

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945)

## **Radio Address Announcing an Unlimited National Emergency**

*given on May 27, 1941*

I AM SPEAKING tonight from the White House in the presence of the Governing Board of the Pan American Union, the Canadian Minister, and their families. The members of this Board are the Ambassadors and Ministers of the American Republics in Washington. It is appropriate that I do this for now, as never before, the unity of the American Republics is of supreme importance to each and every one of us and to the cause of freedom throughout the world.

5 Our future independence is bound up with the future independence of all of our sister Republics.

The pressing problems that confront us are military and naval problems. We cannot afford to approach them from the point of view of wishful thinkers or sentimentalists. What we face is cold, hard fact.

The first and fundamental fact is that what started as a European war has developed, as the Nazis always intended it should develop, into a world war for world domination.

10 Adolf Hitler never considered the domination of Europe as an end in itself. European conquest was but a step toward ultimate goals in all the other continents. It is unmistakably apparent to all of us that, unless the advance of Hitlerism is forcibly checked now, the Western Hemisphere will be within range of the Nazi weapons of destruction.

For our own defense we have accordingly undertaken certain obviously necessary measures:

First, we have joined in concluding a series of agreements with all the other American Republics. This further  
15 solidified our hemisphere against the common danger.

And then, a year ago, we launched, and are successfully carrying out, the largest armament production program we have ever undertaken.

We have added substantially to our splendid Navy, and we have mustered our manpower to build up a new Army which is already worthy of the highest traditions of our military service.

20 We instituted a policy of aid for the democracies—the Nations which have fought for the continuation of human liberties.

This policy had its origin in the first month of the war, when I urged upon the Congress repeal of the arms embargo provisions in the old Neutrality Law, and in that message of September 3, 1939, I said, "I should like to be able to offer the hope that the shadow over the world might swiftly pass. I cannot. The facts compel my stating, with candor, that  
25 darker periods may lie ahead."

In the subsequent months, the shadows deepened and lengthened. And the night spread over Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France.

In June, 1940, Britain stood alone, faced by the same machine of terror which had overwhelmed her allies. Our Government rushed arms to meet her desperate needs.

30 In September, 1940, an agreement was completed with Great Britain for the trade of fifty destroyers for eight important offshore bases.

And in March, 1941, the Congress passed the Lend-Lease Bill and an appropriation of seven billion dollars to implement it. This law realistically provided for material aid "for the government of any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States."

35 Our whole program of aid for the democracies has been based on hard-headed concern for our own security and for the kind of safe and civilized world in which we wish to live. Every dollar of material that we send helps to keep the dictators away from our own hemisphere, and every day that they are held off gives us time to build more guns and tanks and planes and ships.

We have made no pretense about our own self-interest in this aid. Great Britain understands it—and so does Nazi  
40 Germany.

And now—after a year—Britain still fights gallantly, on a "far-flung battle line." We have doubled and redoubled our vast production, increasing, month by month, our material supply of the tools of war for ourselves and for Britain and for China- and eventually for all the democracies.

The supply of these tools will not fail—it will increase.

45 With greatly augmented strength, the United States and the other American Republics now chart their course in the situation of today.

Your Government knows what terms Hitler, if victorious, would impose. They are, indeed, the only terms on which he would accept a so-called "negotiated" peace.

And, under those terms, Germany would literally parcel out the world- hoisting the swastika itself over vast territories  
50 and populations, and setting up puppet governments of its own choosing, wholly subject to the will and the policy of a conqueror.

To the people of the Americas, a triumphant Hitler would say, as he said after the seizure of Austria, and as he said after Munich, and as he said after the seizure of Czechoslovakia: "I am now completely satisfied. This is the last territorial readjustment I will seek." And he would of course add: "All we want is peace, friendship, and profitable  
55 trade relations with you in the New World."

Were any of us in the Americas so incredibly simple and forgetful as to accept those honeyed words, what would then happen?

Those in the New World who were seeking profits would be urging that all that the dictatorships desired was "peace." They would oppose toil and taxes for more American armament. And meanwhile, the dictatorships would be forcing  
60 the enslaved peoples of their Old World conquests into a system they are even now organizing to build a naval and air force intended to gain and hold and be master of the Atlantic and the Pacific as well.

