at the same time be afforded the privilege of cooperating in this manner with our government in the defense of the historic democracy of Iceland.

I am communicating this message, for their information, to the governments of all of the other nations of the Western Hemisphere.