

THE READER'S DIGEST –July 1940

Wake Up, America!

Condensed from the syndicated column by

Walter Lippmann

FOR THE United States this is the beginning of the most critical period in 70 years. Our security is gravely jeopardized. The nation is unprepared in all essential respects - in material for defense, in training, in discipline, in industrial organization, in its politicians and in its mind and heart - to protect adequately and swiftly its vital interests. Our cities may not be bombed; but if Hitler's offensive succeeds, we shall know no peace in our lifetime.

If it succeeds we shall be confronted with immediate choices of the greatest magnitude. We shall be compelled to choose again and again - in the Pacific, in the Atlantic, in the Caribbean, in South America - between retreat and resistance. The choices will not be a simple choice between war or peace. They will be choices between giving up the protection behind which we have lived for more than a century in individual freedom and of acting henceforth with full energy to maintain that protection. For if the Allied power falls there will fall with it all the outer defenses of the Western Hemisphere, and we shall be left isolated in a world dominated by the most formidable alliance of conquerors ever formed in the history of man.

If the Allied power falls in Europe, there will appear in some, perhaps in many, of the countries of this hemisphere subversive movements led by native adventurers, financed and organized by the totalitarian powers. They will be hard to deal with. They will jeopardize most gravely the inner defenses of the United States.

All this will not destroy us. But it will mean that we and our children will have to live wholly different lives. Isolated in a world which envies and despises us, we too shall have to become a nation in arms. We too shall have to have conscription; we too shall have to regiment capital and labor in order to build the ships, the airplanes, the guns and tanks without which we shall be harassed and intimidated, threatened and blackmailed by the coalition on both sides of us.

We have a duty, each and every one of us, which must be done. Our duty is to prepare for the worst, to begin acting at once on the assumption that the Allies may lose the war this summer, and that before the snow flies again we may stand alone and isolated, the last great democracy on earth.

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THE AMERICAN PEOPLE must open their eyes to the fact that the whole fundamental plan of American defense upon which we have relied may collapse altogether. The American people must not be misled into thinking that something has really been done for national defense if Congress excitedly votes another big appropriation.

Our system of national defense is based on the assumption that our security will never be threatened in more than one ocean at a time. It assumes that if we had to fight in the Pacific, we could count in the Atlantic upon the benevolent neutrality of all European powers. It assumes that if we were threatened in the Atlantic, we could count upon the neutrality of Japan.

These assumptions are true as long as Great Britain and France retain control of the Atlantic. But if the Allies fall, the whole conception of American defense falls with them. Unless we are prepared to defend ourselves in both oceans at the same time we shall not be prepared at all.

A Nazi victory in Europe is bound to create a coalition of European and Asiatic aggressor powers who will be the masters of the British, French, Dutch, Belgian, Danish and Portuguese empires. So tremendous a victory will not satiate their appetite, but whet it. Their conquests will not exhaust them; the booty to be had by looting the richest lands on earth will more than make up for their material losses in conquering them.

There are some who think that if the Allied power falls in Europe, we must then resign ourselves to the fact that Japan will be master of the Pacific, and capable of subjecting us to very serious pressure upon essential materials of our economic life. If the Allied power falls in Europe, our neighbors in the Atlantic will then be not the easygoing British but the Rome-Berlin Axis, intoxicated with the coalition might attack us. I do not think so. It will be unnecessary for them to go to that much trouble. They would squeeze and blackmail us as they have done so efficiently to the British in the past few years.

That they could do with no great risk to themselves - given our present weak defenses and a collection of obligations and vital interests scattered over the globe from Alaska to the rubber plantations and tin mines of southwestern Asia, from Greenland to Patagonia. This far-flung complex of American interest is, in Alaska, within a few miles of Russia, in the Far East it is within a few miles of Japanese Formosa, in South America it is closer to Europe and Africa than it is to continental United States.

