

No 2846

EC 2846

XI DEFENSE MEASURES OF THE UNITED STATES

1940

President Roosevelt's Request for 50,000 Planes

In January 1940, when the European war was still in a period of lull, President Roosevelt asked Congress for a national defense appropriation of \$1,800,000,000. By the middle of the following May, the rapid development of military events in Europe impelled him to request further appropriations for national defense. In an address to Congress on May 16, 1940, he said that the brutal force of modern offensive war had been loosed in all its horror; that new and swift and deadly powers of destruction had been developed which were wielded by men who were ruthless and daring; that no old defense was so strong that it required no further strengthening and no attack was so unlikely or impossible that it might be ignored. The President said that we had had before us over and over again the lesson that nations not ready and unable to get ready found themselves overrun by the enemy; that so-called impregnable fortifications no longer existed; that an effective defense required the equipment to attack an aggressor on his route "before he can establish strong bases within the territory of American vital interests".

The President said to Congress that he should like to see the United States "geared up to the ability to turn out at least 50,000 planes a year"; furthermore, he believed "that this Nation should plan at this time a program that would provide us with 50,000 military and naval planes". He made a request for \$1,000,000,000 to procure the essential equipment for a larger and thoroughly rounded out Army, to replace or modernize Army or Navy equipment, to increase production facilities for everything needed for the Army or Navy, and to speed up to a 24-hour basis all Army and Navy contracts. In making this request the President reminded Congress that our ideal and our objective still was peace. Nevertheless, we stood ready "not only to spend millions for defense but to give our service and even our lives for the maintenance of our American liberties".

In a message to Congress on May 31 President Roosevelt made an additional request for appropriations of over a billion dollars for national defense and asked for authority to call the National Guard and the necessary Reserve personnel into active military service. He declared that "the almost incredible events of the past two weeks in the European conflict, particularly as a result of the use of aviation and mechanized equipment", necessitated further increases in our military program. No one could foretell the future, he said, but American defense must be made more certain so long as the possibility existed that not one or two continents but all continents might be involved in a world-wide war. He again emphasized the necessity for expansion of facilities for the production of munitions.

These requests for appropriations were promptly met by the Congress, as also was the President's request of July 10 for \$5,000,000,000 more for the rearmament program. The President's request for authority to call the National Guard and Reserve personnel into active military service was granted in a resolution approved August 27, 1940. However, the legislation provided that the personnel ordered into active Federal service under this authority should "not be employed beyond the limits of the Western Hemisphere except in the territories and possessions of the United States, including the Philippine Islands".

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Excerpt from "Peace and War"
Official publication
Department of State, U. S. A.
Pages 77 and 78