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XLV. Sinking of the S. S. "Robin Moor"

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"*To the Congress of the United States of America:*

"I am under the necessity of bringing to the attention of the Congress the ruthless sinking by a German submarine on May 21 of an American ship, the Robin Moor, in the south Atlantic Ocean (25°40′ West, 6°10′ North) while the vessel was on the high seas en route to South Africa.

"According to the formal depositions of survivors the vessel was sunk within 30 minutes from the time of the first warning given by the Commander of the submarine to an officer of the Robin Moor.

"The submarine did not display its flag, and the Commander did not announce its nationality.

"The Robin Moor was sunk without provision for the safety of the passengers and crew.

"It was sunk despite the fact that its American nationality was admittedly known to the Commander of the submarine and that its nationality was likewise clearly indicated by the flag and other markings.

"The sinking of this American ship by a German submarine flagrantly violated the right of United States vessels freely to navigate the seas subject only to a belligerent right accepted under international law. This belligerent right, as is known to the German Government, does not include the right deliberately to sink a merchant vessel, leaving the passengers and crew to the mercies of the elements. On the contrary the belligerent is required to place the passengers and crew in places of safety.

"The passengers and crew of the Robin Moor were left afloat in small lifeboats from approximately two to three weeks when they were accidentally discovered and rescued by friendly vessels. This chance rescue does not lessen the brutality of casting the boats adrift in mid-ocean.

"The total disregard shown for the most elementary principles of international law and of humanity brands the sinking of the Robin Moor as the act of an international outlaw.

"The Government of the United States holds Germany responsible for the outrageous and indefensible sinking of the Robin Moor. Full reparation for the losses and damages suffered by American nationals will be expected from the German Government.

"Our Government believes that freedom from cruelty and inhuman treatment is a natural right. It is not a grace to be given or withheld at the will of those temporarily in a position to exert force over defenseless people.

"Were this incident capable of being regarded apart from a more general background, its implications might be less serious—but it must be interpreted in the light of a declared and actively pursued policy of frightfulness and intimidation which has been used by the German Reich as an instrument of international policy.

"The present leaders of the German Reich have not hesitated to engage in acts of cruelty and many other forms of terror against the innocent and the helpless in other countries, apparently in the belief that methods of terrorism will lead to a state of affairs permitting the German Reich to exact acquiescence from the nations victimized.

"This Government can only assume that the Government of the German Reich hopes through the commission of such infamous acts of cruelty to helpless and innocent men, women, and children to intimidate the United States and other nations into a course of non-resistance to German plans for universal conquest—a conquest based upon lawlessness and terror on land and piracy on the sea.

"Such methods are fully in keeping with the methods of terrorism hitherto employed by the present leaders of the German Reich in the policy which they have pursued toward many other nations subsequently victimized.

"The Government of the German Reich may however be assured that the United States will neither be intimidated nor will it acquiesce in the plans for world-domination which the present leaders of Germany may have.

"We are warranted in considering whether the case of the *Robin Moor* is not a step in a campaign against the United States analogous to campaigns against other nations. We cannot place reliance on official declarations to the contrary.

"Like statements, declarations, and even solemn pledges have been forthcoming in respect of many nations, commencing with the statement that the Government of the German Reich considered its territorial aspiration satisfied when it seized Austria by force. Evidence that the Government of the German Reich continues to plan further conquest and domination is convincing, and, indeed, scarcely disputed.

"Viewed in the light of the circumstances the sinking of the *Robin Moor* becomes a disclosure of policy as well as an example of method. Heretofore, lawless acts of violence have been preludes to schemes of land conquest. This one appears to be a first step in assertion of the supreme purpose of the German Reich to seize control of the high seas, the conquest of Great Britain being an indispensable part of that seizure.

"Its general purpose would appear to be to drive American commerce from the ocean wherever such commerce was considered a disadvantage to German designs; and its specific purpose would appear to be interruption of our trade with all friendly countries.

"We must take it that notice has now been served upon us that no American ship or cargo on any of the seven seas can consider itself immune from acts of piracy. Notice is served on us, in effect, that the German Reich proposes so to intimidate the United States that we would be dissuaded from carrying out our chosen policy of helping Britain to survive.

"In brief, we must take the sinking of the *Robin Moor* as a warning to the United States not to resist the Nazi movement of world conquest. It is a warning that the United States may use the high seas of the world only with Nazi consent.

"Were we to yield on this we would inevitably submit to world-domination at the hands of the present leaders of the German Reich.

"We are not yielding and we do not propose to yield.

FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT"

"THE WHITE HOUSE,
"*June 20, 1941.*"