Why should the victorious coalition make war on us when we are as vulnerable as that? When they can ask us to give up whatever they covet? If we make ready to resist some demand, let us say, in the Pacific, they need only manufacture storm clouds in the Atlantic, or engineer uprisings in Latin America. We shall not know whom to resist, when to resist or where to resist. We shall be driven from Munich to Munich, and gradually stripped of possessions and outlying vital interests and of the strategical means to defend ourselves.

This critical position cannot be repaired by the simple device of victory and drunk with power. If appropriating more money for warships and military equipment. It would require several years at least to create the facilities for developing adequate air and military armaments. It is impossible for us to build a two-ocean navy except by a gigantic national effort extending over many years at a cost of at least \$7,000,000,000.

Only by successful Allied resistance can we gain the precious time we must have to prepare our selves adequately. We cannot intervene by force of arms in the present war. We have nothing to intervene with, and if we had, the weapons could be more effectively employed by the trained troops of the Allies than by any army that we cannot raise and train quickly enough to make any difference.

The only practical plan for American defense is to organize at once - with government subsidies if necessary - a vast expansion of our plants and personnel for making instruments of war. What those facilities can produce immediately we should sell to the Allies. With those weapons they may be able to withstand the attack. Their successful defense will provide us with the infinitely precious time needed to develop our capacity to produce adequate armaments. Then if the Allies fall, we shall at least have made a start toward preparing ourselves for the emergency which will confront us.

IF THE RESISTANCE of the Allies is broken this summer we shall never be given time to build a second navy or achieve superiority in the air. Long before such a program could get under way the victorious coalition could take possession of Iceland, Greenland, Ireland, Portugal, Gibraltar, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, the Allied colonies in Western Africa, the Netherlands Indies, Singapore, Hongkong, the Philippines, and Guam; we cannot perfect our defenses rapidly enough to suppress the invasions of the fifth columns which are already prepared in several vitally important countries of this hemisphere. Once those outposts are in the hands of the unfriendly, aggressive powers, we shall not be allowed the time to arm ourselves adequately.

How grave the situation is few of us have realized as yet. Let us suppose that Hitler lets loose his air force against England, crippling the industrial plants which supply Britain with arms and making British harbors extremely difficult to use. The British Isles are blockaded and threatened with starvation. What does the British Navy do under these circumstances?

The usual answer is that the British fleet would go to Canada and to Singapore. But would it abandon the British Isles to starvation and destruction? Is it not plain that if Hitler had the British Isles in his power and France fighting in the last ditch, he would offer the two nations a choice between devastation - such as he inflicted on the Poles - and the surrender of their navies? This would give Hitler a ready-made navy in an ocean where we have none.

We dare not assume that the Allied navies would be scuttled in a final gesture of desperate defiance, though even if they were, the naval power of Germany, Italy and Japan would still make us vulnerable in both oceans. We have to assume that if we do not supply the Allies with the means to resist, we may find that the Allied fleets which now guard the Atlantic against the Axis will become part of the power of the Axis.

It is not only necessary for us to make sure that the Allies have weapons and food with which to continue to resist but that they do not lose the incentive to resist. They must be told that, if they hold on, the enormous industrial resources of this country will be organized and the products made available to them as rapidly as possible. With that assurance they should be able to repel the attack. With that assurance every people in Europe, the conquered peoples, the entangled peoples, the non-belligerent peoples, will know that liberation is practicable and that an indomitable resistance is worth the sacrifice.

IN THE SUMMER of 1910 Lincoln Steffens asked a Harvard professor: "Who among the new graduates has the ablest mind which can express itself in writing?" The professor made an accurate choice: Walter Lippmann, then a 21 year old assistant to philosopher George Santayana. Since then Mr. Lippmann has been associate editor of The New Republic, editor of the New York World and, for the past six years, author of the column "Today and Tomorrow," which appears in the New York Herald Tribune and more than 100 other papers. His many books include A Preface to Politics and A Preface to Morals.