They would fasten an economic stranglehold upon our several Nations. Quislings would be found to subvert the governments in our Republics; and the Nazis would back their fifth columns with invasion, if necessary.

No, I am not speculating about all this. I merely repeat what is already in the Nazi book of world conquest. They plan  
65 to treat the Latin American Nations as they are now treating the Balkans. They plan then to strangle the United States of America and the Dominion of Canada.

The American laborer would have to compete with slave labor in the rest of the world. Minimum wages, maximum hours? Nonsense! Wages and hours would be fixed by Hitler. The dignity and power and standard of living of the American worker and farmer would be gone. Trade unions would become historical relics, and collective bargaining a  
70 joke.

Farm income? What happens to all farm surpluses without any foreign trade? The American farmer would get for his products exactly what Hitler wanted to give. The farmer would face obvious disaster and complete regimentation.

Tariff walls- Chinese walls of isolation—would be futile. Freedom to trade is essential to our economic life. We do not eat all the food we can produce; and we do not burn all the oil we can pump; we do not use all the goods we can  
75 manufacture. It would not be an American wall to keep Nazi goods out; it would be a Nazi wall to keep us in.

The whole fabric of working life as we know it—business and manufacturing, mining and agriculture—all would be mangled and crippled under such a system. Yet to maintain even that crippled independence would require permanent conscription of our manpower; it would curtail the funds we could spend on education, on housing, on public works, on flood control, on health and, instead, we should be permanently pouring our resources into armaments; and, year in  
80 and year out, standing day and night watch against the destruction of our cities.

Yes, even our right of worship would be threatened. The Nazi world does not recognize any God except Hitler; for the Nazis are as ruthless as the Communists in the denial of God. What place has religion which preaches the dignity of the human being, the majesty of the human soul, in a world where moral standards are measured by treachery and bribery and fifth columnists? Will our children, too, wander off, goose-stepping in search of new gods?

85 We do not accept, we will not permit, this Nazi "shape of things to come." It will never be forced upon us, if we act in this present crisis with the wisdom and the courage which have distinguished our country in all the crises of the past.

Today, the Nazis have taken military possession of the greater part of Europe. In Africa they have occupied Tripoli and Libya, and they are threatening Egypt, the Suez Canal, and the Near East. But their plans do not stop there, for the Indian Ocean is the gateway to the farther East.

90 They also have the armed power at any moment to occupy Spain and Portugal; and that threat extends not only to French North Africa and the western end of the Mediterranean but it extends also to the Atlantic fortress of Dakar, and to the island outposts of the New World—the Azores and Cape Verde Islands.

The Cape Verde Islands are only seven hours' distance from Brazil by bomber or troop-carrying planes. They dominate shipping routes to and from the South Atlantic.

95 The war is approaching the brink of the Western Hemisphere itself. It is coming very close to home.

Control or occupation by Nazi forces of any of the islands of the Atlantic would jeopardize the immediate safety of portions of North and South America, and of the island possessions of the United States, and, therefore, the ultimate safety of the continental United States itself.

Hitler's plan of world domination would be near its accomplishment today, were it not for two factors: One is the epic  
100 resistance of Britain, her colonies, and the great Dominions, fighting not only to maintain the existence of the Island of Britain, but also to hold the Near East and Africa. The other is the magnificent defense of China, which will, I have reason to believe, increase in strength. All of these, together, are preventing the Axis from winning control of the seas by ships and aircraft.

The Axis Powers can never achieve their objective of world domination unless they first obtain control of the seas.  
105 That is their supreme purpose today; and to achieve it, they must capture Great Britain.

They could then have the power to dictate to the Western Hemisphere. No spurious argument, no appeal to sentiment, no false pledges like those given by Hitler at Munich, can deceive the American people into believing that he and his Axis partners would not, with Britain defeated, close in relentlessly on this hemisphere of ours.

But if the Axis Powers fail to gain control of the seas, then they are certainly defeated. Their dreams of world  
110 domination will then go by the board; and the criminal leaders who started this war will suffer inevitable disaster.

