
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

**Series 2: “ You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR
and the New Deal**

File No. 1371

1941 June 20

**Message to Congress re
the Sinking of the "Robin Moor"**

June 20, 1941

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STEPHEN EARLY
Secretary to the President

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, 60° 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 midocean.

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 towards 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 aspirations 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

June 18, 1941

DRAFT

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. ~~It was sunk despite the fact that an examination of the ship's manifest would have shown that~~

the

the Robin Moor was not carrying any munitions of war.

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~~ ~~certain~~ belligerent rights ~~as~~ accepted under international law. ^{This} ~~These~~ belligerent rights, as is known to the German Government, do ^{is} not include the right deliberately to sink a merchant vessel, leaving the passengers and crew to the mercies of the elements. On the contrary, ~~in the absence~~ ~~of these rights~~ 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 sinking the
boats adrift in North Atlantic.
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. ~~It will later be present to the German~~

~~Government's demand for~~ ^{Full} reparation for the losses and

damages suffered by American nationals ^{will be expected}
^{from the German Government.}

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inhuman treatment

is a natural ~~human~~ right. It is not a grace to be given

or withheld at the will of those temporarily in a position

to exert force over defenceless people, ~~depending on con-~~

~~siderations of policy.~~

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 ^{& 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

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~~inserted here for later~~

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 ^{which} 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 towards 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.

contrary. ^A 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 aspirations 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} ~~step~~ that seizure. ^A 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 ^{A//} friendly countries, _A

~~including Hitler.~~

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. ^{(A) ~~A~~} In brief,

we must take the sinking of the Robin Moor as a warning

~~that~~ the United States ~~is not~~ ^{not} ~~to~~ resist ^{The} ~~the~~ ^{Nazi} ~~movement~~ of world conquest, ^{It is a warning} ~~even upon the adjacent~~ ^{States} ~~high seas; still less to do so by aiding Great Britain,~~ ^{that the United States see the high seas} ~~of the world only with Nazi consent.~~

Were we to yield on this we ~~would~~ inevitably yield

~~submit~~ ^{to} world domination ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ hands of the present leaders of the German Reich.

~~The United States ~~will~~ undertake whatever measures it considers necessary to prevent this attempt at control of the high seas, and thereby to protect the security of the American people and to safeguard the defense of the~~

~~Western Hemisphere~~

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

Notice is served on us in effect, that
the German Reich proposes to destroy
Britain in order to dominate all

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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Same paragraph

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.