Both they and their people know this- and they and their people are afraid. That is why they are risking everything they have, conducting desperate attempts to break through to the command of the ocean. Once they are limited to a continuing land war, their cruel forces of occupation will be unable to keep their heel on the necks of the millions of innocent, oppressed peoples on the continent of Europe; and in the end, their whole structure will break into little  
115 pieces. And let us remember, the wider the Nazi land effort, the greater is their ultimate danger.

We do not forget the silenced peoples. The masters of Germany have marked these silenced peoples and their children's children for slavery- those, at least, who have not been assassinated or escaped to free soil. But those people—spiritually unconquered: Austrians, Czechs, Poles, Norwegians, Dutch, Belgians, Frenchmen, Greeks, Southern Slavs- yes, even those Italians and Germans who themselves have been enslaved- will prove to be a  
120 powerful force in the final disruption of the Nazi system.

All freedom- meaning freedom to live, and not freedom to conquer and subjugate other peoples—depends on freedom of the seas. All of American history—North, Central, and South American history—has been inevitably tied up with those words, "freedom of the seas."

Since 1799, 142 years ago, when our infant Navy made the West Indies and the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico  
125 safe for American ships; since 1804 and 1805 when we made all peaceful commerce safe from the depredations of the Barbary pirates; since the War of 1812, which was fought for the preservation of sailors' rights; since 1867, when our sea power made it possible for the Mexicans to expel the French Army of Louis Napoleon, we have striven and fought in defense of freedom of the seas for our own shipping, for the commerce of our sister Republics, for the right of all Nations to use the highways of world trade—and for our own safety.

130 During the first World War we were able to escort merchant ships by the use of small cruisers, gunboats, and destroyers; and that type, called a convoy, was effective against submarines. In this second World War, however, the problem is greater. It is different because the attack on the freedom of the seas is now fourfold: first—the improved submarine; second—the much greater use of the heavily armed raiding cruiser or the hit-and-run battleship; third—the

bombing airplane, which is capable of destroying merchant ships seven or eight hundred miles from its nearest base;  
135 and fourth—the destruction of merchant ships in those ports of the world that are accessible to bombing attack.

The Battle of the Atlantic now extends from the icy waters of the North Pole to the frozen continent of the Antarctic. Throughout this huge area, there have been sinkings of merchant ships in alarming and increasing numbers by Nazi raiders or submarines. There have been sinkings even of ships carrying neutral flags. There have been sinkings in the South Atlantic, off West Africa and the Cape Verde Islands; between the Azores and the islands off the American  
140 coast; and between Greenland and Iceland. Great numbers of these sinkings have been actually within the waters of the Western Hemisphere itself.

The blunt truth is this—and I reveal this with the full knowledge of the British Government: the present rate of Nazi sinkings of merchant ships is more than three times as high as the capacity of British shipyards to replace them; it is more than twice the combined British and American output of merchant ships today.

145 We can answer this peril by two simultaneous measures: first, by speeding up and increasing our own great shipbuilding program; and second, by helping to cut down the losses on the high seas.

Attacks on shipping off the very shores of land which we are determined to protect, present an actual military danger to the Americas. And that danger has recently been heavily underlined by the presence in Western Hemisphere waters of a Nazi battleship of great striking power.

150 You remember that most of the supplies for Britain go by a northerly route, which comes close to Greenland and the nearby island of Iceland. Germany's heaviest attack is on that route. Nazi occupation of Iceland or bases in Greenland would bring the war close to our own continental shores, because those places are stepping-stones to Labrador and Newfoundland, to Nova Scotia, yes, to the northern United States itself, including the great industrial centers of the North, the East, and the Middle West.

155 Equally, the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands, if occupied or controlled by Germany, would directly endanger the freedom of the Atlantic and our own American physical safety. Under German domination those islands would become bases for submarines, warships, and airplanes raiding the waters that lie immediately off our own coasts and attacking the shipping in the South Atlantic. They would provide a springboard for actual attack against the integrity and the independence of Brazil and her neighboring Republics.

160 I have said on many occasions that the United States is mustering its men and its resources only for purposes of defense—only to repel attack. I repeat that statement now. But we must be realistic when we use the word "attack"; we have to relate it to the lightning speed of modern warfare.

Some people seem to think that we are not attacked until bombs actually drop in the streets of New York or San Francisco or New Orleans or Chicago. But they are simply shutting their eyes to the lesson that we must learn from  
165 the fate of every Nation that the Nazis have conquered.

The attack on Czechoslovakia began with the conquest of Austria. The attack on Norway began with the occupation of Denmark. The attack on Greece began with occupation of Albania and Bulgaria. The attack on the Suez Canal began with the invasion of the Balkans and North Africa, and the attack on the United States can begin with the domination of any base which menaces our security—north or south.

170 Nobody can foretell tonight just when the acts of the dictators will ripen into attack on this hemisphere and us. But we know enough by now to realize that it would be suicide to wait until they are in our front yard.

When your enemy comes at you in a tank or a bombing plane, if you hold your fire until you see the whites of his eyes, you will never know what hit you. Our Bunker Hill of tomorrow may be several thousand miles from Boston.

Anyone with an atlas, anyone with a reasonable knowledge of the sudden striking force of modern war, knows that it  
175 is stupid to wait until a probable enemy has gained a foothold from which to attack. Old-fashioned common sense calls for the use of a strategy that will prevent such an enemy from gaining a foothold in the first place.

We have, accordingly, extended our patrol in North and South Atlantic waters. We are steadily adding more and more ships and planes to that patrol. It is well known that the strength of the Atlantic Fleet has been greatly increased during the past year, and that it is constantly being built up.

180 These ships and planes warn of the presence of attacking raiders, on the sea, under the sea, and above the sea. The danger from these raiders is, of course, greatly lessened if their location is definitely known. We are thus being forewarned. We shall be on our guard against efforts to establish Nazi bases closer to our hemisphere.

The deadly facts of war compel Nations, for simple self-preservation, to make stern choices. It does not make sense, for instance, to say, "I believe in the defense of all the Western Hemisphere," and in the next breath to say, "I will not  
185 fight for that defense until the enemy has landed on our shores." If we believe in the independence and the integrity of the Americas, we must be willing to fight, to fight to defend them just as much as we would to fight for the safety of our own homes.

It is time for us to realize that the safety of American homes even in the center of this our own country has a very definite relationship to the continued safety of homes in Nova Scotia or Trinidad or Brazil.

190 Our national policy today, therefore, is this:

First, we shall actively resist wherever necessary, and with all our resources, every attempt by Hitler to extend his Nazi domination to the Western Hemisphere, or to threaten it. We shall actively resist his every attempt to gain control of the seas. We insist upon the vital importance of keeping Hitlerism away from any point in the world which could be used or would be used as a base of attack against the Americas.

195 Second, from the point of view of strict naval and military necessity, we shall give every possible assistance to Britain and to all who, with Britain, are resisting Hitlerism or its equivalent with force of arms. Our patrols are helping now to insure delivery of the needed supplies to Britain. All additional measures necessary to deliver the goods will be taken. Any and all further methods or combination of methods, which can or should be utilized, are being devised by our military and naval technicians, who, with me, will work out and put into effect such new and additional safeguards as  
200 may be needed.

I say that the delivery of needed supplies to Britain is imperative. I say that this can be done; it must be done; and it will be done.

To the other American Nations- twenty Republics and the Dominion of Canada—I say this: the United States does not merely propose these purposes, but is actively engaged today in carrying them out.

205 I say to them further: you may disregard those few citizens of the United States who contend that we are disunited and cannot act.

There are some timid ones among us who say that we must preserve peace at any price- lest we lose our liberties forever.

To them I say this: never in the history of the world has a Nation lost its democracy by a successful struggle to defend  
210 its democracy. We must not be defeated by the fear of the very danger which we are preparing to resist. Our freedom has shown its ability to survive war, but our freedom would never survive surrender. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

There is, of course, a small group of sincere, patriotic men and women whose real passion for peace has shut their eyes to the ugly realities of international banditry and to the need to resist it at all costs. I am sure they are  
215 embarrassed by the sinister support they are receiving from the enemies of democracy in our midst the Bundists, the Fascists, and Communists, and every group devoted to bigotry and racial and religious intolerance. It is no mere coincidence that all the arguments put forward by these enemies of democracy—all their attempts to confuse and divide our people and to destroy public confidence in our Government- all their defeatist forebodings that Britain and democracy are already beaten—all their selfish promises that we can "do business" with Hitler—all of these are but  
220 echoes of the words that have been poured out from the Axis bureaus of propaganda. Those same words have been used before in other countries—to scare them, to divide them, to soften them up. Invariably, those same words have formed the advance guard of physical attack.

Your Government has the right to expect of all citizens that they take part in the common work of our common defense take loyal part from this moment forward.

225 I have recently set up the machinery for civilian defense. It will rapidly organize, locality by locality. It will depend on the organized effort of men and women everywhere. All will have opportunities and responsibilities to fulfill.

Defense today means more than merely fighting. It means morale, civilian as well as military; it means using every available resource; it means enlarging every useful plant. It means the use of a greater American common sense in discarding rumor and distorted statement. It means recognizing, for what they are, racketeers and fifth columnists,  
230 who are the incendiary bombs in this country of the moment.

All of us know that we have made very great social progress in recent years. We propose to maintain that progress and strengthen it. When the Nation is threatened from without, however, as it is today, the actual production and transportation of the machinery of defense must not be interrupted by disputes between capital and capital, labor and labor, or capital and labor. The future of all free enterprise—of capital and labor alike—is at stake.

235 This is no time for capital to make, or be allowed to retain, excess profits. Articles of defense must have undisputed right of way in every industrial plant in the country.

A Nation-wide machinery for conciliation and mediation of industrial disputes has been set up. That machinery must be used promptly—and without stoppage of work. Collective bargaining will be retained, but the American people expect that impartial recommendations of our Government conciliation and mediation services will be followed both  
240 by capital and by labor.

The overwhelming majority of our citizens expect their Government to see that the tools of defense are built; and for the very purpose of preserving the democratic safeguards of both labor and management, this Government is determined to use all of its power to express the will of its people, and to prevent interference with the production of materials essential to our Nation's security.

245 Today the whole world is divided between human slavery and human freedom—between pagan brutality and the Christian ideal.

We choose human freedom—which is the Christian ideal.

No one of us can waver for a moment in his courage or his faith.

We will not accept a Hitler-dominated world. And we will not accept a world, like the postwar world of the 1920's, in  
250 which the seeds of Hitlerism can again be planted and allowed to grow.

We will accept only a world consecrated to freedom of speech and expression—freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—freedom from want—and freedom from terror.

Is such a world impossible of attainment?

Magna Charta, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the Emancipation  
255 Proclamation, and every other milestone in human progress—all were ideals which seemed impossible of attainment—and yet they were attained.

As a military force, we were weak when we established our independence, but we successfully stood off tyrants, powerful in their day, tyrants who are now lost in the dust of history.

Odds meant nothing to us then. Shall we now, with all our potential strength, hesitate to take every single measure  
260 necessary to maintain our American liberties?

Our people and our Government will not hesitate to meet that challenge.

As the President of a united and determined people, I say solemnly:

We reassert the ancient American doctrine of freedom of the seas.

We reassert the solidarity of the twenty-one American Republics and the Dominion of Canada in the preservation of  
265 the independence of the hemisphere.

We have pledged material support to the other democracies of the world—and we will fulfill that pledge.

We in the Americas will decide for ourselves whether, and when, and where, our American interests are attacked or our security is threatened.

We are placing our armed forces in strategic military position.

270 We will not hesitate to use our armed forces to repel attack.

We reassert our abiding faith in the vitality of our constitutional Republic as a perpetual home of freedom, of tolerance, and of devotion to the word of God.

Therefore, with profound consciousness of my responsibilities to my countrymen and to my country's cause, I have tonight issued a proclamation that an unlimited national emergency exists and requires the strengthening of our  
275 defense to the extreme limit of our national power and authority.

The Nation will expect all individuals and all groups to play their full parts, without stint, and without selfishness, and without doubt that our democracy will triumphantly survive.

I repeat the words of the signers of the Declaration of Independence—that little band of patriots, fighting long ago against overwhelming odds, but certain, as we are now, of ultimate victory: "With a firm reliance on the protection of  
280 Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."  
(4566 words)

*Quelle: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16120>*